

**One-Eyed King's  
Fast Castle Guide  
for the  
Terminally Slow**

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Fall 2000, Revision 1

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## *Credits*

My first credit goes to a player who probably doesn't know me or knows how much he inspired this guide: **NS\_Niester\_**. I was a spectator in a 3v3 where I saw him do a 16:33 Castle with a pop 28+2 and a stone-for-gold trade. His Feudal time was 12:50, a mere 15 seconds off the theoretical fastest Viking pop 28 Feudal (with Dark loom). There was a lot that impressed me about his game, but the Fast Castle was what made me take 2 weeks to re-tool the first 18-minutes of my own game.

Beyond that, I intentionally did not want good players offering advice. This is not an expert guide. It's a guide for rookies. And the lessons learned from the rookie volunteers are what make this guide effective.

I wish to thank **ThePENDRAGON**, not just for being my first graduate, but more so for his feedback and input into the guide. The core was 92% done when Pen got the guide. That extra, but highly critical, 8% was done through Pen's (and some others) gaming experiences. But Pen led the way.

**MPP\_MilqueToast** also should take a bow. He had excellent suggestions on organization of related sections that were sporadically scattered throughout. I think he had a genuine interest in having this guide be first-class, and didn't just make suggestions so I would mention him in the credits. Thanks too for the web art, and for just being a cool cyber friend with a wickedly keen sense of humor.

Thanks to **all LabRats** and **Blindmen**. They volunteered their time so that you can get faster and beat them in future games. Thanks again to **ThePENDRAGON**, **PippyDaKid**, **MPP\_MilqueToast**, **Holo\_Doc**, **Andrew Shafer**, and **PainMemory**.

This time spent on this turned into a nightmare. So many people keep asking over and over how to turn in a better Castle time that I decided it all needs to be written down. When I had 15 pages done, and *felt* I was 80% there, I decided to let others know what I was doing. Then I took on lab rats and felt I was 90% there. *WRONG!* I was barely a third of the way done. I spent a lot more time adding to the guide, and even more time analyzing games over and over and over. Then there was the web page to host the guide.

Suffice to say that a lot of effort went into the guide.

With kind regards,  
Good luck and clean gaming to everyone,  
Rick Davin, aka The One-Eyed King

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# Chapter 1: Before Getting Started

## Who this guide is not for

If you have ever Castled < 18-minutes before in your life, then GO AWAY. This guide is not for you. You are not the target audience here. This guide is not to help a typical 18 minute Castler hit it in 16 minutes. This guide is for the Terminally Slow – players who must improve their game play several orders of magnitude before you would even do the honor of calling them a *rookie*.

Because of this, some of the tips and advice I dispense would not fly for better players. I fully acknowledge this. The way I see it, any reader who can explain why certain advice is not prudent in the more competitive circles is a reader who will not benefit from this guide. This is not to say my information is necessarily wrong. When one considers the intended audience, then the information here is pretty much on the mark.

## Who this guide is for

For anyone who has trouble reaching Castle age in under 20 minutes, and especially those who normally don't reach Castle before 22 minutes, 24 minutes, *or worse*. Yes, these guys have faithfully read Mike Kidd's Newbie guides and other articles at Mr. Fixit Online (see [AOK Basic Training](#)). Yet they still can't break the 22 minute mark. Or the 25 minute mark.

Many experts have written many great articles. The problem with it is that experts wrote those articles. This gives a Terminally Slow player an excuse of why they cannot follow the guides. The slow poke obviously can't be as good as an expert, so even though the expert claims a guide is for newbies, it really is for *almost*-experts. Thus the newbies have a reason to stop trying.

So I am writing my guide for true newbies, and I have many advantages over the experts. I am not, nor ever will be, an expert player. I have no special skill or talent for quick thinking or micro-management. I consider myself quite an average player. My hardware equipment is average. My mental faculties are average. My reflexes are average. Not average in relation to a group of experts. I mean in average to *all* players on the Zone, including those that play Black Forest, explored, high resources.

I have played games with very good players. I have played *more* games with very bad players. I have played games with no feudal rushing, no galley rushing, and some of the players do not reach Castle < 24 minutes! Any good player who reads this surely has dropped his jaw by now. *Tough!* I told them that this guide was not for them and that

they should stop reading after the first paragraph. If your mind is now obsessed with why there was no early rushing, or why it took so long for players to Castle, then you have proved my point: *experts do not understand the mind of the Terminally Slow and are therefore ill-equipped to truly help them.*

I, on the other hand, walk freely among the newbies and rookies as one of their own. Given that there is nothing at all special about my playing, my goal is to help newbies become as mediocre as I am. Some may laugh that even my goal is quite mediocre. So be it. I want to help the Terminally Slow become mediocre players. Some of those players may graduate beyond my guide. That's when Mike Kidd or Dark Jihad's guides take over (Appendix D).

## **Before you read further – Record Yourself**

I suggest that before you dive further in to lots of tiny tips that it would be nice to capture your current game play in a recorded game. Try 2-3 practice games with the following settings:

### **“BEFORE” Settings - 1v1 against the Computer**

Map Style:	Arabia
Map Size:	3-player
Difficulty:	Any
Resources:	Low (standard)
Max Pop:	75 - 200
Reveal Map:	Normal
Starting Age:	Dark (default)
Your civ:	Byzantine
Target Castle Pop:	you decide
Speed:	Normal (NOT SLOW)
DO NOT PAUSE	

**“BEFORE” Goal:** Your goal is not to beat the computer. Your goal is to (1) Get to Castle Age as fast as you can, and (2) resign once you have at least 2 TC's and a Barracks.

### **Optional:**

- If you are very slow and getting attacked, then first try playing on Easiest. If that fails, then you can try playing a faster civ for the BEFORE game.
- If your Castle times are < 21 minutes, then try to also research the following 3 economic techs: Double-bit axe, Horse Collar, and Wheelbarrow.

Be sure to click RECORD for each game. Take your best “BEFORE” time, and give it a meaningful name. Towards the very end of the guide, you will be given some “AFTER” settings for a comparison.

Some people have discovered just by playing these settings that have fine-tuned their Castle times in a practical way. It is a nice beginning point anyway. For instance (hint), you do not need a Stable or Archery Range (hint) so you can use the wood for other things (hint).



**Seriously, record your games with the “BEFORE” settings. This helps later for benchmark comparison *after* you’ve read the guide. This helps you to measure your improvements.**

## **The Practicality of the Exercises**

Later when you are ready to record an “AFTER” game, certain settings will be mandatory. This includes playing on Hard, building the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC, and investing in the “Big 3” economic techs: double-bit axe, horse collar, and wheelbarrow. No pausing. Play on normal speed. Just like a real game.

These settings were chosen to keep the exercises practical. The Castle Time challenges at Mr. Fixit’s (<http://mrfixitonline.com/readPosting.asp?PostingId=72>) were fun, educational, and enlightening, but not at all practical. The landslide winner, Mike Kidd, freely admits to this. Contestants were allowed to play on slow and pause as frequently as they desired.

While the guide does put emphasis on Castle time, it also looks a few minutes beyond Castle time. That’s why the “AFTER” settings will later require the “Big 3” economic techs. Whether or not you get them in your real games is a decision up to you. These exercises are designed to help you have the resources on hand should you choose to invest them, either in those “Big 3” or in an early military.

## **Arabia -The Baseline Map**

For this guide I am using an Arabia map. Any experts, reading along despite my warnings, will probably agree with the map selection. But I know that a newbie is upset it is not Black Forest. Sorry. I am choosing Arabia for the baseline of this guide because Arabia is a food sparse map. There will be no talk of a dock or a fishing boat boom. (Note: if you build a dock on Arabia, then let this be your first tip: DON’T.)

For Arabia, you should scout about and find 8-10 sheep. Sheep will be found in pairs (unless your enemy has stolen one). There will be 2 boars within 1-2 screens of your TC. There may be deer within 1-3 screens of your TC.



For AOK:TC, the Mongolia map is similar to Arabia, except it has steppes. Most other maps have more food on it, except rare instances of the custom maps ES@Capricious and ES@Moats.

During testing of this guide, some of the rookie volunteers said that when they played on other food rich maps, such as Yucatan, they felt like they were in hog heaven. They practiced and trained on a food sparse map and felt confident they could reach a Fast Castle on any map. Give them a map with 12 sheep instead of 8, and these guys are ready to rock.

## Chapter 2: Practical Tips For Any Strategy

### 1-click Garrisoning - AVOID

Many experts do not talk about this because they don't play with 1-click garrisoning enabled. They don't panic like a newbie when being attacked, so the quicker garrisoning is no help. On the other hand, in the early stages of the game you may find yourself low on food and can't make a villager unless you have some guys check their food in. **The better players disable 1-click garrisoning, so when they order some vils to the TC, it's to drop off the food. Then put them back to work.** This gives you that 50+ food and the next villager without wasting precious few seconds.

My first 6 months of playing AOK, I played with 1-click garrisoning because I was essentially a Fraidy Cat. I took several weeks to train myself not to use 1-click garrisoning, but I now feel that by doing so that I have trimmed my times down. Besides, I can always mass garrison with a simple ring of the bell. I suggest that all players do not use 1-click garrisoning. Don't be discouraged your first couple of weeks. Keep practicing with it until it starts to feel natural.

When you watch a recorded game and see 6 boar hunters all stand upright for a prolonged second, and then continue eating, it probably was the player manually checking the food in. Drop off the food to make more vils.

### Why and When to loom

I laugh and cry at the same time when I see a newbie throw away 3 vils on a boar or to the wolves. Research Loom! That 50 gold is money well spent in Dark Age. It makes your villagers slightly stronger against boars and wolves. I can lose 10 vils in Imperial and not feel it's as detrimental as losing 1 vil in Dark. Research Loom! No excuses!

So now the big question is when to loom? Some suggest after villie #7. Others say after villie #14. I say do it before you hunt boars or venture too far away from your original town. One opportune time to do this is when you have insufficient food to create a new vil (remember you've got to keep your TC busy). Another opportune time is if you were forgetful and did not build a house in time. If so, cancel any vils in the queue, and research loom. Keep practicing and soon you'll find a rhythm to your game play and you'll settle on a good time to loom for your play style.

### Placement of buildings

One time killer is villager walking time. If you place a lumber camp 5 tiles from a forest, your choppers will be less efficient due to the long walks. You should try to place that

resource building anywhere from 0-2 tiles away. Some strongly suggest leaving 1 tile space. Others suggest placing it flush (0 tiles) against the resource. I mix and match. For lumber camps, and a few choppers, I place it flush against the forest (0 tiles). For a Mill, I place it 1 tile from the berries. Not also, that for a Mill, I build it on the far side of the berries – you might get lucky and have deer nearby.

On the topic of houses, do not try to build a pretty apartment complex. You do not get extra points for neat rows of houses. Your first house should be right where your first 2 vils stand. Then after that you may be a little pickier. With vil #3 walk a little bit to make sure your next house won't be blocking berries or gold. Early in the game you may need to throw down a house right away, so don't be too picky about it's placement. Later you may decide to use housing for radar.

That is to say you place houses on the outskirts of your town. It works best not to keep them neat, since an enemy could bypass this. Instead if you have a jagged layout, you have a better chance of spotting an enemy. Note, however, that housing placement is more as a defensive strategy, and not at all the economic bonus to get a fast Castle time. First and foremost, just be sure to have sufficient housing. If you have the luxury of good placement, go for it, but for crying out loud don't spend *too* much time walking about.

Note that later in the game you'll have more wood and you may want to use a wall of houses. This is fine by me, and is not the same thing as an apartment complex. But through much of Dark and Feudal, this will not be justified.

## **Scouting, Waypoints, and the Mini-Map**

Scouting is integral to your success. Don't let your Scout stay idle too long. Keep him moving, and try not to cover the same territory twice. Try going in circles around your original town, making *at least* 3 passes in your town so you can locate that stone, gold, boars, and maybe deer.

One way to scout is to set waypoints that the scout will follow. To set waypoints (1) select the scout, (2) right-click waypoints where you want the scout to follow, and (3) your last click should be a left-click to begin the journey. If you have a sensitive mouse, or clumsy fingers, then you may end up left-clicking *twice* which more or less kills your waypoints. The first left-click concludes the waypoints and sets the Scout in motion. The second left-click unfortunately cancels the waypoints.

Another tip is that you can click (be it right or left) on the mini-map. This can save you some scrolling time, but also has the tendency to be kind of coarse in its pathing. You may notice chunks of black strips of unexplored land, or you may be scouting already explored area.

Suffice it to say, keep your Scout moving. After you make several passes on your land and have discovered much of your resources, then head to the other side looking for your enemy. Set 3-5 waypoints and let him go. Remember to come back to him later and set

more waypoints. I am guilty of wasting time by setting 15 waypoints, and then later grabbing the Scout and setting different waypoints.

## **Improve your own LOS**

If your screen resolution is stuck at 800 x 600, then you are hopeless cause. The first and foremost choice on resolution should be **1280 x 1024**. Why? This enables you to see more of your screen at a glance. This requires less hand movement and scrolling on your part.

