

ADVANCED GAME STRATEGIES IN CONQUEST OF PARADISE

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This article is a series of studies of different advanced types of strategies that player can undertake in the game. These go beyond the normal game-play found in the basic form of the game. This article is meant as a guide for new players to the game as most veterans of the game already know everything contained in it.

The Mapboard

Before we begin this treatise, it is necessary to establish a coordinate system on the mapboard in order to better describe the different sections on the board. The mapboard has seventeen columns of hexes on it, all of which have playable hexes. Although the mapboard has no coordinate system printed on it for the hexes, one can be easily imagined. Just think of the western most column as Column 1 and the eastern most column as Column 17. Columns 1 through 5 contain the Known Independent Island Groups hexes, Column 6 contains the Tonga and Samoa hexes, Column 14 contains the "To South America" hexes, Column 16 contains the Galapagos Island hex, and Column 17 contains the South America hexes along with the Unfortunate Island hex. Within each column, each hex can be numbered starting with the top hex of each column being Number 1 and increasing as you go down on the column. Thus, the hex coordinate would be two numbers, the first being the column and the second being the hex in the column. For example, Samoa would be in hex 6-5, Tonga would be in hex 6-6, Raiatea would be in hex 9-6, and Hiva would be in hex 11-5. The South America hexes are really a double-hex and would count as one hex. (There is no need to write the coordinates on the hexes and ruining the mapboard artwork, the hexes are big enough to count by simple eyesight.)

Operating Areas

Operating Areas are the sections of the mapboard where the various island empires will be operating in. The size of these areas is varied as to the type of game being played and are based on the geography of the board. It should be noted that the boundaries of these areas are not absolute, players have been known to extend their empires into other sections, but the bulk of their Island Groups will be in the areas listed.

Two-Player Game: In the Two-Player game the active empires are Samoa and Tonga. These games tend to be nothing more than a friendly race in the development of their respective island empires with combat being either very rare or nonexistent. The board is divided into two sections with Samoa taking the northern section and Tonga taking southern one. The dividing line between the sections is an east-west line that is based on the hex-side between the Samoan and Tongan home islands. The hexes that are split in half by this line (Vanuatu, Fiji, Nuie, Raatea, Mangareva, and one open ocean hex way to the east) are included in the southern section. Tonga's section has 34 explorable Unknown Hexes and four Known Hexes. These include the two "To South America" hexes way to the east. Samoa's section includes 26 explorable Unknown Hexes and ten Known Hexes. Both sides have plenty of room to explore and develop their empires without getting in the way of each other. Samoa has the advantage of having more of the Known Hexes which are rarely used and Tonga has the advantage of the "To South America" hexes which are also almost never used. The Two-Player game is an excellent game to teach a new player to the game.

Three-Player Game: In the Three-Player game the active empires are Samoa, Tonga, and Hiva. These games start off as friendly games but by mid game, the infringing on each-other's territory raises the possibility of combat. The board is divided into three sections with Samoa taking the northern section, Tonga taking the southern section, and Hiva taking the eastern section. The northern and southern sections are divided as in the two-player version with the east-west line stopping after it enters Column 10. Tonga's section has 17 explorable Unknown hexes and five Known hexes (which includes Nuie). Samoa's section has 19 explorable Unknown hexes and 13 Known hexes (which includes Flint Island and the two Open Ocean hexes adjacent to it. Hiva's section is Columns 10 through 14. These include 19 explorable Unknown hexes and two Known hexes (Hiva and the Open Sea hex next to Flint Island). Hiva also has the "To South America" hexes within its section. Note that Column 10 is the column where Hiva's section overlaps with the other two sections. It is here where the three empires will intermingle with their various island groups, thus, creating opportunities for combat to occur. But Tonga and Samoa will most likely be busy eyeing each other along their common border, leaving Hiva in peace. This will allow Hiva to develop her empire to the east and perhaps, to make a go for the Kumara. Besides, as Hiva starts the game behind Samoa and Tonga with only a three-village home island, compared to their four-village home islands, she will probably be last in Victory Points early in the game. This will give Hiva control of the Random Event cards, inflicting any adverse events upon Samoa and Tonga, and placing any beneficial events upon herself. The Three-Player game is the second-best version of the game as combat will start to become more possible, but not an overwhelming concern.

