

Before I get into the meat of this article, I feel I should give a brief introduction to who I am and try to trick people into thinking that I am qualified to write anything. My name is Gabe Schwartz and I have played a lot of games of Epigo. For most of my life, I have been a gamer of one variety or another. As a kid I used to play competitive chess until it became too stressful for a 13 year old to spend a whole weekend playing in a tournament. In my early teens I picked up Magic the Gathering. I also played Magic quite competitively for a while and even got to play on the pro tour for a few times. Unfortunately, I then had to make the decision to be an adult and could no longer justify traveling around the world for a game. It was around this time that two good friends of mine started to pursue creating a gaming company and introduced me to board games. I got hooked pretty easily and have been enjoying board games since then. My newest gaming addiction is the ancient game of Go, which currently devours most of my gaming time. I guess you can say that I really like games.

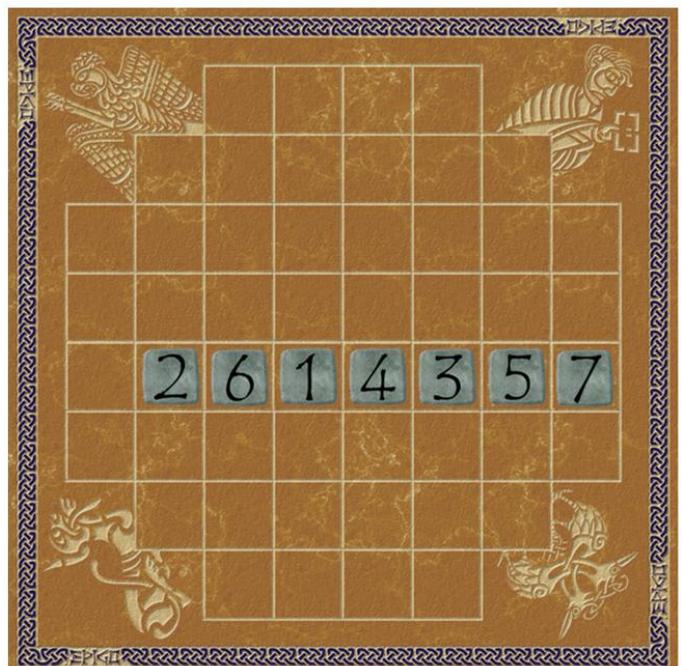
So, the aforementioned friends indeed started a gaming company. After playing a bunch of prototypes and playing the role of a soundboard for their ideas, one game stuck out above the rest. This was the game that would be known as Epigo. Even when the game was in its infancy, it was a fun game to play and showed promise. Luckily, those initial thoughts were correct and the designers went ahead and made Epigo their debut game. During the development of the game, a good friend of mine (Eli Hamblet) and I were the main play testers. We would bounce ideas back and forth with the Chris's and help validate variants or point out which ones we thought were lacking. It was a very fun and fulfilling experience for me. Maybe at another time I will write about the process of play testing the game.

I think that is enough background to convince at least some people that I am qualified to talk about the topic of today's article... Epigo strategy. For simplicity, I am only going to be dealing with the core game. The variants often completely change the basic strategy, so it would just be too much to go over.

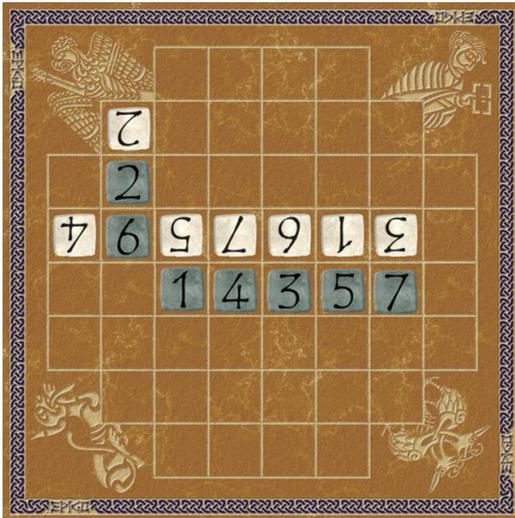
Epigo is a heavily strategic game. More often than not, the player with the better strategy is going to win the game. The main goal of this article is to take a look at the basic strategic areas of the game and how I generally approach things. They don't always work out, but I do win a good majority of the games that I play. I am hoping that as Epigo becomes more popular, this will no longer be the case. As it stands now however, I am still one of only four people who have likely played Epigo over 100 times.

Deployment and First Turn

Let's start at the beginning with the initial deployment. I am not going to lie. I generally do not have a big master plan when I deploy my Epigons. Often I put a few key Epigons in positions that I want them to be in, and then just kind of distribute the rest as I see fit. One decision that is consistent is putting the blank space at one of the two side positions. I will also sometimes choose to attack the side that I have put the blank space, using a high number such as a 6 or 7 on the opposite side to shift my whole line. Here is an example of how I will deploy:



The attacking strategy that I mentioned would be to first push my 2 north, then my 7 west, then my 6 north. It is important that the 2nd order is a large number to guarantee it moves first. It is also pretty important that the 3rd Epigon is large since it will be in a position to capture. Assuming my opponent does nothing to stop this, it results in the following situation. His 2 and 4 are both in trouble, but my 2 and 6 are separated from the rest of my Epigons. I feel this is still a good position for blue.



