



## Age of Darkness -

### “The Era of Merchant Princes” Theme Set



“The Era of Merchant Princes” Theme Set is played with the Theme Set of the same name and the Basic Cards I have introduced in part 5 of my series of blog posts about the reform of the Card Game. In the fictitious history of Catan, “The Era of Merchant Princes” Theme Set is set in the 15th century and follows “The Era of Discovery,” a Theme Set of the second game expansion planned for fall 2012.

The treasures and the gold of the discovered neighboring islands allow trade to flourish. The rulers of the two principalities compete for economic supremacy on Catan. Powerful merchant princes and – as already in “The Era of Gold” – trade ships play a central role in this context.

Therefore, the prince is well-advised to hire a **Shipbuilder**. The redheaded giant of Scottish ancestry is not only an asset at celebrations: he also manages to economize lumber and wool in such a way that building a trade fleet is noticeably easy on the prince’s resource supplies. And if a Pirate Ship converts a trade ship into a ship wreck – pay this skilled craftsman 1 gold, and the trade ship quickly is like new again.

A prince who wants to boost trade should offer Residences to his merchants. It actually isn’t that expensive. The prince only has to own a city and provide a building site above or below an appropriate region – the merchant will then generously take care of the building costs for the Residence.

The **Cloth Merchant’s Residence** must be placed adjacent to a pasture region. At his prince’s behest, the cloth merchant henceforth converts two wool into one commerce point. (The Residence is rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise.) We don’t even see the intermediate stage “cloth” – that’s how fast the cloth is sold and the trade boosted.



The **Paper Merchant's Residence** can only become active if it is adjacent to a forest. The paper merchant converts the forest's lumber into paper. Again, we don't spend time dealing with the intermediate stage "paper." We or, respectively, the princes are only interested in the final result. On level three – after three times converting lumber into paper and rotating the card – that result consists of one commerce point, one progress point, and one victory point.

The bell tolls for everyone at some point. Merchants are no exception. But don't worry, they won't be swept away by a hurricane. Actually, the **Hour of the Master Merchants** event has a downright positive effect: without paying a single resource, we just rotate all Residences to the next higher level.

"Oh dear!" exclaims the cloth merchant, bemoaning his destitute situation. "Over there, on the eastern pasture, the sheep multiply like rabbits, and here, on the pasture adjacent to my residence, my rams seem to be dedicated celibates. With a situation like that, I can hardly be of service to you, my prince."

If the prince is smart, he acts upon his merchant's complaint and lets a **Wainwright** settle in his principality. The Wainwright will then see to it that the merchant gets the wool from sheep of other pastures.

Sheep need to be shorn. Wool must be spun and woven into cloth. Lumber is waiting to be made into paper. Who is supposed to do all that? Well, the middle class, of course, which – also on Catan – consists of craftsmen, the backbone of any productive society. Our prince knows that too. And so he grants his backbone a **Craft Guild**, which immediately results in an upgrade of one of his Residences (the card is rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise).

Once a Craft Guild is built, it won't take long until a **Guild Master** appears on the scene, to provide his lord with any two resources.



What the craftsmen have created is then spent by the merchants of the Commercial Harbor. If you have built a **Commercial Harbor**, one time during your turn you may downgrade one of your Residences by 1 level (rotate the card 90 degrees clockwise) and take any 2 resources of your choice in exchange.

At the beginning of the game, the two Commercial Harbor cards are placed as a face-up expansion card stack. That way, both the prince and the princess can build a Commercial Harbor, which is absolutely advisable: if you have a Commercial Harbor, you may place a **Trading Station** in one of your opponent's cities and then, once per your turn, pay your opponent 1 gold for any 1 resource of your choice. And if you play the **Trade Monopoly**, you may even take up to 3 resources of the same type from your opponent.



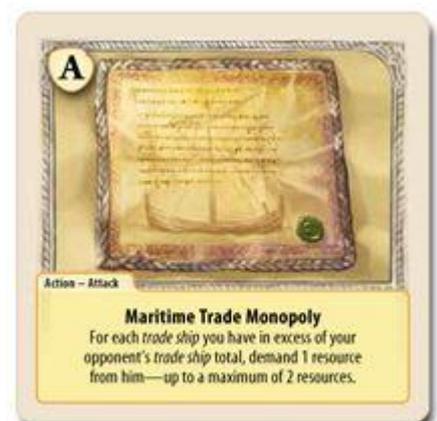
The Commercial Harbor also allows you to build a **Lighthouse**. A Lighthouse enables an adjacent trade ship to trade resources at a 1:1 rate. You need a Commercial Harbor for this to work, but if you don't have one, being the owner of at least two trade ships also does the trick.