Four-Player Game: In the four-player game, Raiatea is added to the mix of empires. The game may start off with all the players on friendly terms, respecting each-others' sections of the map, but soon the reduced size of their areas will force the players to explore and develop their empires into other player's areas, and combat becomes a definite probability. The board is divided up into four sections with Samoa and Tonga taking the northern and southern sections in the west, Hiva taking the eastern section, and Raiatea taking the middle section. The east-west line dividing Tonga and Samoa will only extend into Column 8, as will their respective sections. Tonga's section will have five Known hexes (again, including Nuie) and 12 explorable Unknown hexes. Samoa's section will have eleven Known hexes and 15 explorable Unknown hexes. Hiva will again have its area of two Known hexes and 19 explorable Unknown hexes. Raiatea's section, which will consist of Columns 8, 9, and 10, will have four Known hexes and 16 explorable Unknown hexes. Thus, Raiatea's section will overlap Samoa's and Tonga's to the west and Hiva's to the east, forcing Raiatea into what amounts to a two-front war. Hiva will again have the "To South America" hexes in its area, although Raiatea is close enough to make a try for Kumara as well. Hiva is probably in the best position as it has the biggest area to develop its empire without having to go into Raiatea's core area. Tonga has the smallest area to explore and once that is done, will either have to go into Raiatea's core area or go west into the Known Islands. Samoa faces a similar situation, although it has a few more explorable hexes and will probably challenge Tonga for the possession of Huie. Raiatea has a sizable area to explore and will be able to establish its empire before the other three empires start encroaching into its realm. As both Hiva and Raiatea each have three-village Home Islands, starting the game behind Samoa and Tonga, control of the Random Event cards will alternate between them in the early game. The Four-Player game is the best version of the game which is why it is the standard version used in tournaments.

The Picket Line

The Picket Line is a line of hexes, each containing a War Canoe, in front of one's empire facing the other opponents' empires. These hexes are usually Open Sea hexes, although an Atoll hex can also be in

the line. The purpose of the Picket Line is to stop an opponent's invasion force before it gets to the Island Groups in your empire. War Canoes are the perfect unit to do this with because they can stay in an Open Sea hex. Transport Canoes cannot enter a hex with enemy War Canoes by themselves, they must be escorted by at least one War Canoe. War Canoes, and any Transport Canoes with them, can enter a hex with an enemy War Canoe in it but must stop in that hex and do battle with it. As battle occurs after all movement is done in a turn, there is no instance of a battle opening a hole in the Picket Line for another enemy force to move through it in the same turn.

Picket Lines don't just magically appear, they must be built up over time. The build-up usually starts early mid-game when a player has enough villages in play to start making more war units. Initially, a player may send out one or two War Canoes, along with some Transport Canoes not being used in his empire's Transport Canoe Chain, and some Rumor markers, to establish his line. Why are Transport Canoes and Rumor makers used in the line? Because since all markers on the board are flipped over (except those Transport Canoes in the Transport Canoe Chain) an enemy player will not know which hexes in the line have a real War Canoe and which ones don't. He has to send in a War Canoe on a reconnaissance mission to find out. Transport Canoes and Explorers cannot enter a hex with an enemy unit in it by themselves. As the game progresses, a player sends out newly built War Canoes to replace the Transport Canoes and Rumor markers holding the line, bringing those back to within the empire. He also moves around the units in the line, like a shell game, to keep his opponents guessing where the War Canoes are. By the late mid-game, the line should be ready with all War Canoes. This raises the question of where the player's Warrior Bands are. Well, they will usually be placed on the more strategically important Island Groups within the player's empire.

So, what happens when an enemy force, with at least one War Canoe, enters a hex in the Picket Line? Well, if the hex contains a Rumor Marker, it is removed and the force can keep on moving. If it contains a Transport Canoe, the opponent has the choice of either continuing to move on, remain in the hex to eliminate the Transport Canoe in a very one-sided battle. There is a third option of dropping off a War Canoe to deal with the Transport Canoe while the main force moves on. But if the hex contains a War Canoe, the whole enemy force must stop and do battle with it. Battles in Open Sea or Atoll hexes are handled in the same manner as those in Island Group hexes except that Local Warriors cannot be used by the defender nor can he play the "Pa" Arts & Culture cards in Open Sea hexes. If the attacking enemy force wins, all he has is an Open Sea or an Atoll hex in his possession, not the Island Group that he was heading for. If the attacker loses the battle, he heads back home. If the defender wins, he retains the hex and the Picket Line remains intact. If he loses, he hopes that he is only forced to retreat so as to retain the War Canoe for future operations. If the defender's player-turn follows that of the attacker, he has a chance to repair the hole in his Picket Line. If the attacker has another player-turn before the defender, due to a new Game-Turn, then the attacker can exploit the hole in the line.

There are disadvantages to a Picket Line.