You can get by and still do a decent Castle time with 1024 x 768, but you will do much better with the higher resolution.

For those whining about performance now, I encourage you to set the **Graphics Detail** to **LOW**. Not only will this yield better graphics performance, but I also find it more beneficial as a player. A nice smooth rolling hill is nothing but pretty eye-candy. With a low graphics detail, it becomes staggered or layered in appearance. **AND I LIKE IT.** I can quickly see if land is flat enough to support a building of certain dimensions. If there is a small bump, then my Market won't fit there. This is easier to spot with the ugly layered look.

## **It's not all brains**

There is a lot of material to go over here. A newbie may be overwhelmed with all the little tidbits of what to be done, why, when, and where. However, the game is a *real-time* strategy which means it does require *real-time* hand movement. Get your scroll settings down to where you can scroll rapidly enough to set waypoints. Also if you want a quick jump to a portion of the screen, you can left-click on the mini-map. If you suffer from bursitis then maybe this isn't your game. Otherwise you should "stretch" by limbering up your mouse arm and shoulder and get ready for some quick arm movements.

## **The 1<sup>st</sup> 30 seconds**

The instant the game starts, the first thing you do NOT do is chop wood. Instead, you should put at least 2 villagers on building a house. If all 3 villagers are close together, have all 3 build a house. If 2 are together, have those 2 build a house. Then go to your TC, and SHIFT-Create a villager. Shift-create will attempt to create 5, but you only have enough food for 4 vils. This is OK. With the 3<sup>rd</sup> villager, build another house. Oftentimes, I have the 3<sup>rd</sup> villager build a 3<sup>rd</sup> house as well.

Set your Scout in motion on the outskirts of your town with the priority of looking for sheep. If the scout is far away from those 1<sup>st</sup> two builders, then send those villies in different directions, 6 tiles or so into the dark, looking for sheep. Keep the Scout moving. If you don't have sheep yet, newly created vils should be chopping wood at a nearby straggler tree. Once you find sheep, all wood chopping should cease. All but 1 villie

should go to eat sheep. The last villie is the one building the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> house, and he afterwards he should start building a Mill.

On rare occasions, you may find 8 sheep in first 30 seconds. In that case, your first building could (not should) be a Lumber Camp. Or if you are Japanese, it doesn't matter since you have enough wood for both a Lumber Camp and a Mill. In most games, however, your first building will be a Mill.

I personally build a Mill on the other side of the berries. Why? (1) because I go farming nuts later in the game, so I want plenty of room to accommodate as many farms as I can get. (2) Sometimes I get lucky and have deer nearby. Not necessarily next to, but less than a screen away from the Mill. (3) once farms start popping up, sometimes a villie will take a long walk to the Mill instead of dropping the food off at the TC he is farming next to. So I move my Mill slightly further away to alleviate this quirk.

### **Wish you had pockets?**

Some newbies are unaware that they after spending precious time to gather resources that sometime they throw the resources away by task switching the villagers. Say what? If you have someone eating a sheep, and he's got a lot of mutton, then you switch the villager to another task (like wood chopping) before he's dropped off the food, then all that food is lost. Ouch!

So you should be very careful to have your villagers drop off any resources before switching their tasks. The first step is to be aware of the problem. The second step is to remind yourself of the problem.

Also note that while it's clearly obvious that wood and gold are two distinct resources, and therefore one needs to be dropped off before you switch tasks to another, the distinction is not so clear with food. All food is not the same. In fact, only boar meat and deer meat are treated as the same food type. Thus if you keep task switching among berries, shore fish, sheep, and boars, you will have no food unless you check in each time. Think about it. If you have 5 vils eating sheep at your TC, and another vil is running a boar back to your TC, then you better have those 5 vils drop off the mutton (nice to have 1-click garrison off for this) before they shoot at the pig. Otherwise you lose all the sheep food.

AOK:TC introduced the notion of Smart Villagers. These are villagers that will build a resource center, and then be smart enough to go to work on that resource after completion of the building. Any resources they are carrying prior to the construction will automatically be deposited after the building is completed but before they begin to gather new resources. The key here is that Smart Villagers apply to Builders. If you switch a berry picker to *build* a Mining Camp, then he will auto-deposit the food. If you switch a berry picker from berries directly to a gold pit, then he loses the food.

## **Villager Task Management**

That said, the rawest newbie is probably saying “Solution: I’ll never switch my villagers on their tasks.” Then you will never improve as a player, and you will not get your Castle time below 18 minutes. In the first 20 minutes of the game, you need to keep a good eye on the resources at the top of the screen. You just can’t look up there and see how much you have. Rather, you need to think ahead to the next 1-2 minutes and think of how much you need.

If I have 600 wood, but only 30 food, then I know my incoming food is insufficient. I can build another TC and some farms. I can build a Mill and some farms. Or I can build some farms by an existing TC or Mill. But the point is that I need more farms. Take 6 guys off of wood and place them on farming. Just be sure that they drop their wood off first.

To reiterate, the key to task management isn’t just to keep checking your resource levels at the top, but also to project ahead your planned need and how to spend those resources. It’s not unusual in the first 22 minutes of game play to move 6 guys from wood to berries and to later back to wood.

## **Gathering rates of food**

Different types of food can be gathered faster than others. This harvest rate is nice to be aware of, including any civ specific rate. Mongols hunt faster, so Mongols can really carve up pigs and deer. Britons eat sheep and turkeys faster than others. This can be a good thing to get food quicker.

- Shore fishing by villagers (not on Arabia, *puh-leeze*)
- Boars
- Deers
- Sheep \*\*
- Farms
- Berries

\*\* Sheep eating is quicker if within the confines of the TC because there is 0 walking involved to drop off the meat. Try to be within or near your TC. Even being 3 tiles away to eat a sheep can make you feel sluggish.

## **Food rots**

One thing to realize is that dead boars, deer, sheep, and turkeys will spoil and rot. The spoilage rate is 1 unit of food per second. So 1 vil working by himself on a sheep will lose more food to spoilage than 3 vils. The 3 vils can chop up the sheep quicker than 1 vil, thus less available food is lost to rotting.

## **Much ado about mutton**

For efficiency, try to have at least 3 vils eating a single sheep. The sheep rots quickly if you have 1-2 vils on it. Bring the sheep inside the TC (or as close as possible to the TC) to eliminate drop-off walks.

Remember that sheep are found in pairs. If you find 1 or 3 sheep, there is another around there (unless an enemy stole it).

If you find 6-8 sheep right away, you can use a sheep to scout for you! Don't scout too far out since an enemy can steal it, but it can sometimes find that 2<sup>nd</sup> pig for you. Pick 1 or 2 out and set some waypoints not too far away from your town.

Don't bunch the sheep all together in the TC. Move them out of the way so the vils can walk freely. Then move 1 sheep near the current sheep eaters. Don't move them 10 tiles away for goodness sake! A single sheep can support up to 6 vils eating it.

After the 4-6<sup>th</sup> sheep, you will be ready for pigs. Move all other sheep out of the way so you don't kill a sheep just as the boar is delivered. Sheep are faster than berries, so sometimes when I begin boar hunting I will move the extra sheep by the Mill and put 4 berry pickers on the sheep.

## **Boar Luring, When and How**

If you don't eat boars in the game, then you are denying yourself 700 free food. Just like in real life, I never turn away a free meal. You've got to have several villies chopping a lot of wood to throw down a lot of farms in order to gather the same amount of food in near about the same time. Obviously, it's more efficient to do it without the wood chopping. Have some bacon.

So you should be ready for a pig roast sometime after eating the 4<sup>th</sup> sheep. Be sure to get loom, and send one vil out towards a pig, but 5 tiles away. When your undivided attention is ready, have that vil shoot the pig *at least* twice, and sometimes 3 times. Be sure that pig is heading right for the vil, then have the vil turn tail and run back to the TC. If you time it right, then the shepherds should *just* be finishing up on the mutton. Or you will need to manually drop off the mutton, and then shoot the boar.

One tip is to be sure the pig is almost on your butt before you turn and run. Sometimes the pig does not respond to the first arrow. The other thing is if you ran around too many buildings or run away quick, the pig gives up and goes back – thus wasting precious time.

On the other hand, you don't want to begin shooting the boar when you are right up on him. This is risky. Give yourself a little space cushion by keeping the boar ever so slightly outside of the villie's LOS before you try shooting the boar. I know some players will send a villie from the TC to shoot a boar 1 ½ screens away, and then the player gets involved with other tasks. This may result in a dead villager. Instead, simply

send the villie out about 5 – 8 tiles away from the boar and have the villie just stand there until you are done with those other tasks. Yes, you've lost some production time standing there doing nothing. On the other hand, your villager is alive and he can run that pig back to town faster than you can send another villie out.

Another tip is try to lure the pig as close to your TC or Mill as possible. If you kill it 10 tiles away, then the drop-off walks are too long. They may not seem long to you, but the villager inefficiency adds up and you will find yourself short on food at certain points in Dark Age.

## **To Deer or not to Deer**

Deer is also free food, but they cannot be lured to the TC. Instead, all hunters must walk out to the deer site. These walks can be long, and a time killer. If you are wood heavy, and there are at least 4 deer, then a Mill maybe is justified. Remember the earlier hint that if you build the Mill on the far side of the berries, that you may luck out and have deer close by.

Still, I do not count on deer as a reliable food source. The walking times can delay you more than laying down 4 spare farms right at the TC. If the deer are very close by, I consider it a gift. If there are 6 or more deer, it's justified.

There two critical things regarding deer and a decent Castle time. One, you must send 3-6 hunters to hunt deer early enough (before you click to advance to Feudal) for them to get a lot of meat and return in time to check-in the food for your Castle advancement. Two, even before you worry about Castle advancement, you've got to have plenty of steady non-deer food sources in Dark Age to keep villie production steady and still advance to Feudal Age in the first place.

While you should never turn away a bountiful food and convenient food source, so often the deer are not so convenient and should be left alone. Hence, the baseline for this guide assumes no deer.

## **Gathering Points**

I excluded this in my first several drafts. It's one of those things I assume every player uses. Boy was I wrong! There is a lot to juggle, and a lot of units to keep busy. Free yourself of some of that busy-work by setting the gathering point from the TC. Let those new vils go straight to work on berries, or lumber. Set it and forget it.

Farms require more micro-management. So if I need immediate farming, I'll pull wood choppers away and move them to farms. Then I set a gathering point back to wood. Thus I spend my time to lay down the farms I need, and free my time worrying about new villagers (future woodchoppers) for a while. That's the beauty of gathering points.



## **Timing is *EVERYTHING***

Here's some old and new time shaving tips.

- Be sure to lure the boar before you need it. After about the 4-6<sup>th</sup> sheep will do. Move the other sheep out of the way, and send 1 vil out for the luring.
- For the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar, you need to send another vil out (one with 100% health) before the guys are done with the 1<sup>st</sup> boar.
- If you hunt deer, you should do it before you start researching Feudal. Send 3-6 hunters over. When you have Feudal 60% researched, force those deer hunters to check-in.
- If you've got the wood, then switch your woodies to builders. Around the 90% research to Castle, move a group of 3-4 woodies over to build a Market, and move another 3-4 to build a Blacksmith. This will shave seconds off your time.

**If by this time during the transition to Feudal Age you don't already have 6-9 farms, then you are hosed.** Much more on this later.

You may need to understand why you shift 4 woodies to builders in order to fully understand this entire guide. Multiple builders construct buildings faster. So 4 builders can erect a building in half the time as 1 builder. Plus, walking times are a killer (remember). So have your former-woodies now-builders move into position *ahead of time*, and pick a nice spot of land for a large Market and small Blacksmith.

## **Environmental and other Mental Hazards**

In a 2-hour span, I may be online for all but 15 minutes. But that 15 minutes is carved up over the 2-hours where I may be answering the phone, sending off e-mail, marinating dinner, going to the ladies room, answering the door, kicking the dog, etc. So oftentimes I don't play because I know the chance for frequent interruptions is too high. This would be rude to the other players.

Likewise I know of players who have other conditions swirling around them in the house. Babies crawling on their lap, wives wanting their attention, food burning on the grill, etc. If you cannot play with minimal interruption then your attention is naturally divided. Your Castle time should be horrible. If you can shut-out the outside world and keep your attention 100% on the game, then you might make it to a decent Castle time.

Corollary: Good players have no life since they have no outside interference.

## **Don't be Anal-Retentive**

Don't get *too* overly anal about shaving seconds off, or saving resources, or neat building. Strangely enough they do not award extra points for this. If you are low on housing, slam 4 guys on it right where they stand. Do not waste time finding a pretty spot. Build it. Build it now. And in the next game, build it earlier.

While it is good to check in while carrying resources, don't be nuts about it. You may lose more villie seconds in dropping off than by putting that guy back to work. This is very true later in the game.

Do not try to completely eat a sheep if a pig is on the way. I have seen the pig run back or kill a villie just so I could eat 20 more sheep units. Dude, you got 300 units of food in front of you. Check-in the sheep mutton, turn, and fire. If it means a sheep partially rots, so be it.