Having either a Commercial Harbor or two trade ships is also the requirement for **Hergild the Master Merchant**, a lighthouse keeper's daughter who became rich. If the prince can meet one of the two requirements, Hergild will enable him to trade the resource for which he has a trade ship at a 1:1 rate as often as he wants.



**Gero the Master Merchant** is a little more modest. Two trade ships navigating off the coast are enough for him to provide his prince with any two resources.

One shouldn't underestimate the importance of trade ships in this set. If the prince has more trade ships than the princess, he can play a **Maritime Trade Monopoly**. It allows him to demand one resource from the princess, for each trade ship he has in excess of her trade ship total. To avoid the princess losing her composure, however, he never takes more than two resources from her.





The events “**Fortunate Trade Voyage**” and “**Capricious Sea**” are also tailored to trade ships. The first of these two events helps provide the prince with two resources of the type traded by one of his trade ships. The second event either provokes a storm, which – should the prince not have a Lighthouse – sinks one of his trade ships, or it produces calm sea, which earns him one resource of his choice for each of his trade ships.

If the prince relies on trade ships and assiduously uses them to trade resources, the princess is well-advised to initiate the **Master Merchants’ Alliance**. By means of this Alliance, each time the prince performs a 2:1 or 3:1 trade the princess receives one resource of the type paid by the prince during his trade. The princess could also build a Pirate Ship (which is also included in the set) and use it to sink one of the prince’s trade ships.

**Olaf the Merchant Ship Captain** is the first hero to enter the Catan scene who also has a commerce point besides a skill point. By order of the prince, the peaceful merchant ship captain turns into a dangerous pirate who takes two resources from the princess. Afterwards, the commerce point is lost, of course, because Olaf retires with part of the bounty.

The **Trading Post** offers another possibility to trade resources favorably. You place it on an empty road, where it allows you to trade a resource between the adjacent regions once per your turn. For example, you may quickly



convert one gold into one brick, which is much needed for road building.

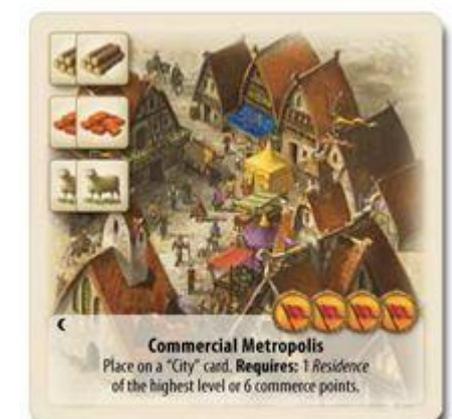
If the princess has the trade advantage, the prince can make use of his connections to the Church and send his **Mendicants** into the opposing principality. We don't know what kind of sermon the brothers deliver; however, they always successfully wheedle one or two resources from the princess.

The prince gladly uses the **Brigand Camp** as another effective means to reduce the princess's commerce points. But there's still more to this card. If he places it on one of the princess's roads, the robbers occasionally intercept a merchant who is on his way to the princess's Marketplace, the result being that the prince receives 1 gold each time the princess uses her Marketplace to store a resource. The prince can thus lean back and relax while calmly focusing on further expanding his principality.

When the prince no longer needs the Brigand Camp, he sounds the **Tactical Retreat**. Then he can remove one of the buildings he placed in the princess's domain. He receives two resources in exchange – one of them comes from the princess, who definitely is happy that she got rid of the unwelcome building.

Maybe those resources are the crucial resources for the prince to build the **Commercial Metropolis** and thus maybe win the game. Of course, the prince must have met the requirements to build the Commercial Metropolis: either having 6 commerce points or a Residence of the highest level. The Commercial Metropolis is placed on a city and brings 2 additional victory points.

The three sets of the Age of Darkness expansion extend the possibilities of the Duel of the Princes variant. With this expansion, the players now have a total 6 sets at their disposal, 3 of which are chosen for playing the Duel. For all those who are interested in the selection criteria, here is an excerpt from the game rules:



*“The Duel of the Princes” is played according to the already known rules; only the event card stack is assembled differently. Each player chooses 1 Theme Set from the available Theme Sets (the starting player chooses first). The third Theme Set is chosen by lot: take 1 event card from each of the Theme Sets that have not been chosen yet, shuffle them face down, and draw one card at random. The card drawn determines the third set to be included in the Duel. Alternatively, you may want to leave things entirely to chance: take one card from each available Theme Set, shuffle them, and draw 3 cards at random; to play, use the 3 sets these cards belong to. Either way, put the Theme Sets you don’t use back into the box until you start a new game.*

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