1. Picket Lines are susceptible to Random Event cards such as the Typhoon and the Taniwha, which can leave a hole in the line, although the Taniwha does plug it up for one turn afterward. The Deception Revealed Random Event card can also eliminate any Rumor markers in the line, creating a hole.
2. It can be outflanked as players tend to set up their line on the hexes with the light blue boxes in them. (It is surprising how many players forget during the game that the Open Ocean hexes printed on the map are playable, they just cannot be explored.)
3. Each player only has six War Canoes in his counter set. Putting them in a Picket Line robs a player of his offensive potential, placing him in a defensive mode. However, if the Picket Line exists within the Transport Canoe Chain, a player could easily move his War Canoes around to

pick up Warrior Bands and go on the offensive in the same player turn.

The use of the Picket Line is rare in Conquest of Paradise as most players prefer to keep their War Canoes and Warrior Bands stacked together to form the defenses of the more important Island Group within their empire or establish an invasion force. But when they do, it is usually in the four-player version of the game. Hiva usually sets hers up facing her enemies to the west, namely Raiatea. Both Samoa and Tonga set theirs up facing their enemy to the east, again, Raiatea. Raiatea can set up a line facing either Hiva to the east or Samoa and Tonga to the west, but not both directions, in essence, she is fighting a two-front war. The best that Raiatea can do is set up a ring of War Canoes around her home Island Group.

The Second Transport Canoe Line

A favorite trick used by players, especially if they are going for a win, is to attack and capture an island group in an opponent's empire that results in the Transport Canoe Chain in their empire being broken. Island Groups that are isolated from their home island group cannot count for Victory Points when determining victory (although any Villages on them would count). Also, Build Points generated by Villages in the isolated area can only be used to build units within the isolated area and the isolated area cannot use Build Points from anywhere else. To prevent this from happening, a player can build a secondary Transport Canoe Line behind the first, preferably in a direction away from an opponent's line of attack. These Transport Canoes would be adjacent to the Island Groups in the primary Transport Canoe chain. Thus, if an opponent takes an Island Group to break your chain, you will still lose the island and any villages on it, but your Transport Canoe Chain is still unbroken. This works for small to medium size island empires, but for a large empire whose Island Groups are spread out all over the map, this can put a strain on your counter mix as you only have fifteen Transport Canoe counters.

Hiva is probably the best empire to employ this strategy, being situated on the east side of the map. It can place its secondary Chain to the east of its empire. Samoa and Tonga come next as they can both place their secondary Chains to the west and for Samoa also to the north and for Tonga also to the south. Raiatea is really hurting being in the middle of the map because no matter which side of their empire they put their secondary Chain, it can be attacked by an empire from that side of the map. Depending on how the Island Groups are arranged within its empire, Raiatea could perhaps build two shorter irregular Chains, one on each side. These Chains would have holes in them, allowing an enemy empire access to some Island Groups, but hopefully on the other side of these islands is a Transport Canoe from the other secondary Chain to keep the empire Transport Canoe Chain network intact.

While this strategy is viable in a two and three player game, it is rarely viable in the standard four-player game. The irregular shape of the four empires usually makes the map too crowded to effectively employ a secondary Transport Canoe Chain. Only Hiva has a chance in a four-player game to successfully employ one. Plus, depending on the type of Arts & Culture and Random Event cards that a player has in his or her possession, the defensive capabilities of the empire may make the secondary Transport Canoe Chain unnecessary.

Kumara

Those two hexes with the little sweet potato symbols on the eastern side of the map, are a necessity to possess if you want to try to get Kumara (Sweet Potatoes). This is providing that there is an Island Group or Atoll in those hexes, or at least have been explored with an Open Ocean counter in them. In a two-player game these hexes lie in Tonga's normal operating sphere, but Samoa also has an equal

chance of reaching over in its island empire. The problem is that by the time either empire reaches those hexes, the game is probably over with by then. In a three-player game, these hexes lie within Hiva's normal operating sphere. In this game, Hiva has the best opportunity to go exploring for Kumara as Samoa and Tonga will be busy vying against each other, leaving Hiva alone. In a four-player game, those hexes again lie in Hiva's operating sphere, but Raiatea also has a chance to possess at least one of those two hexes. So how does Samoa and Tonga get Kumara in this case? Well, just capture an Island Group from an empire that already has Kumara. If you do, be sure to save one Village upon capture in order to get the Kumara counter. You do not have to keep the Island Group or even have it in your Transport Canoe Chain.