## **Hotkeys and other keys**

I was tempted to skip this altogether because I do not think a newbie uses hotkeys. If you must, use "H" to take you to your TC. I also will number my scout using CTRL-1 so that later I can find him with ALT-1. This is an occasional thing. I really think most newbies freeze up with hotkeys, so this guide assumes you do not use them.

Other important keys are:

**F11** – to show the time in the upper left.

**F4** – to show player scores in lower right

Check out the mini-map in the lower-right hand corner. In the north-east corner of the mini-map, there is a button that looks like 2 gears. This is your **Advanced Options** button. Turn it on.

## **Self Analysis**

Record your own games. If you whine to me that you can't Castle better than 20 minutes after faithfully following this guide, then something is wrong with *you* and you don't want to admit. Watch your recordings. On slow. Is the TC idle? Do you check-in food to get the 50 needed for another vil? Is your Scout moving? Do you have sufficient housing?

Be your own critic. When you can spot your own mistakes, you are almost there. Use a critical eye. Run it on slow. Do you have 0 farms but 500 wood? You will be slower getting the food than if you laid down a farm each time 60 wood was available.

Play it on slow, if you must, and also pause. Look at your resources in the upper-left and ask yourself questions.

- If your pop is 12 of 15, and you have 120 wood, should you build a lumber camp or a house first? Answer: house.
- If you have a lumber camp, and your pop is 19 of 25, and you have 150 wood, what do you do? Answer: build 2 farms and then a house.

So stop the game, take time to look at what's happening in the game, and then ask questions such as: What next? What do I need in next 30 seconds? What do I need in next 1 minute? In 2 minutes? While this is slow at first, eventually you are training your thinking to project ahead and use resources. All we got to do now is make it faster.

## Chapter 3: Fine-tuning for Fast Castle

### General All-Purpose Tips

Some people have found an immediate improvement from a Castle time of 25 minutes down to 20 just by following a few general tips. These tips apply to most opening strategies on virtually any map type.

- **Keep the TC busy.** It should be creating vils at a steady pace, researching Loom, or advancing to the next age. This means you need to have 50 food ready to create a villie, or have sufficient housing, otherwise the TC is idle.
- **Keep walking distances to a minimum.** By building a Mill or Lumber Camp in the right spot, you shorten the time for walking. Walking time is a killer.
- **Look ahead for housing needs,** but not too far ahead. This means good management of your wood. If you've got pop 23 of 25, and 140 wood, then do not build spend 120 wood for 2 farms. Instead build 1 farm, and build 1 house. Once the builder is finished with the house, there will be enough wood for the 2<sup>nd</sup> farm. If you are late getting a house up, stick several builders on it in order to keep your TC busy.
- **Don't overbuild housing too early in the game.** Certainly build the house before you need it. But if your target pop is 30, then build enough housing for 30 or maybe 35. If you built for pop 45, then you've spent 60 wood that could've gone to a Dark age farm, and instead wasted that 60 wood on 2 houses that you don't need until Castle Age.
- **Scout the resources on your side before running off to find the enemy.** Know where your gold and stone will be, or where good chokepoints lie. Whenever I see an enemy's high score in the early stages of the game, I chuckle because I know it's a newbie racking up scouting points. Make 1-2 more passes on your side before venturing over. When you do, make a mental note: where would you attack yourself if you were the enemy. This gives you a clue as where to put your defenses.
- **Postpone upgrades except for Loom.** Those upgrades are beneficial, yes, but they cost food and delay advancement. If you can defer those upgrades for just 2-3 minutes and select them *during* your transition to Castle. Note: wood chopping should be the first one. There are exceptions to every rule so if you reach Feudal

Age with 1000 Food and 400 Wood, then go ahead and get the Axe upgrade as soon as you can.

- **Do not make army units until after you are advancing to Castle.** Yes an army is important, but like upgrades you should wait until you have started to research Castle. Postpone them 2 minutes. I know many newbies will balk at this, and wonder how they will defend themselves. “I need an army to defend me because my Castle time is slow.” Exactly. Instead, go for a faster Castle, and then build extra TC’s to offer a hiding place for your vils.

## **Where’s my Cookbook?**

My friend FlyCat says he hates cookbook guides that give a strict recipe to be followed blindly by players. This guide is not one of them.

Many players like to follow a strict build order guide that villie 14 goes to food, villie 15 builds a lumber camp, etc. I do not do this here. Each map is so different, even on a subtle level that a smart player must feel confident to adjust the specific tiny steps in a strategy while adhering to the overall strategy.

There are so many variables to the game, and you must learn to read the map. In one of my trial tests (unpublished here), I found 8 deer near each other. Rather than stick to a rigid cookbook, I skipped 4 farms and built a Mill near the deer.

So here’s the closest thing to a cookbook: food, food, food, wood, food, wood, food.

The important thing is **NOT** to follow a rigid guide, but to think for yourself. Each map is different even on a very subtle level. Learn to read the map and make in-game adjustments.

## **Food, Food, and *MORE FOOD***

In order to get to Castle quickly, the most important resource is FOOD. You may have 16-18 guys on food in Dark age: 4 on berries, 6 on meat, and 7 on Farms. That’s right, farms in Dark age. **After you have built the requisite Mill and Lumber camp, and after you have sufficient housing, then each time you get 60 wood you should plop down a farm until you have 6-8 farms** depending upon wood needs. Note: if you have deer conveniently nearby, you can get by with fewer farms but build a Mill near the deer. Do this only if it is tempting, like with 6 or more deer.

When the pig roasts are over, a couple of hunters can move to berries, and the other hunters can shift to wood. This may happen during the transition to Feudal Age, or soon as you reach Feudal Age.



**I cannot emphasize the above point enough! FOOD. FOOD. FOOD. Don't save that wood – build a farm. Feed your people. With a renewed focus on food, I was able to consistently trim 2-3 minutes off of my Castle times.**

### **Did you catch that hidden clue?**

Certainly this is a voluminous tome. Lots and lots of buried tips for newbies that experts otherwise take for granted. I hope that you find many nuggets of information in this guide, but the previous section had a not-so-subtle clue on the secret of a Fast Castle. Begins with “F”. Something you put in your mouth to digest in your stomach. You eat it when you're hungry.

Food, food, food. So important it warrants special mention. If you piece together many of the tips around the critical need for food, then you will reach certain revelations. Elsewhere I mention that you should not save too much wood, that you should spend it instead. A farm is a nice gift. And don't save up to build 6 farms at once (early on anyway). Each time you get 60 wood that should be a farm right then and there.

### **SPEND that WOOD!**

Let's talk about Dark Age wood management. First of all, you can defer your Barracks until Fedual age, so that's 175 Wood in Dark age that can be used for something else (that's almost 3 farms). After you have constructed a Mill, a Lumber camp, a Mining camp, and have sufficient housing, please remember (*in case I haven't mentioned it earlier*) that **60 Wood EQUALS 1 NEW FARM!**

If you already have those buildings, then you can get by through the rest of Dark with 4 – 6 wood choppers. Any new villagers being created should (1) assigned to a new farm, wood permitting, or (2) sent to berries. During this time you already have at least 2 gold miners, and 4 – 8 boar hunters eating the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar. **KEEP PLOPPING DOWN FARMS** until you have 7 – 9 farms. When the boar hunters are finished dining,, task switch them to wood.

When I say, make more farms, I do not mean to merely shift a boar hunter to a farm, or a berry picker to a farm. This is merely moving 1 food gatherer between food sources. **The idea is to increase the number of food gatherers.** So keep that guy on the boar, and grab a new guy (fresh from TC or from the lumber camp) for that new farm.

If you have already built all of your Dark buildings, and you've got 9 wood choppers, then have as many as possible check-in their wood, and have those guys (3 – 6) start farming as much as your current wood levels allow. If you do this, then perhaps you should send newly created vils to the lumber camp to bring your chopper level up to 6.

Don't worry about riding thin on wood. Once you've got those 7 – 9 farms in place, stop any further buildings (except possibly for that single extra house). By doing this and by task switching the boar hunters to wood later, then you will chop enough wood during the Feudal transition period. When you reach Feudal Age, you should have over 400 wood. That gives you the 2 buildings you need, and your food requirement is already there.

Depending upon your layout, you may not want to send all the boar hunters or all the berry pickers over to a lumber camp. If you are still short on farms, then keep a few guys on nearby straggler trees. As the 60 wood becomes available, task switch 1 vil to a new farm.

One sign that you're saving your wood instead of spending it: if you get to Feudal and must wait on food to come in before advancing to Castle, then you are wood heavy, and you were probably wood heavy in mid-Dark age. You should be thinking of farming in the 8 – 9 minute time frame.

## **Dark Age Synopsis**

Find those sheep right away.

Build only enough housing, as you need it.

Shoot for housing 30, but if you want extra houses only have 1 extra house to support pop 35.

Your Dark Age pop should be 30 (29 vils and 1 scout).

You have a Mill, a Lumber camp, and a gold mining camp (around villie 23-25).

To have just enough gold to Castle, you can get by with 2 gold miners, sometime around villie 23-26.

No Barracks in Dark Age. You have no stone miners, and 2 gold miners.

You have 6-10 Dark farms (8 is good target). Roughly 17 vils are working on food sources, and 10 are on wood. Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe 18 vils are on food, and 9 are on wood. Check your resources and consider your needs in the next 2 minutes.

## **Feudal Age**

On your way to reaching Feudal, check the resources at the top. See if you have at least 325 wood. If you do, then you can start building right away. If not, then some woodies need to remain as choppers.

Do not make extra vils in Feudal.

Do not research any techs until after you are researching Castle Age. Once you are on your way to Castle, then you can invest in Double-Bit Axe and Horse Collar. Don't research them before Castle as they will slow your times down. You have a 2:40 window in transition to Castle to get these techs.

Stick at least 4 choppers on a Market (175 wood) first. If you have another 150 wood, then build a Blacksmith with another 2-4 choppers.

The Blacksmith is done, so now advance to Castle. If you were able to keep your TC busy, busy, busy in Dark Age, with no delays to housing shortages or brain farts, then you should be on target for an 18-minute Castle.

Considering economic techs: get Axe upgrade (first), then Horse Collar as wood and food allow. If you don't have housing for 35, build an extra house during this time. You can move 1 villie in place to build a Barracks during this time (or you can wait until after hitting Castle).

## **Castle Age is here**

Let's say you reach Castle in 18-minutes. You have 200 stone. You have 300+ wood. A prime location for your 2<sup>nd</sup> TC should be near a gold mine. A secondary location would be near stone. If possible, place the TC near another resource, like wood, as well. Sometimes you get lucky and have gold, wood, and stone close by for 1 TC. Lucky you. Now go mad on gold.

If you haven't already got one, your next building should be a Barracks. From there you can crank out a few Spearmen in order to guard against Knight attacks. Whether your 3<sup>rd</sup> building is another TC or a Stable depends upon you, your playing style, and your game plan. Keep both TC's busy pumping out new vils, and keep your eye on needed resources.

OK, that's gotten you to Castle quickly. It's given you 2 TC's which can protect your vils, and you're in shape to start building an army while booming back home.

So my job is done. I can't give you any more details on what to do next. Up to now this has focused on your economic advancement to Castle age. Now you are in Castle age with relatively sound economic footing. You're the general and now it's your war strategy that takes over. Good luck.

## **Brief Castle Age tips**

OK, maybe I do have a few tips for Castle age.

- Don't keep too much wood in the bank. Think of your needs. Do you need to build a University – as soon as you got 200 wood, then build one. Do you want to build another TC – as soon as you get 275 wood, then build one. Do you want



early investments in economic upgrades? Then get them. Wood in the bank doesn't gain interest. Spend it.

- Wheelbarrow. This gives immediate boost to farming, and when coupled with farming or wood techs, you get a noticeable boost. I find I have enough wood when I reach Castle to build a 2<sup>nd</sup> TC and get Wheelbarrow, followed shortly by a Barracks.
- Load balance from the TC and Army buildings. If you have 4 TC's, keep them all busy. Don't build 5 vils from one TC, 5 from another, and 0 from the other two. Instead, rotate among the TC's and pump 2-3 vils out *per* TC. Same for army buildings. If you have 4 Barracks, get all of them busy creating a few Spears or Swordsmen or upgrades.
- If you have lots of wood, little food, and little gold, I suggest building a TC near gold. However, do not put those TC builders to work on gold! Instead, have the 4 or 5 of them build farms by the new TC. Then create new vils from the TC and have those new vils go to mine gold.
- If you are going wood heavy, have some choppers near extra TC's start building farms near those TC's. Or shift the woodies to build a Mill and farms.
- In early Castle, you may discover that you have 600 Food and only 10 Wood. If a farm runs fallow during this time, there is no law that demands that the farm be replanted right away. Switch that farmer to wood until your wood level gets healthy again.
- Sometime in mid- to late-Castle, you're going to need lots of houses, and more farms. Build a Mill somewhere that has spacious land, and lay down 6-8 more farms. Lay down 6 – 10 houses, scattered about.

## **Variations on a theme**

What I suggest is that you practice the basic strategy until you are safely pulling 18-minute pop 30 Castle times. If you have trouble, then don't feel like a weenie if you must play on SLOW. Go ahead and play on slow. Pause when you need to refer to notes. Pause when you need to in order to contemplate what you are doing. Work on your thought processes of what you should be doing now, plus what's coming up next.

Once you get this down, and return to normal speed, then you may be ready for variations in the strategy. Play around with what happens when you make 2 less vils, or maybe build a stone mining camp. See how this affects your resource levels when you reach Castle Age.

Make a small variation in your game, and measure its effect. Don't be afraid to experiment.

### Trading Stone

Some can turn some excellent Castle times (15:00 – 16:30) by making a few less villies, and not spending wood or villager time on gold mining. If you trade your stone for gold, you will have over the 200 gold needed to advance to Castle Age.

You can experiment and see an optimum number of vils and their work distribution. I find pop 26-28 and a stone trade can get me to Castle around 16:30. It also helps if deer are convenient. Then you don't need 8 farms. Maybe you can get by with 4 farms and only the 1 Mill. Start two groups of 4 hunters out before you start researching Feudal.

Keep in mind the overall goal isn't just the fastest Castle time you can achieve. It's to get to Castle fast but with strong economic shape. So you may still want a 2<sup>nd</sup> TC ... but ... you traded your stone away. So when you are researching Castle, you need to mine STONE.

As you are transitioning to Castle, you can take the berry pickers (idle by now with no more berries) and shift them over to stone. Start mining stone even if you do not have 100 wood for a mining camp. You need at least 100 stone to build a new TC when you hit Castle. Certainly **as you get the 100 wood, then build a stone camp.**

That 2<sup>nd</sup> TC should still be next to gold.

### Dark pop 28 + 2 Feudal vils (28+2)

Some purists believe that the single TC should constantly be busy until you reach Castle Age. In Feudal, there is a delay where the TC does nothing while you construct your 2 buildings before advancing to Castle Age. One way to keep your TC busy is to make 28 vils in Dark, and then when reaching Feudal Age, you create 2 more vils. I encourage all to experiment and give it a try. If you try this, do not put more than 3 builders on a building. If you put 5 builders on the Market, the buildings will be done while you are waiting for that 2<sup>nd</sup> Feudal villie to pop out.

Oftentimes I myself forget to make those 2 extra vils in Feudal. Plus in team games I like needing my gold to get Cartography. So I agree that a Dark 30 is a simpler method. Still it's nice to know about other methods, to experiment with, and to see how they fit into your style.

### Pop 25 for quicker, but weaker, Castle time

If you want an even faster Castle time, you can try a pop 25 opening. Make all vils in Dark, and none in Feudal. Make NO spare housing, i.e. only have enough housing for pop 25. You are trying to get by on thin resources, so stay within the margins.

Since you have 5 less vils, or to put it another way, 5 less gatherers, you will be shorter on resources. I suggest having 18 vils on food, 6 on wood (or builders), and 1 scout. In this strat, you can get by with 3 Dark farms, but you need to send 4-6 vils to hunt 1 deer. You should send these guys to hunt before you transition to Feudal Age. Shortly after reaching Feudal, send the hunters to check in even if they aren't finished. They should be carrying enough food to get you over the 800 mark.

The reason for the deer is because you have fewer choppers, and therefore less wood for farms. This strat only works if you have both boars, and deer that is not horribly far away.

Also when you reach Feudal, you probably do not have 325 wood. So have 1-2 choppers start a Market, and the instant the other choppers have 150 wood, have them start the Blacksmith. You must trade stone for gold in this strat. Those deer hunters can then switch over to stone once they've dropped off the meat.

You may pull a sub-16 minute Castle time with this strategy, especially if you are using a civilization that has an early economic bonus. But your economy is not as strong since you are missing 5 gatherers. This would be more prudent if you wanted a brief mini-boom. You really can't raid the other guy, because you have no gold or stone. But you should have enough wood to build a TC near a gold mine.

### Pop 25-29

You may discover with certain civ bonuses that you can get by with maybe 27 vils instead of 30, or 28+2. Example, Celts get a wood bonus, so you can get by with fewer choppers right away. The important thing is to experiment. Don't be shy to adjust by 1 or even 2 vils a given strategy until you feel comfortable with it.

### Pop 35

What's this? How will this help you Castle faster? It doesn't. But consider that you probably are playing in slow gaming circles where most people Castle with pop 25 in 22 – 24 minutes. If you Castle in 18 minutes, these people will quit playing with you. Instead, Castle slightly faster than them in, say, 20-minutes ... but with a much stronger economy. Stick 2 guys on Dark stone, another 1 on food, wood, and gold. You can even build a Barracks in Feudal.

Do not try this against better players.

## **Theoretical Best Times**

Let's consider the theoretical best times for a Byzantine pop 30 Castle (including Loom in Dark Age). In essence there are many fixed times, but one fuzzy time, namely the construction time in Feudal Age. Note that these times are based upon ABSOLUTELY ZERO idle time at the Town Center through Dark Age.

**Byzantine, Dark pop 30, Dark Loom:**

<b>Dark Age</b>	10:50	26 vils X 0:25 per vil
	00:25	Research Loom
	02:10	Research Feudal
	13:25	<u>Best Feudal Time</u> <sup>(1)</sup>
<b>Feudal Age</b>	**:**	Construct 2 buildings
	02:40	Research Castle
	16:05	<u>Partial Castle Subtotal</u> <sup>(2)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> this is the absolute best theoretical Feudal time with Byz pop 30.

<sup>(2)</sup> does not include construction times in Feudal.

Now we need to account for the Feudal construction times. A Market takes 1:00 build time, and a Blacksmith takes 0:40 build time. Let's focus on the longer build time of the Market, and assume the Blacksmith will be completed before the Market. Note that these times imply ZERO walking time to a construction site.

<b>Number Builders</b>	<b>Market Build Time</b>	<u>Plus 16:05</u>
1	1:00	17:05
4	0:30	16:35
8	0:15	16:20
16	0:08	16:13

My own personal times seem to average around 17:20, so this means that I have a little less than 1 minute of idle time for my Dark Age TC, and a few seconds of Feudal Age slack time moving the Market builders into place.

It is unreasonable to think you can ever reach the theoretical best time. Obviously there will be seconds lost here and there for those moments when the TC is idle in Dark, or when you are positioning your Feudal builders.

If you wanted to try the 28+2 approach, then the Feudal construction time is not the hold-up as 2 vils will be created in 50 seconds. Since a Market takes 1 villie 1-minute to construct, you can put 4 builders on the Market to finish it in 30 seconds, plus have some slack for walking time.

Others may try a 29+1 approach. The thought here is that you can trim 25 seconds off the Dark Age times without adding any to the Feudal Age time. If you take 30 seconds to build a Market, then 29+1 is good. However, I frequently forget to make any extra villagers in Feudal, so my strategy often ends up as a 29+0 and the Feudal Age TC still has its idle time.

Still this information also shows that in order to diagnose Castle times, it helps by reviewing Feudal times.

### Byzantine, Dark pop 28, Dark Loom, +2 Feudal vils:

Dark Age	10:00	24 vils X 0:25 per vil
	00:25	Research Loom
	02:10	Research Feudal
	12:35	<u>Best Feudal Time</u>
Feudal Age	00:50	2 vils x 0:25
	02:40	Research Castle
	16:05	<u>Best 28+2 Castle Time</u>

### An idle TC is the loser's workshop

This section was added after testing the Lab Rats. My first Lab Rat was turning in a Castle time of 18:30, but he kept recording the full-time of the exercise (which requires building a 2<sup>nd</sup> TC). So he felt frustrated that his "time" was 19:45. Nope, I said, it was 18:30 which was the time he reached Castle Age, not the time his 2<sup>nd</sup> TC was finished.

He had a decent enough game with pop 30, and yet still pulled in an 18:32 Castle time. He was 32 seconds away from the elusive 18:00. I watched the replay several times. His Feudal Age was *very* brief – he quickly and efficiently constructed the buildings.

But I did notice that in Dark Age he was not beginning to research Feudal Age until 12:56. One of my games showed me beginning the Feudal Age research at 11:51. So my Dark Age was 1 minute faster than his. Obviously his slow down was somewhere in Dark Age. But where?

The problem was that I was watching the replay on Fast. When I finally felt the slowdown was going to be TC idleness, I had to slow down the replay. Here's what I did:

- Turn the POV off.
- Stay centered, and focused, on the TC.
- Be sure times show up in upper-left corner (F11).
- As long as villies are queued up, you can play on Fast.
- As soon as the last queued villie is 90% done, play on Slow.
- Pause if no additional villie (or loom) is being created.
- Play on slow to count up the seconds of idleness.
- The instant more vils are queued, you can play on Fast.
- Repeat as necessary to catch idle periods.

If these steps are hard to follow, then replay the whole game on Normal or Slow. I was able to use the Fast/Slow steps above for Lab Rat 1, and here's what I saw on the game clock to help analyze where his 18:30 Castle time could be improved.

### Discovered TC idle time:

5:20 – 5:30	Right before villie 16 – no reason
7:44 – 8:14	Right before villie 21 – insufficient housing
8:36 – 9:09	Right before villie 22 – no reason

**Total idle time: 1:03.** Hence he could trim slightly over 1 minute off of his 18:30 Castle time to yield a 17:30 Castle time, *or better*. This would give him not just a sub-18 minute pop 30 Castle, but he could be closer to 17:00 than he is to 18:00. Nice.

So here's a lesson of this section: replay on slow to analyze TC idle times. But the **main lesson** of this section is: **KEEP YOUR TC BUSY!** The issue of villager efficiency is no doubt important, but TC efficiency is the **NUMBER ONE** means to a Fast Castle.

One of the guide's volunteers, Holo Doc, code-named BlindMan1, offered the following excellent tip: by having at least 4 berry pickers early on that you may have sufficient food to keep the TC busy. While berry picking is slow, it is also steady. Given the feast-or-famine nature of hunting, the steady supply of berries early on is but one of many ways to keep the TC busy.

## The Game Clinic

See Appendix A at the end of the guide for games by Terminally Slow people that experience many of the same problems as you do. These games are very educational about what to do, and what not to do, to improve your Castle time.

And don't forget your own gaming buddies. You and your friends can host your own gaming clinics where you each analyze the games. If you are still stuck in the 19+ range after reading this guide, do not call me, but do call your friends.

## Chapter 4: Putting It All Together

### The 4 Critical Areas to Graduating

Before you get ready for some more exercises let's hammer home some of the various points in a single section. Here are 4 critical areas in the order that I feel are needed to have an 18-minute Castle time with a decent economy:

1. TC Efficiency
2. Resource Management
3. Task Distribution
4. Villager Efficiency

(1) During the first 20 minutes of the game, TC Efficiency is the most critical area for a Fast Castle. Keep the TC busy. Idle time at the TC is a killer. The other areas are supports towards high TC Efficiency, but it still depends upon the player keeping a keen eye on the TC. If you are more worried about sending 6 vils out to build a Mill and hunt deer, while your TC sits idle, then your priorities are wrong. Don't be anal retentive about improving item (4) when you let item (1) suffer.

(2) While Resource Management envelopes the areas (3) and (4), it also involves the spending of resources, as well as the planning of future resources (and how you intend to spend them). This means keeping an eye on the upper left and seeing how much of what that you've got, and your plans on spending it. When you reach Feudal Age, you may have around 750 Food already (some games show over 900 food), but you need 325 Wood for those 2 buildings. If 2 farms expire during your trip to Feudal or shortly after getting there, good resource management is NOT to reseed the farms before those buildings are started.

(3) Task Distribution entails not just how many vils are working on food vs. wood vs. gold, but also *when*. One of the games in Appendix A shows a player who has a nice distribution of food vs. wood gatherers at the end of Dark. The problem was his previous 10 minutes in Dark the distribution was not good – it was too skewed towards wood.

(4) Villager Efficiency makes sure you don't have villagers idle for prolonged periods. Those 6 vils finished eating the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar – don't let them stand around too long. Stick em on a straggler tree. Keep a vil garrisoned too long and he's lost all efficiency. Besides idle time (or really "do nothing while standing there" time), just because a villager is moving doesn't mean he is efficient. Too much walking by too many vils reduces their gathering time.

## **The End-Goal has many Sub-Goals**

An 18-minute Castle with decent economy is the end-goal. When you shoot for that target, you need to be aware of the other sub-goals in-between. For instance, to make an 18-minute Castle means you must have the sub-goal of researching Castle at the 15:20 mark (the 2:40 research time puts you at 18:00). If you budget for a 40 second build time in Feudal, this means you must have a goal of reaching Feudal at 14:40. To make a 14:40 Feudal, this means your goal should be to begin researching Feudal Age by 12:30.

From our other sections, you can see that a pop 30 Dark with Loom comes to 11:15. This gives you a 1:15 minute slack time where your TC can be idle, and you can still have an 18-minute Castle. You can do better than 18-minutes by reducing this 1:15 slack (as well as the 0:40 Feudal build time).

Those are timing goals. Don't neglect the resource goals. Sufficient housing is a sub-goal. Reserving 325 Wood for the 2 Feudal buildings is a sub-goal.