Of course, sending your Explorer to South America is a risky venture, with only a 33.3% chance of success of continuing on in each hex that you move into on your journey. Having a "Navigation", a "Poi", a "Double Hulled Canoe", or an "Ocean Chart" Arts & Culture Card is a must if you do not want to end up with a Lost result in your searching. The first three previously mentioned cards will also raise your chances of success up to 50%. A "Marae" Card is also helpful, but it can only be used once. Getting sidelined by a Off Course result into a hex with either the Galapagos Islands or the Unfortunate Island will give you an additional 16.7% chance of reaching South America.

Once you have Kumara, defend your Island Groups fiercely if you do not want your opponents to get the extra two Victory Points that you have. Capture of an Atoll will not give your opponent Kumara, so you need not worry about them (though you will still lose ½ Victory Points).

Independent Island Campaigns

These are campaigns involving the Independent Island Groups that are printed on the map. Because of their placement on the map, Tonga and Samoa are the empires most likely to engage in these campaigns. But while these campaigns list specific Island Groups in each set, it does not mean that you have to take the whole set. You could take some Island Groups from one set and some others from another set or just capture a few Island Groups from one set to help pad your Victory Point total.

The Central Pacific Campaign: This campaign, named after a similar campaign of a certain future war, involves capturing the Island Groups and Atolls on the northwest corner of the map. These are Kiribati, Marshall Islands Wake Island, Nauru, Pohnpei, and Truk. This campaign will most likely to be performed by Samoa, although Tonga can perform it too by going around Fiji and then heading north. This campaign is usually undertaken if the normal exploration early in the game yields few islands or atolls of little worth in Victory Points. These Island Groups are weakly defended, having only one or two Local Warriors, and the two Atolls can just be occupied by Transport Canoes. Only a small invasion force is needed comprising of at least two War Canoes and two Warrior Bands, plus the accompanying Transport Canoes needed to extend one empire's Transport Canoe Chain. Battles in these Island Groups are simplified by the fact these Independent Islands Groups have no Arts & Culture or Random Event cards to aid them. Possession of this entire set of islands and atolls gives the owning empire eleven Victory Points. If one is really feeling frisky, you could swing south of Nauru and take the Santa Cruz islands too, but this adds the problem of malaria to maintaining possession of it. One does not have to take the whole set though if your early exploration yielded some good Island Groups. Only taking one or two of the Island Groups in the set will help pad your Victory Point total.

The Fijian Campaign: This is a campaign involving capturing one Island Group, namely Fiji. This Island Group lies adjacent to both Samoa and Tonga, making it an attractive target for both powers. The problem is that it is the most heavily defended Island Group in the game with four Local Warriors. One

would need at least six combat units in his invasion force to have a chance of capturing it and at least eight combat units to be assured of capture. This seems an awful lot of units just to capture an island group that at most will only give you four Victory Points. Tonga would be the power more likely to pursue this campaign, as Samoa has those Independent Island Groups to the northwest in the Central Pacific to go after. Of course, Fiji has no Art & Culture or Random Event cards to help defend it, so any cards that the attacker has will certainly make the task of conquest easier. If you take Fiji, you might as well take the adjacent Hunter Island Atoll to the southwest as this will provide the jumping-off point to the next great campaign.

The Solomons Campaign: This campaign, named after another similar campaign in a certain future war, involves capturing the remaining Independent Island Groups in the west. These are Vanuatu, Santa Cruz, the Solomon Islands, and the Bismarck Archipelago. All together, these four Island Groups will garner a player seventeen Victory Points. Both Tonga and Samoa are the empires most likely to attempt this campaign, although Tonga is the stronger candidate as Samoa has the easier Central Pacific Campaign to attempt. However, these islands are moderately defended with three Island Groups having three Local Warriors each and the last one having only two. This will require a large invasion force of at least six combat unit, plus reinforcements to replace the Warrior Bands that you will be using to save Villages on the newly conquered islands. However, like all Independent Island Groups, these islands will not have Arts & Culture and Random Event cards to help in their defense. These islands hold one additional danger, Malaria, which causes an Island Group to lose a Village each time that it strikes. The Bismarck Archipelago and the Soloman Islands each have a 33.3% chance of Malaria striking each turn and the other two Island Groups have only a 16.7% chance of it striking each turn. Fortunately, only one of the four Island Groups can be affected each turn. Of course, a player does not have to conquer the whole set, taking one or two Island Groups can help bolster an empire who is weak on Victory Points.

Conclusion

The strategies presented here should help the new players to better play in the game, after mastering the basic strategies. Mind you, these advance strategies are a supplement, not a replacement, to the basic strategies of the game and should be used occasionally, not all the time.