## **Who do you think you're kidding?**

All right, you say you've read Mike Kidd's Newbie guides. You've now read this. And you still bemoan, "I can't Castle faster than 20 minutes!" I have heard many claim this to me, and I examine their recorded games to discover:

- They do not, despite their claims, keep their TC busy. It is very idle due to insufficient housing or just negligence.
- They do not, despite their claims, scout worth a damn. They would be better off killing their own scout to free up the population slot.
- They do a lot of walking, with long criss-cross walking to impede villager efficiency.
- They don't check-in food to keep the TC busy, or they will be wood heavy with no farms in Dark.
- They play with various environmental hazards, such as 2 year olds climbing on their knees, or a wife wanting to chat about today's Oprah episode. It's a miracle you can even Castle in 20 minutes.
- They have the manual dexterity of Stephen Hawking.
- It is a distinct possibility that these people will never be mediocre. This is fine because without such people there would not be a mediocre category.

So far, I have yet to meet anyone that I thought was incapable of reaching Castle in 18 minutes with pop 30. I've met people who have never done it, but I believe they have the



skills to do it. It's just they don't do it for whatever reason. Bad scouting, insufficient housing, idle TC, too many woodies, not enough foodies. Despite their protestations that they are doing everything OK, if you watch on replay you'll find the reasons for their slowdown.

## **Ready to put to practice – “AFTER” game**

After you have read the *entire* guide (hey, I wrote the *entire* guide with the intent that you would read it *all*), you are now on the threshold of a new tomorrow. Ask yourself of which tips you do not currently employ. You may have to try many trial games working on a new tip until you bring it all together.

Once you feel you are ready to give it a shot, record yourself with these settings:

### **“AFTER” Settings - 1v1 against the Computer**

Map Style:	Arabia
Map Size:	3-player
Difficulty:	<b>Hard</b>
Resources:	Low (standard)
Max Pop:	75 - 200
Reveal Map:	Normal
Starting Age:	Dark (default)
 Your civ:	 <b>Byzantine</b>
Target Castle Pop:	<b>30 (either Dark 30, 28+2, or 29+1)</b>
Speed:	Normal (NOT SLOW)

DO NOT PAUSE (keep it like a real game)

DO NOT SAVE DURING GAMEPLAY (it stops further recording)

### **Other Required Goals:**

- 2 TC's
- 1 Barracks
- Loom
- Double bit axe
- Horse Collar
- Wheelbarrow

**“AFTER” Goal:** Your goal is not to beat the computer. Your goal is to (1) Get to Castle Age as fast as you can, and (2) resign once you have at least 2 TC's and a Barracks, plus the required (above) economic techs researched.

Be sure to click RECORD for each game. Try 2-3 or more, games and save your best “AFTER” time, and give it a meaningful name. Compare this to your “BEFORE” time

earlier. Note that the time to record is your actual Castle time as shown in the achievements screen. However, to keep the exercise practical and realistic you should build that 2<sup>nd</sup> TC and invest in technologies.

Let's consider some changed settings for the "AFTER" game. Play on Hard for the psychological effect that you are not scared of the computer building on you. Play as Byzantine because though they are the slowest civ to Castle, you can still do it quickly. And more importantly, focus on building and sustaining an economy by erecting a 2<sup>nd</sup> TC while investing in some good economic techs.

Note that the exercise does not require a Stable or an Archery Range. This means the 350 Wood you would of spent for them can now go towards something else (almost 6 farms).

## **Tell-Tale Signs of Trouble**

OK, so now you've tried playing a few AFTER games, and you may have trouble breaking 19 minutes, or getting to the elusive 18-minute mark. That's what Appendix A is for. There are lots of games with detailed analysis in Appendix A. They were put there, not just as samples or proof that the guide works, but as good training lessons. In between a player's BEFORE game and his successful AFTER game there are one or more other educational games. At least one of these guys have probably experienced what you are now experiencing, so you can benefit from their lessons learned.

I've spoken before that you need to analyze games and ask questions. Why did he do that there and then? What are his needs for the next 2 minutes? When did he start hunting the 1<sup>st</sup> boar? When did he lay down his 1<sup>st</sup> farm?

I've also spoken about watching games for different things. Watch the game using the player's POV. Re-watch the game with the POV off and stay focused only on the TC. As long as vils are queued, play it on fast. When the last vil is 80% done, play on slow. Measure the TC idleness.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," you say, "I've done that and I still can't pinpoint why my games are slow." Let's turn now to the tell-tale signs of different problems.

**If you are reaching Feudal way past 14:40**, then you won't be in Castle before 18:00. This is due to TC idleness (I guarantee it). You must now explore why. Did you do poor scouting and bring the first batch of sheep in too late? Were you insufficiently housed because you forgot, or because you were low on wood? Are you low on food and not forcing your vils to check their food in early? Are you low on food because have too many wood choppers? Or was your TC idle just because you forgot to check it?

**If you reach Feudal with < 700 food (*or much, much worse*)**, then you need to improve your task distribution. You've gone too heavy with choppers, and not enough hands on food, especially early in the game. For the successful games in Appendix A, the players practically have 750 – 900 food immediately upon reaching Feudal. One of the spot light

games has a player getting to Feudal with enough wood for his two buildings, but he's 300 food short of his goal.

**If you reach Feudal with > 800 food but < 325 wood**, then either you have too many people on farms (more than 10 farms is excessive, with 8 being a good number), or your villagers are inefficient (idle, or needless walks).

Understand that this general strategy of this guide is not at all fragile. Pop 30 is fairly generous with its slack time. This is not like other expert strategies like the FLUSH, SMUSH, or KLEW that critically depend upon resources at key times or else it blows apart. If you put 3 guys on gold instead of the 2 that I suggest for your exercises, the world will not fall apart.

### **When faced with real games**

When I did some tests on the Zone, I found my times were slow. Instead of a 17:20 Castle I would have an 18:40 time. Not all of this is lag. As I replayed each game I realized I was doing too much walking. Still, you should expect your online or team game times to be slower too. Don't get discouraged. If it is lag, then even your enemy suffers from the same lag.

This fast Castle strategy is merely an economic one. It is not a good counter strategy to a FLUSH or a KLEW. However, it may be decent against an early Knight. With 2 TC's, all of your vils now have a place to hide.

In real games, you may want another guy villie on gold. This guide ignored Cartography, but in team games you'll want to get it. It ignored early stone mining, which many others feel is important, even in Dark Age. So do not think this strategy is gospel, but do consider the exercises a way of fine-tuning some fundamental skills.

### **Am I still Terminally Slow?**

Hello, Graduates. You were never able to reach Castle before 20 minutes. Now you can do it under 18 minutes. I'm sure many of you are thinking the same thing: *Now that I can do a fast Castle, am I still Terminally Slow?*

**Yes.** Without a doubt. An 18-minute Castle is no longer "fast". There are guys using the KLEW to Castle in sub-14 time frame. Or guys using a FLUSH to tower you at the 12-min mark and they never Castle because they killed you before they reached Castle.

So you may be faster than you were before. You may have a stronger economy than you did before. You may be better poised for an earlier stronger attack against your dweeb friends. But you are still Terminally Slow in relation to all the dedicated AOK:TC gamers out there. Still you gotta admit that you are better off at the 20-min mark having 2 TC's, 1 Barracks, a Mill, Lumber camp, Mining camp, Market, Blacksmith, and researched technologies like Wheelbarrow, Horse Collar, and Double bit axe. Compare

that to your previous 24-minute Castle economy, and you must admit you are “faster” now, right?

How will you get truly fast? When you quit listening to me. This guide only takes you so far. When your experience takes you beyond this is when your journey to “fast” really begins.

### **I want my money back**

Sorry, loser, no refunds. If you can't Castle better than 18 minutes, then take refuge on the low end of the bell curve. Celebrate your individuality that you are *not* mediocre. You assume a position similar to gaming greats: The Sheriff, DBD Jinx, and Mazory. Like them, you are 1.5 standard deviations away from the smelly dense pack of us in the middle; it's just you are on the other end of the curve. You are special. This guide has proven that beyond a shadow of a doubt.

You're welcome.

### **Hearing from Future Graduates**

I'd love to hear from others who have found the guide helpful and who have trimmed down to an 18-minute pop 30 Castle. Keep stats on your “BEFORE” game and compare them to your “AFTER” game. Then drop me a line at [one\\_eyed\\_king@email.com](mailto:one_eyed_king@email.com) with your BEFORE/AFTER Castle times and pop counts. I may publish the cursory stats of your success story on the web site at <http://oekfastcastle.4t.com/grads.html>.

But **DO NOT SEND ME ANY RECORDED GAMES**. They will be **discarded** without downloading. Also note that while I may publish your success story on the web site, that there are very, very, VERY few notes that I will respond to. One reason why I wrote this guide is it lets me slip into seclusion with a clean conscience.

### **Escape Disclaimer**

That's the bulk of the guide. I'm sure somewhere there is somebody who says “*HEY, this is bogus! I read 24 pages to find out the secret to a Fast Castle is to make 8 Dark Farms and keep my TC busy? I knew this already!*”

Well, for one, if you knew that already, why did you read past page 1? And two, to say the secret is 8 Dark farms is a gross oversimplification. Many newbies know that they need to get an economy going, and that they need 25-30 villies busily moving about on wood and food. But they never seem to have a cohesive economy working in concert. By telling them to make a farm as soon as 60 Wood is free is one way to drive home the point.

Two trite sayings apply: “It's the economy, stupid” and “An army marches on its stomach”. This helps reiterate the need for food. It helps a newbie focus on economy

and food for strong future growth. It teaches them not to leave too much wood in the bank. And it helps them focus on their food needs beyond getting to Castle.

One fun thing evident in testing ... where the goal of a sample game is merely to Castle fast ... it was interesting to see traditionally slow Castlers fine-tune and optimize their game in order to save 2-3 minutes. My point with this guide is that those exercises should not be a special case – they should play very much along those lines in the first place. So it is with the rest of the guide.

Many slow gamers experience periodic doldrums and feel stuck in a rut with their game. If and when this happens to you, revisit this guide to refresh the basic fundamentals.

Let me clearly say that this guide will not improve your win-loss record. This guide is to merely get you to Castle Age quickly and with a sound economic foundation. For what you do after you reach Castle Age, this guide stops. Then it's all up to you.

## Appendix A: Game Clinic with Samples

<http://oekfastcastle.4t.com/>

To make this guide more dynamic, I've included sample games from myself, and from some admittedly Terminally Slow players. The first set of games is from me. They are examples of putting the techniques of the guide into action.

However, I would wager that for many readers, the greatest lessons learned they receive will be from watching games by volunteers. While I can look upon their final game as a graduation, I really think their intermediate games may be the most educational. These games, usually titled After(1), show their raw attempts after reading the guide.

I'd like to reiterate that these student volunteers were known as Terminally Slow Castlers for a good reason. I've seen them play and their times were anywhere from 22-minute to close to 30-minute Castle times.

### **Training Game (1)**

**Feudal time:** 14:00 pop 30

**Castle time:** 17:20 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Sample \(1\) 17.20 pop 30.mgx](#)

In this game, I found 8 deer less than 1 screen south of my TC, but I intentionally ignored them for this exercise. In a real game, however, you better believe that I'd put a 2<sup>nd</sup> Mill right in the middle of them.

#### **Milestones to check-out:**

Around 2:50 – 3:00 one sheep has only 1 villie eating. To avoid rotting, I shift the 2 lumberjacks to sheep (after check-in of wood, of course).

At 4:25 I am slow luring the 1<sup>st</sup> boar into the TC.

At 5:10 I find 1 (odd number) sheep – there's gotta be a 2<sup>nd</sup> around there.

At 6:15 I send a vil out for the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar. The others are done with 1<sup>st</sup> boar, so move them to nearby a sheep, and move the other sheep out of the way.

At 6:50 check-in mutton at the TC, shoot the boar. Feast.

At 9:45 a gold mining camp is built with villies #24 and 25

At 9:50 seed first two farms. By 10:40, I have 5 farms (each time I got 60W = new farm) until I eventually have 8 farms.

At 11:00 the pig/sheep hunters at the TC are done. Keep them busy by chopping nearby wood. This avoids walks, especially since some of the choppers shift to farms.

At 14:00 reach Feudal Age. Some woodies build a Market while the guys on berries build the Blacksmith. Research Castle Age.

During the trip to Castle age, get double-bit axe, then horse collar. Send 3 vils forward to make a Barracks (erected before 16:20).

At 17:00 move woodies forward in preparation for the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC, placed strategically forward near wood and two gold pits.

At 17:20 reach Castle Age. Build that 2<sup>nd</sup> TC and research Wheelbarrow at first TC. Build 2 farms at 2<sup>nd</sup> TC, and reseed expired farms (riding thin on wood). Build more housing.

## **Training Game (2)**

**Feudal time:** 13:53 pop 30

**Castle time:** 17:14 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Sample \(2\) 17.14 pop 30.mgx](#)

Thanks to a forest located close by, I have 3 TC's before 20:00. This demonstrates that shorter walks add up to more resources (in this case, wood).

At start, my vils are scattered, so all 3 build the 1<sup>st</sup> house. At 0:20, I see undiscovered sheep and shift a villie over to claim the sheep.

At 4:30 got 3 on berries by mill, but send them to sheep for faster food gathering rate. The shepherds currently at the TC will switch to boar hunting.

At 8:46, the first farm appears. At 9:40, I'm finished with 2<sup>nd</sup> pig, chop nearby tree stumps at the TC, and others are building a gold mining camp.

I have 9 farms before reaching Feudal Age.

I knew I had enough food (>900) to research both Castle and double-bit axe, so I get the axe upgrade before going to Castle, because it won't slow me down.

Build Barracks around 16:20 mark while on way to Castle.

At 17:14, reach Castle Age. Build 2<sup>nd</sup> TC near gold, and research Wheelbarrow at 1<sup>st</sup> TC.

At 17:50, while constructing 2<sup>nd</sup> TC, I check-in a bunch of woodies to get 275 wood, enough for a 3<sup>rd</sup> TC near stone. When a farm expires, I can't spare the wood, so that farmer moves to the 3<sup>rd</sup> TC.

At 19:36, I now have 3 TC's. I plant a few more farms, then quit.

### **Training Game (3)**

**Feudal time:** 13:09 pop 28

**Castle time:** 16:48 pop 28+2

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Sample \(3\) 16.48 pop 28+2.mgx](#)

This game shows some deer hunting, and a stone-for-gold trade. I'd like to emphasize that this Castle time was not faster because I hunted deer or because I traded for stone. Obviously this game was faster for no other reason than I kept my TC busy.

Like sample game #2, I move sheep to 4 berry pickers. The first farm shows up sooner, after 7-minutes, and I won't have spare wood for a gold mine.

At 8:20, I kill the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar, but still have meat on 1<sup>st</sup> boar. I eat both now by moving 3 villies back to the 1st boar.

At 9:20, I send 4 villies (3 from the 1<sup>st</sup> boar) to hunt deer. At 10:55, I send *another* group of 4 (from 2<sup>nd</sup> boar) to hunt deer.

As I reach Feudal, I manually send all deer hunters to check-in their food.

After the Market is constructed, I trade my stone for gold, and send 8 villies to mine stone for my 2<sup>nd</sup> TC.

At 15:55 a farm expires – I don't reseed it as I am saving up 275 wood for 2<sup>nd</sup> TC.

At 16:48, reach Castle Age. I build the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC near gold, and research Wheelbarrow at 1<sup>st</sup> TC. Shortly thereafter I have enough wood to build a Barracks.

Remember these 3 key points about this game:

1. The faster Castle time had *nothing* to do with deer hunting or stone trading, and everything about TC efficiency.
2. Deer hunting begins *before* researching Feudal so they can check-in the meat in time to research Castle.



3. Since I traded stone for gold, I've got to mine stone before reaching Castle, if I want a 2<sup>nd</sup> TC.

## **Lab Rats and Blind Men**

The true test of this guide is whether it truly can help a slow Castler pull in an 18-minute pop 30 Castle time. Towards that end, I found some volunteers to be my lab rats. I would give much coaching time and personal hands-on training to the lab rats. I would analyze and comment upon their games, and even coop if needed. In return the lab rats were to give me critical feedback on the guide. Boy, was this true! Some sections were rewritten for clarity, and other new sections added.

The Blind Men were to be volunteers that were given the guide, but no direct interaction from me. They could give me feedback and ask for clarifications, but I do not give them analysis on their specific games during testing. This was to make the guide stand on its own. Anyone should be able to read it and practice with it without the need for a personal coach.

For the really raw rookies who may be discouraged by the 20-21 minute "BEFORE" Castle time from the volunteers – please understand that these guys trimmed 2-3 minutes off their Castle time just focusing on the goals of the "BEFORE" exercise. So a 21-minute "BEFORE" time pretty much indicates someone who is a typical 23-24 minute Castler.

Let me explain ahead of time why the guide seems to skip some volunteer numbers. I had recruited 2 Blindmen and was deep in the guide when I found out that Blindman #2 only has the trial versions of the game. During testing, LabRat #2 had real life interruptions, so I had recruited more. Unfortunately for me LabRat #3 turned in a "BEFORE" Castle time of 16:03 which disqualified him as being Terminally Slow.

## **Lab Rat #1**

The first, code-named LabRat1, has a game handle of ThePENDRAGON. I had played a few games with Pen in the past and can verify that he indeed is a 22-24 minute Castler.

### **LabRat1BEFORE Game**

**Feudal time:** 13:21 pop 26

**Castle time:** 20:16 pop 26

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat1 BEFORE 20.16 pop 26.mgx](#)

### **OEK comments:**

I thought Pendragon was very close to getting a good Castle. His game showed a decent level of attention and focus, so it is a matter of directing it better. He had a good bit of

farming (which is critical) but he did it late in the game. For starters, he needs to eat the sheep within the perimeter of his TC – in this game most of the sheep and the 1<sup>st</sup> boar were being eaten some walking distance from the TC. He was slow getting housed for villie 21. I suggested deferring the Dark Age Barracks until later. Around the time he was Feudaling (12:00) he had 400+ wood. When he had a gold mining camp, he had 4 woodies take a very long walk to the gold mine.

He reaches Feudal in 13:21 and puts 1 builder on a Market, and 1 on a Blacksmith – this is OK for this specific game since he has 360 Food at that time. He researched Double-bit axe and Wheelbarrow before researching Castle. This should be deferred until after he was researching Castle Age.

At 22:00, he has 2 TC's, pop 26, a Barracks, 3 critical economic techs, and lots of farms. With just a little better managing of *when* those farms are laid down versus *when* those techs are researched, I felt Pen could easily make a sub-18 pop 30 Castle.

### LabRat1AFTER Game (1)

**Feudal time:** 15:04 pop 30

**Castle time:** 18:32 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat2 AFTER \(2\) 18.32 pop 30.mgx](#)

### **OEK comments:**

Certainly, this was an improvement over his BEFORE game. Getting housed for villie 21 still hangs him up, but he ate the sheep within the confines of the TC. He did other things right, such as moving multiple builders in place ahead of time. Around 6:10 he moves a sheep close to the TC, and then wisely backs it off since he is going boar hunting. He didn't make long walks.

All in all, it was a decent game that followed much of the guide's recommendations. So why did he fail to break the 18-minute barrier?

When I play this game on fast, it is hard to see where his slowdown is. He is in Feudal only briefly, so really any slowdown is *prior* to Feudal. This caused me to speed up/slow down his game to look for **TC-idleness**:

5:20 – 5:30	Before villie #16, no reason
7:44 – 8:14	Before villie #21, no housing
8:36 – 9:09	Before villie #22, no reason

Pen was frustrated. Part of it was my fault in what times he should be giving me. He was under the impression that my "18-minute Castle" *included* the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC build time (it does not). So he was upset he was still in the 19:45 time frame. I pointed out that his Castle was 18:32 for a good game, and then showed him the table above where he was idle for 1:13. In other words, he could easily trim a minute off of his time.



**I really think the ability to analyze games, especially your own games, is a *BIG* way to improve. The reader is invited to review these games and see if they come up with a similar analysis.**

### LabRat1AFTER Game (2)

**Feudal time:** 13:43 pop 30

**Castle time:** 17:03 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat1 AFTER \(2\) 17.03 pop 30.mgx](#)

#### **OEK comments:**

Success!!! I am now officially scared of ThePENDRAGON. He built housing for villie 21 on time. He dedicated surplus wood to farming first, and then Barracks second (which he built right after clicking on the button to research Castle). When some villies were done with berries and boars, he shifted them over to a nearby tree. At 17:46, he has a 2<sup>nd</sup> TC, a Barracks, double-bit axe, horse collar, and Wheelbarrow (47% done).

One of those “By Jove, I think he’s got it” moments came when @7:05 Pen forces two vils to stand-up and check-in their boar meat so he could have enough food to create more villagers.

### Feedback from ThePENDRAGON

I asked Pen if he felt the guide could be better with a cookbook build recipe. He said he at first wished there was one, but later grew to appreciate that the guide forces him to think for himself. So I will leave cookbooks to other guides or web sites.

#### **ThePENDRAGON:**

*“I did learn a great deal from this experiment as my times, if nothing else, indicate. A certain calmness has transcended my Dark and Feudal game play rather than the haphazard frenetic chaos that was my game before.*

*Sure it doesn't protect me from a FLUSH DRUSH or whatever, but that was not its function (as the guide explains). And I know about the KLEW's etc but I don't care! It's a (big) step forward for me.”*

### Lab Rat #2

My first game against PippyDaKid, he reached Castle in a glacial 31:57. There was no flushing and no rushing. Too bad for him that I had Imperialed by 29:27. This was going to be a challenge. But Pippy also represents a significant segment of rookies.

One of his causes for slowness is the environmental hazards, like children crawling in his lap. Just by keeping the kids off his ankles and following the general tips, Pippy was able to trim down to a 25-minute Castle time in some real games, and even did better for his “BEFORE” game.

### LabRat2 BEFORE Game

**Feudal time:** 13:58 with pop 22

**Castle time:** 20:09 with pop 22

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat2 BEFORE 20.09 pop 22.mgx](#)

#### **OEK Comments:**

Not too bad. He’s already trimmed 11-minutes off his Castle time just by playing with the “BEFORE” settings.

Pippy was slow to get a Mill up, and was very wood heavy through most of Dark. He was slow getting housed, and the TC was idle for stretches. He was slow getting the on-deck sheep in place in the TC, and ignored 700 units of pig meat until late in Feudal age.

Besides Loom, the only other tech he researched was Town Watch. So Pippy wasn’t a fast-track candidate for minor tuning. He pretty much needed to read the whole guide, *twice*, and virtually change his whole game.

### LabRat2 AFTER Game (1)

**Feudal time:** 16:30 pop 30

**Castle time:** 21:04 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat2 BEFORE 20.09 pop 22.mgx](#)

#### **Game Summary:**

If you replay this one on Fast, you may miss a lot of the finer points. He builds his first house too close to the TC (on his way to Feudal, he later deletes the house). He also should have sent those 2 builders in different directions into the darkness looking for sheep.

While his scout is desperately looking for sheep, he sticks his idle vils on wood. Still no sheep, so he sends 2 vils over to start a Mill. The sheep are found, so when the Mill is 49% complete, he moves the builders back to the TC. He should have kept those 2 guys on the Mill, and maybe even send all spare hands on berries before the sheep were found.

At 1:50, he has gathered ZERO food. The sheep at TC has 7 vils. He keeps new vils on wood, instead of finishing the Mill and eating berries. He should finish that Mill and send the next 4 new villies to the berries. Instead, he sends villie 9 - 12 to wood.

At 4:30, he takes a lot of time setting scout waypoints. Set 3-5 points and get your attention back to the TC. At 5:00, his pop is 12/15. He has 160 wood which is enough wood for a lumber camp and 2 houses. The wood for the Mill is already allocated, but the Mill still is not finished.

At 6:20, he finally starts to finish the Mill. He has 14 vils: 7 on Food, and the other 7 on wood (well, 2 are building the lumber camp). He is soon out of sheep.

He is slow for first boar at 6:50. Bad timing for the now idle shepherds. He hasn't got a boar yet. At 7:00, he builds 2 farms, instead of waiting on the incoming boar. When that boar does come in, he has to move guys off of the farms. I think he should've postponed the farms and concentrated on the boar.

He does show very good timing on 2<sup>nd</sup> boar.

At 11:00, he has the wood for all housing needs, and enough for a mining camp. At 12:00 he has a nice distribution of villagers on Wood vs. Food, but by this time in the game, it is just too late. He was slow bringing in food early in the game, and had too many woodchoppers, too early. Half of those choppers should have been berry pickers 10 minutes ago.

Upon reaching Feudal 16:30, he has over 1100 Food. But the new house (at 15:35) and several farm reseeds have left him with only 50 Wood. This is critical now because he has the food, he has the gold, but what he doesn't have is the 2 buildings (325 wood).

### **OEK Comments:**

My comments to Pippy referred him back to my Sample Game (1). In that game, I was boar hunting before the 5-minute mark. My first farm in that game appeared after the 9-minute mark. Contrast this to Pippy that he did not start boar hunting until after 7 minutes, which is the same time that he began farming. So compared to my first game, his boars came 2 minutes later, and his farms came 2 minutes earlier.

I strongly suggest not building any farms before the first pig is eaten.

Basically, the root cause of the problem is a poor job scouting from the very beginning. This leads to a long period of no incoming food, which leads to not enough food for villager creation.

So (1) Scout better, (2) eat pigs earlier, (3) farm later, (4) if no sheep, go for berries, (5) put fewer guys on wood, and (6) keep the TC busy.

### TC-idleness in LabRat2 After Game (1)

Game Clock	Elapsed Time	Cumulative Elapsed	Description
1:44 – 2:29	0:45	0:45	No food (slow finding sheep)
4:37 – 4:51	0:14	0:59	No reason. 66 Food
6:08 – 6:44	0:32	1:31	No reason. 95 Food
8:01 – 9:08	1:07	2:38	No reason. 84 Food
14:10 – 14:20	0:10	2:48	No reason. This happens between vil 30 and Feudal research.
16:30 – 16:50	0:20	3:08	Delay before Blacksmith begins
16:50 – 17:45	0:55	4:03	Delay before Market begins
18:16 – 18:25	0:09	4:12	2 buildings done but 9 second delay to upgrade to Castle

That 2:48 TC-idle time in Dark Age is a killer. This means instead of Feudal Age research beginning at 14:26 that he could've *already been in* Feudal age around the 14-minute mark. If Pippy had scattered his 3 vils to the wind to find sheep in the beginning, he would've trimmed the initial idle time. However, the other 2 minutes of Dark idleness lies strictly upon Pippy's shoulders.

He enters Feudal at 16:30 with 50 Wood and 1135 Food. He had the food and did not need to reseed any farms. His only thought at this stage should've of been getting 325 Wood for the two buildings.

**Mid-way through testing, real life interrupted Pippy. I guess the best lesson Pippy has taught us is that real life is more important than gaming. Nonetheless his games are good educational experiences that may be very representative of other Terminally Slow players.**

### Lab Rat #4

Note that LabRat #3 was disqualified because he turned in a "BEFORE" time of 16:03. LabRat4 is MPP\_MilqueToast, the first foreign member of the Memphis Powder Puffs clan. Milky was a typical 23-minute Castler.

#### LabRat4 BEFORE Game

**Feudal time:** 14:26 pop 26

**Castle time:** 21:09 pop 35 (+6 vils, +3 Spears)

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat4 BEFORE 21.09 pop 35.mgx](#)

#### **OEK Comments:**

Milky was slow getting housed for villie #16. He is low on food when he reaches Feudal, but he's spent a lot of wood already for a Barracks while on his way to Feudal. Worse, Milky gets the Double-bit Axe upgrade immediately upon reaching Feudal. This leaves

him not just low on food, but also low on wood for subsequent farms and the required Feudal Age buildings. He reached feudal at 14:26 but doesn't start construction on the 1<sup>st</sup> Feudal age building until 17:00. He never gets horse collar, but gets gold mining on his way to Castle.

Basically I have no specific tune-up tips for LabRat4 that would fast-track him for a faster Castle (like with LabRat1). Instead he should follow the whole guide.

### LabRat4 AFTER Game (1)

**Feudal time:** 14:16 pop 29

**Castle time:** 18:11 pop 29+1

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat4 AFTER \(1\) 18.11 pop 29+1.mgx](#)

### **MilqueToast's comments:**

Oh, baby! This was a game that started out great. However, I blew a sub-18 minute Castle time when I too late realized that I did not have the required food to go from Feudal to Castle. I had three villies on gold, and I probably should have moved one over to farm earlier. I hesitated for a moment, then realized the extra gold miner had provided me with some cash to buy food. I purchased food and went to Castle. I nearly had a housing shortage early but put four villies onto a new house. However, later in the game, I got caught once again short on housing. I need to start housing when I am two short of capacity, instead of one short. Even though the guide suggests this, it is still something to work on.

So, as you can see, I am starting to become more consistent. I am hitting Castle in a reasonable time, and in reasonable shape to move to the next step. It's not the end of the learning curve, but I am on my way to being a better player.

### **OEK Comments:**

This game is actually a very good training game among 5 different trials that he sent me (all of which had slow Feudal times). Milky talks about his Dark Age housing shortage and touches on his food shortage in Feudal Age. In a similar analysis to first "AFTER" game of LabRat #1 (ThePENDRAGON), Milky's TC has prolonged idle periods.

7:21 – 7:49	Dark – housing for villie 21
9:55 – 10:25	Dark – housing for villie 26
14:55 – 15:30	Feudal – waiting on 800 food

I first point out to MilqueToast that his Feudal times are slow. He can trim 30 seconds to a minute off if only he keeps sufficiently housed. However, he has another 30 seconds of TC idle time in Feudal *after* completion of his 2 required buildings. He has insufficient food. While a gold trade helped him out here, I don't agree with him that the 3<sup>rd</sup> gold

miner was the problem. In fact, I imagine many a reader may stick 3 miners on gold in Dark.

No, what differentiates Milky's TC idleness from Pendragon's is that Milky is very wood heavy. He has more woodies than food gatherers throughout much of Dark Age. When he begins researching Feudal at 12:08, he has 290 Wood and 140 Food. His Feudal Age food shortage occurred 3 minutes before this (around the 9-minute mark).

Due to Milky's game, I added the section "SPEND that WOOD!" to help drive home the point because it didn't get through to him the first 10 times I mentioned it.

### LabRat4 AFTER Game (2)

**Feudal time:** 13:37 pop 29

**Castle time:** 16:55 pop 29

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat4 AFTER \(2\) 16.55 pop 29.mgx](#)

Milky was 1 vil shy of pop 30, but in many of the games he submitted, Milky frequently did a pop 29+1.

### **OEK's comments:**

In many of his games, Milky builds his Mill 4-6 tiles from the berries. I think he could be closer. I don't recommend flush against the berries, but 1-2 tiles away would be good. Other than that, much of his Dark Age he does so many things right (with exception of not scouting the enemy).

At game start his vils are all scattered, but he sticks the 2 villagers closest to each to build the 1<sup>st</sup> house. Good. Later his Scout finds a single sheep. Milky directs his Scout to find the matching pair. Good. At 5:10, you see him manually check-in mutton to get the 50 Food needed to churn out another villie. His shepherds were idle after the 1<sup>st</sup> boar, but Milky sent them to a straggler tree while luring the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar. Those vils almost scattered after the tree was gone, but he kept them in the TC to shoot the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar. Good. And he was always housed ahead of time. Good.

On the way to Feudal, he has 4 gold miners. At 12:50, he checks his gold levels, and wisely shifts 1 villager over to wood. He spends 39 seconds in Feudal before upgrading to Castle. He is a little low resource-wise but gets the econ upgrades anyway. He starts building a Barracks on his way to Castle.

At 17:15, Milky has 187 Wood towards that 2<sup>nd</sup> TC. When a farm expires, he wisely does not re-seed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> TC is more important so he waits to save the wood (it wouldn't have killed him to move that farmer to a straggler tree, though).

He had good times, and kept an eagle eye on his TC. Excellent job. Yet, his available resources (especially wood) were, at times, on the low side. I think this was due to



villager inefficiency. He has a lot of vils make a lot of walks. Those walks contribute towards less gathering time. Some of this could be attributed to map layout, but it does highlight an area where Milky needs to pay attention.

Nonetheless, it was a very good game from a player who would have never believed he could have a sub-17 pop 29 Castle ever.

### LabRat4 AFTER Game (3)

**Feudal time:** 14:11 pop 30

**Castle time:** 17:28 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS LabRat4 AFTER \(3\) 17.28 pop 30.mgx](#)

Just in case anybody cries “Foul Ball!” because MilqueToast’s last game was pop 29, I had him do another just to silence the critics.

### **OEK’s comments:**

All in all this was a good game. Milky did a few things that could’ve been better. He didn’t need to walk so far for the 1<sup>st</sup> house. His 3<sup>rd</sup> house was too close to the Mill. His 1<sup>st</sup> farm showed up shortly after 5:00 when he had only 1 guy on berries (save the wood and go for the berries). For some reason he went for a neat row of condo housing. During the Feudal transition, he could have thrown down 1 more farm, or 2 at the most.

Still this game was stronger, not because it was slightly slower, but because his vils were much more efficient. The forest was close by and his wood levels were healthy. When he first reached Feudal, he put several, but not too many, builders on the buildings because the food wasn’t there yet. The 800 food came in just in time, and the buildings were done a few seconds later. Good timing! When he hit Castle, I think Milky had good strategic placement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC near the stone mine, especially since another stone mine was nearby. If left unattended / undefended, an enemy could cover both stone mines and critically deprive you of precious stone.

While MilqueToast officially had a sub-18 pop 30 Castle, I’m still going to promote his 16:55 pop 29 Castle on the web site.

## **Blindman #1**

Holo\_Doc is Blindman #1 (Blindman #2 was disqualified). Remember the deal with the Blindmen is that they do not receive personal coaching nor any comments from me regarding their games. I would help them indirectly by sending them comments and games of the other LabRats. So if Holo\_Doc sends me a game where he was doing most everything right, but had an idle TC, I would send him LabRat1’s first “AFTER” game with my analysis. If Holo\_Doc sent me a game where he was storing too much wood in the bank, then I would send him LabRat2’s “BEFORE” game.

### Blindman1 BEFORE Game

**Feudal time:** 13:46 with pop 25

**Castle time:** 20:28 with pop 25+4

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Blindman1 BEFORE 20.28 pop 25+4.mgx](#)

#### **OEK Comments:**

Holo was a little slow with his Scout. He just missed spotting two separate pairs of sheep (for 4 sheep total) and he's done eating his original 4 sheep around 4:00. He skips boars and chooses to walk to deer. At 10:20 he starts eating his first boar, but keeps a villie garrisoned for a prolonged period of time.

While Holo's game shows a fairly good degree of concentration and attention, his villies are rather inefficient and taking long walks. If he can follow the guide, and employ his concentration to orchestrate his movements to be in harmony, then he can easily pull down a sub-18 time.

### Blindman1 AFTER Game (1)

**Feudal time:** 14:47 pop 30

**Castle time:** 18:18 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Blindman1 AFTER\(1\) 18.18 pop 30.mgx](#)

#### **OEK Comments:**

Holo Doc employs many of the tips of the guide for a pretty good game. He fell 18 seconds shy of the goal, but he left the gaming knowing in a few more tries he could do it.

He did a good start, nice boar hunting, and kept housed on time. He did good farming. The first farm appeared at 9:00, and he had 8 farms by 11:40 mark.

His villies were often inefficient. The woodies on the straggler trees get scattered on west, which results in long walks. Towards game end, he has a woodchopper on the south side of the forest taking long walks to the lumber camp. He loses sight of the vils clustered near the Mill, berries, and forest. In a blink of an eye, its hard to see some of them standing idle.

He comes up slightly shy with resources, partly due to the villie inefficiency, and also due to the 2 extra farms he lays down by the Mill at 13:40. This burns 120 Wood from the bank, even though his food levels were solid at that point. Thus when he reaches Castle Age, he has 650 Food, but little wood for the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC.

Afterwards, he does a good job of replanting farms. He takes on 3 wolves with 3 vils, instead of garrisoning in the new TC and shooting them.

His TC shows some degree of idleness, sometimes in 2-4 second intervals. Let's not get too crazy about over 2-4 seconds. But there were 3 spots to consider:

3:43 - 4:13	No reason – he has 115 Food
5:57 – 6:07	No reason – he has 68 Food
14:47 - 15:37	50 seconds for build time in Feudal before he begins to research Castle Age

This could save 40 seconds in Dark Age, and I think another 15 could be saved in Feudal. So it's not farfetched to think Holo Doc could easily trim 55 seconds off his 18:18. What's more, he knows it too even without my coaching. In his own analysis of this game, he knows his problem is in the first 10 minutes.

### Blindman1 AFTER Game (2)

**Feudal time:** 14:42 pop 30

**Castle time:** 18:02 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Blindman1 AFTER\(2\) 18.02 pop 30.mgx](#)

### **OEK Comments:**

Getting very close. In other games, I harp on TC idleness. Granted with a 14:42 Feudal time, there definitely is TC idleness in Dark Age. Holo Doc is aware of this, and I leave it to him (and the reader), to pinpoint when and why. This time I am switching gears and will talk about villie efficiency.

At 7:00 minutes, his 7 woodies scatter away from the TC. Yet, he had 160 wood, enough for a Lumber camp. Instead, some of these woodies will be inefficient with long walks back to the TC.

At 7:25, the 1<sup>st</sup> boar was fully eaten. This left 5 vils idle. He should've shifted them to sheep. Frequently during Holo Doc's games, I will not several vils idle at a given time, and sometimes 1 idle for prolonged periods.

At 12:40, he is transitioning to Feudal Age and has 8 farms. After the Feudal buildings do up, he has idle hunters and builders.

When 80% to Castle, he already has double-bit axe and horse collar upgrade. He starts construction on a Barracks. When he hits Castle, he has 150 wood, yet 5 vils are idle standing around to build the 2<sup>nd</sup> TC. They stay idle for a good period of time before building a TC near the gold. Rather than have those builders go to gold, like he did, I would suggest they chop wood and any *new* vils be sent to gold.

So Holo Doc was very close to a good Castle, and had the tools to figure out why on his own, or with some gaming buddies. I'm not worried about him reaching a sub-18 Castle.

What I do think he should work on is villie efficiency. Otherwise, he will be slightly weaker when he reaches Castle. For the sake of his all-around game, not just a fast Castle, he should keep those villies busy, and reduce walks where possible.

### Blindman1 AFTER Game (3)

**Feudal time:** 14:00 pop 30-1 (lost a vil on the way to Feudal)

**Castle time:** 17:52 pop 30-1+1 (made an extra vil in Feudal)

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS Blindman1 AFTER\(3\) 17.52 pop 30.mgx](#)

### **OEK Comments:**

The other graduation games are not necessarily good learning games. They are more akin to bragging games. Not so with this one. This game is a good learning game because it shows a player who is not following a cookbook, but rather quickly adjusting to unforeseen circumstances in the game.

This game could have been a disaster time-wise. One sheep was stuck in a forest across from a pond. He didn't find the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar until he was on his way to Feudal Age, and even lost a villie while hunting it. For many players they would've been shy on food when they reach Feudal. Instead, Holo Doc has just enough to get his Fast Castle. Why?

Because he planted farms. Lots of them. In his other 2 AFTER games, I criticized him for building more than 8 farms. Now he needed them. This is not a contradiction, but rather underscores the subtle differences between map layouts and villie efficiency.

In the other games, he often had idle vils, or vils with long walks. This caused him to be slightly low on wood, so farms 9 and 10 hurt his wood levels more than they helped his food levels.

But in this game, his vils were busy. His wood levels were much higher because of the shorter walks. And since the 2<sup>nd</sup> boar, or rather 350 food on a hoof, was slow to be found, the early and extra farms paid off.

Since he knew he needed farms, he intentionally held off on a gold mine. Granted these miners would need to take long walks to drop-off the gold, but Holo Doc knew they would get him the 200 gold needed to advance to Castle Age, even without a gold mining camp. This gave him 100 wood towards more farms which he knew he needed.

When his Feudal Age buildings are completed, he has 680 food in the bank. But he manually has the boar hunters check-in to bring him up to 780. Very quickly after that, 2 more farmers did a drop-off to get the 800 food. Then he was on his way to a 17:52 Castle.

Since he had less idle vils, he had better resource levels. This allowed him to easily get the upgrades, Barracks, and 2<sup>nd</sup> TC. In his other games, his Feudal times were around

14:40. In this game, the 14:00 Feudal time is a good indicator that he has paid more attention to his TC. And he really did a pop 31 to make up for a lost vil.

While his sub-18 Castle is slower than the other LabRats, Holo Docs game is far more interesting because of his in-game adjustments. It shows a player who has read the guide, understands the guide, and who has learned to think for himself by making those needed adjustments.

That to me is a very fitting conclusion to my guide volunteers.

### **Holo Doc's comments:**

In my early game play the balance between hunters, woodies and berry pickers seems to be essential. The 4 slow berry pickers produce quite the amount of food to support the hunters, which only episodically deposit their food. And it is really, really important to lay down my first farms early in the game despite any surplus food available from future herding and hunting.

At the 11-12 min mark all 8 farmers have to be at work to provide the required food for Feudal and Castle transition. For a long time period, this was my big fault. I successfully micro-managed luring sheep and boars and got enough food for Dark Age vil production and therefore was not forced to lay down the first farms at the 9 minute mark. I always began farming with a 1 or 2 minute delay. This caused a food shortage for my Castle jump several times.

1. Those 4 "slow" berry pickers early in dark can be essential because 10-20 food from berries can make the point to the next 50 food to keep the TC busy, if the hunters have empty pockets. I have ignored the berries much too long :-((

2. Early farming is really important. Despite surplus sheep and boars for vil production the 800 food required for Castle progress only can be gathered if most of the farms are build around the 11 minute mark.

That is the hidden point: early farming is essential for the Castle jump in time. This relationship was not obvious for me, therefore I failed to get < 18 minutes for a long time period.

### **Example of What to do After Castle**

My volunteer for LabRat3 was PainMemory. Pain's first "BEFORE" game showed a 16:03 pop 22 Castle time. I had no idea why he was eager to have a slower Castle time.

I asked to do re-submit using pop 30 and with the Big 3 economic techs. He turned in a 17:46 Castle time. I then fired him from his LabRat position.

One thing he failed to do was stop the game once the objectives were met. He continued into Castle age, forward built an army on the enemy (on Easiest), and the computer resigned around 32 minutes.

#### *PainMemory After Castle Example*

**Feudal time:** 13:57 pop 30

**Castle time:** 17:46 pop 30

**Download:** [OEK-FC4TS After Castle Example.mgx](#)

#### **OEK Comments:**

Even though it was on Easiest it still is a good example of what to do after reaching Castle, because you can see Pain's economic momentum continue to help build an army.

When he reaches Castle, he re-seeds his farms, some by hand and some by the farm queue. This is important to keep food production steady. Without the farming in late-Dark and early-Feudal, shortly after reaching Castle your food input grinds to a halt. Pain keeps the food coming.

He chose specific military upgrades that fit his own game style and strategy for this specific game. Again Pain's economy was on a solid foundation that was able to support his military build-up. Once he stuck a Castle in the enemy's face, then leveled the enemy's TC with a ram, the game is over.

Pain researched a few more economic techs, and kept his villie production going from his 3 TC's. At the 30:00 mark, his pop was over 70. This was all possible (the pop, the army, the tech upgrades, the army upgrades) because of his economic foundation.

## Appendix B: Civ-Specific Tips

This will provide just brief civ-specific information, and mention how your opening moves may differ. It will not discuss military strategy and bonuses.

### Aztecs

The Aztec econ bonus is villies carry +5. This means they are more efficient in how much they carry during those early walks. I don't see this forcing a big change in the first 18 minutes but it does add up to a stronger Castle Age.

### Britons

They get a sheep/turkey bonus. This means they'll run through them quicker, giving you more food earlier. It also means you'll need to loom earlier, and go pig hunting. Also, when a Brit gets to Castle, he is in position to boom with TC's that cost ½ wood of a normal TC. These guys could get by with a very fast 25 pop Castle.

### Byzantines

Many people use them as a baseline slow example since they have no real economic bonus until advancing to Imperial. My recorded games use Byz for this very reason. If you can do it with the slowest civ, then you can do it faster with a fast civ.

### Celts

The Celt sheep stealing bonus isn't that great, but the wood chopping is a great one. You need wood for 6 farms, and then wood for the 2 Feudal buildings. These guys will get it done, and can maybe get by with shifting a few choppers to farms or gold.

### Chinese

**Opening change:** build 1 vil, and then get loom. With Chinese you start out with sufficient housing since the TC houses 10. You can put 1 villager to building 2 more houses. Do not build a 3<sup>rd</sup> house right away. You can scatter a few of the other villagers outward, in different directions for early detection of sheep. If you've got time, a couple of vils can chop wood until the sheep are found and herded back to the TC. Then it's all hands on food.

## **Franks**

Their early econ bonus is free farm upgrades beginning in Feudal. This has little affect on a Fast Castle time. They also get to build cheaper Castles for 488 stone. A slight modification of your strategy could be to get a few vils on stone so you can have a quickly constructed Castle building.

## **Goths**

The Goths have +5 attack against boars, which means a risky player could get by without loom. This would be dumb because loom also helps against eventual enemy attacks. The Goth hunters also carry +15 meat, which makes deer even more enticing.

## **Huns**

Granted they start with –100 wood, but there is no need for housing. No villie seconds used for walking and building of houses. Whenever I've played Hun, I find myself with extra wood in Feudal. Shame on me – I should be spending that wood! Huns could possibly do a Fast Castle with fewer vils (that would otherwise be put on wood).

## **Japanese**

The Japanese have a great fishing bonus for water maps. Mills, lumber, and mining camps cost –50%. This means you can build a Mill and a Lumber camp right away. You can also squeeze out a cheaper gold camp, and almost have enough wood left for 2 more houses.

## **Koreans**

Their vils get +2 LOS, which helps when those initial sheep are hard to find. The other econ bonus is stone mining, which doesn't help you get to Castle faster, but does help you *after* you get there.

## **Mayans**

**Opening Change:** Loom before you create extra vils. Mayans start out fully housed, so Loom first in order to keep the TC busy. The Eagle Warrior has good vision and can find those missing sheep. They get a nice bonus where resources last 20% longer. This is magical. If you are eating a 100 food sheep, and drop 10 food off, the sheep now has 92, not 90, units of food remaining. Because the food lasts longer, you have can get by with 2 less farms, and use that 120 wood for the Feudal buildings.



## **Mongols**

The biggest food on the map is in the 2 pigs, and the Mongols have a +50% hunting rate. If the deer are relatively close by, have the Mongols hunt them too. On Yucatan or Scandavian, where pigs and deer are plentiful, Mongols can sometimes get by without any farms until Castle Age. This means more available wood, or less choppers.

## **Persians**

Persians gets +50 food and +50 wood. This means there is little hiccup in villager production, even if you are a little slow in finding the sheep. The TC also has a faster work rate, which means the villie creation time is quicker. Research time for Loom and Age advancements are quicker too. A Persian theoretical faster pop 28+2 Castle is 14:19, almost 1:45 faster than Byz; a pop 25+2 would be 13:11.

## **Saracens**

Market trade cost only 5%, but this econ bonus is not good for Terminally Slow players.

## **Spanish**

Builders build 30% faster, and Blacksmith upgrades do not cost gold. A gold-free Blacksmith is nice, but not going to be helpful for a Fast Castle (but certainly afterwards). The faster builders may trim a few seconds off your time in Feudal. The best use of the faster build time may not reduce your actual Castle time, but prevent slowdowns: housing can be done on quicker for absent-minded players who haven't built ahead of need.

## **Teutons**

Not fast for Flushing, despite a Tower bonus of 2X garrisoning. But a Fast Castle requires farms. A Teuton will save 160 wood on 8 farms. This wood can go towards a Feudal building without any sacrifice of food production.

## **Turks**

Gold miners gather 15% faster. This may have no impact on a Fast Castle, but will help afterwards.

## **Viking**

Their economic bonus doesn't kick in until you reach Feudal age, but during your brief stay in Feudal during the transition to Castle, you will feel the impact of free Wheelbarrow. This helps farmers right away, since the farmers frequently walk about, and then walk to drop off. It may not trim time off of your Castle time, but when you reach Castle Age, you'll have more resources. And like it.

Given that brief write-up of each civ, we can categorize these civilizations into 3 groups in regards to reaching a Fast Castle time:

**Grouping of Civs in regards to Fast Castle:**

Civs with different starts	Chinese Mayans Persians
Civs with good econ bonus for Fast Castle	Aztecs Brits Celts Franks Goths Huns Japanese Mongols Teutons
Civs with average bonuses for Fast Castle	Byzantines Koreans Saracens Spanish Turks Vikings

These in no way should be construed as saying that Vikings or Koreans are bad civs. Keep in mind that our categorization is strictly in regards to reaching Castle quickly. You really should choose your civ based upon what you plan on doing *after* you reach Castle.

## Appendix C: Different Maps

This guide focused on Arabia because it has the least nearby food, and an emphasis on food is critical for advancement. Also, Arabia does not allow a boat boom and the tricky question of how to you fuse together this guidebook with a boat boom is skillfully ignored.

Remember that even different maps of the same type (e.g. Arabia) are different. Learn to read the map and see the benefits each offers you. Maybe you have gold and stone together requiring only 1 mine. Or maybe deer are close, or a forest is close.

### **Arabia, Mongolia**

These are similar with the low amount of food on it.

### **Yucatan**

You don't need as many Dark farms because this has food galore. You should build Mills near deer or boars instead of building farms in Dark. But timing and hunting is a key, which means go after deer early.

### **Water maps**

Baltic, Coastal, Mediterranean, Islands, etc., all have a few more sheep on them. Plus these maps allow for a specialized strategy called a boat boom. This topic deserves a separate treatment, so we skip it here.

### **Migrations**

There are no boars on a migration map. Expect 8 sheep and 4 deer. But if you are good laying down farms, you can progress nicely. On the other hand, a boat boom may be better of wood since you must eventually transport over anyway.

### **Highlands, Rivers, Black Forest**

These have slightly more food than Arabia. Your times may actually be slower, however. You may send some villies over to wall in choke points. The time for this and the wood for this may delay you somewhat. In this case, the protective walls are worth reaching Castle 1-2 minutes later.

## Appendix D: MFO Required Late-Nite Reading

The embarrassing thing about writing a guide like this is not admitting that I am a slow player. Rather, so many other better players have already written better articles. You want to know how many vils shoot how many arrows in a TC? Should you farm in Dark Age? How about a civ specific strategy for Britons, Mayans, Mongols, or Huns?

There are a lot of really good sites out there with a lot of good info. But if I had only 1 that I could go to it would undoubtedly be Mr. Fixit's Online. Besides having a good concentration of recognized experts, MFO offers plenty of empirical data to back up the articles.

### AOK Strategy Index

<http://mrfixitonline.com/getPostings.asp?ForumId=1>

### AOK Basic Training

<http://mrfixitonline.com/readPosting.asp?PostingId=141891>

Mike Kidd's Newbie Guides  
On the road to expert by Dark Jihad  
Glowworm's University

### AOK Strategies

<http://mrfixitonline.com/readPosting.asp?PostingId=238>

Dark Age Farming, Boon or Bust  
Dark Age Food Sources

### True Gathering rates of resources

<http://mrfixitonline.com/readPosting.asp?PostingId=16629>

This explains why Wheelbarrow is important

### How garrisoning really works

<http://mrfixitonline.com/readPosting.asp?PostingId=397>

### Construction time and multiple builders by Gutter Rat

<http://mrfixitonline.com/readPosting.asp?PostingId=826>