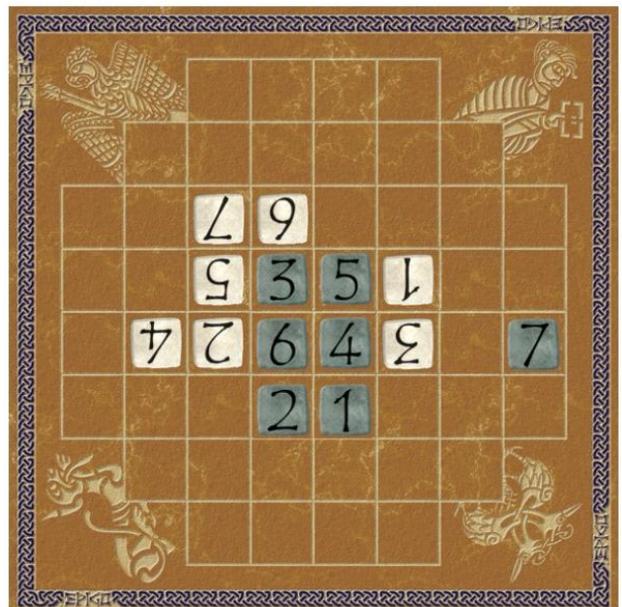
Of course, my opponent is going to have something to say about this, but if he does not focus on the west side of the board, he is likely going to be in trouble. I like this opening play because it uses my orders to efficiently move my Epigons by getting many of my Epigons to move per order. It also shifts my entire line, which can often mess up my opponent's plan. I do not always use this opening, but the first time I play someone, I am going to test them with it.

Tanking

Let me start this section off with saying that I dislike using the strategy I am about to explain. For whatever reason, I just don't like it. Ok... that is a lie. I know exactly why I don't like it. Eli, the other play tester, loves this strategy and will employ it at any given opportunity. So I had to play against it a lot, and it just got tiring. Another way to put it; I lost to it a lot until I learned how to play against it.

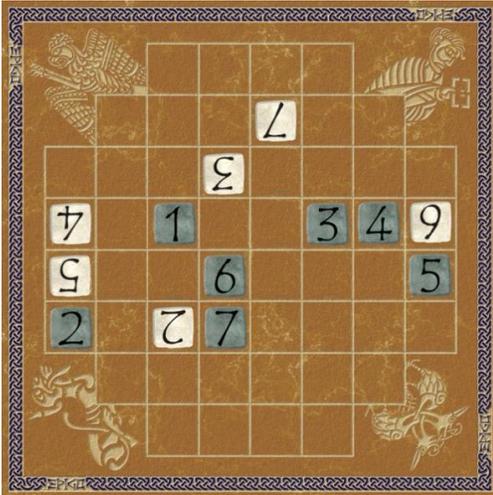
"Tanking" is when you make a 2 x 3 grid of your Epigons (or a similar shape) and move that entire "tank" around, pushing anything that gets in your way and blocking most attempted pushes on your tank. After Eli used it a few times on me, we gave it the name of tanking. It takes a lot of work to get your Epigons in that configuration, but you are in a strong position once you do. It is certainly not unbeatable, but it is best to prevent your opponent from doing it if it looks like that is his plan. If you ever find half of your Epigons on one side of the tank, and the other half on the other side, the game is over. If your tank ever gets penetrated though, things fall apart quickly.

Here is an example of a successful tank.



The Lost Cause, The Escalator (The Princess Bride Conundrum), and Ignore

The next few topics that I want to go over all deal with similar situations where Epigons are in danger of being captured. Let's look at the position below. We are blue and have captured our opponent's 1.



Interesting completely not contrived board position we have here. Our 2 is in risk of being captured, as is our opponent's 6. There are a lot of things going on here. Luckily we have already captured an Epigon. So we need to figure out what is important to us here. Since we have not lost any Epigons, we are not in a position where we must save our 2 or risk losing. So, do we want to save our 2? We can try to save it if we want, but it is not going to be easy to save. It will take a lot of effort to save it, and we will likely fail if we try. We will need to figure out if our opponent is going to push with his 4 or his 5, or maybe even both. Both of those numbers are larger than our 2, so we would have to block both of them potentially. Even if we do get to move our 2 east, it doesn't really do too much if the 4 and 5 were blocked and are still there. I see our 2 as a lost cause. I think it is better to focus elsewhere on the board.

Brief, on topic aside: While watching the games being played at the tournament that we held at GenCon, I noticed that many players were unwilling to let any Epigons get captured if they could at all avoid it. In one game, a player had captured 2 of his opponent's Epigons. One of his Epigons was at risk of being captured, but he had not lost any Epigons yet. He must have spent 2-3 full turns to save the Epigon when he could have severely attacked one of his opponent's Epigon to win the game. You do not need to save every Epigon. Unless it is going to end the game, take a look at if it is actually important to you if your Epigon gets captured. In a game I played recently, I actually pushed one of my Epigons off in order to be threatening 2 of my opponent's Epigons the next turn.

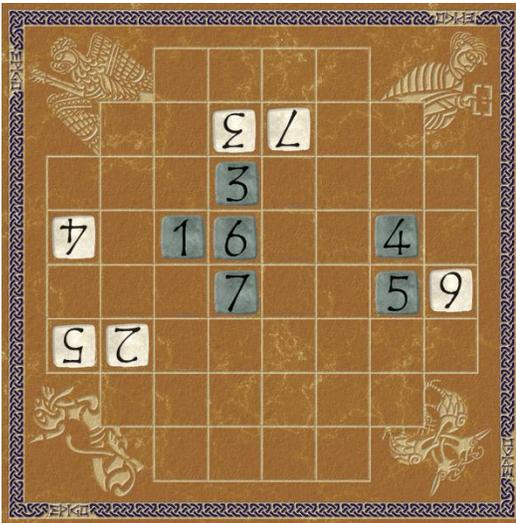
So, how about capturing our opponent's 6? We are threatening it with our 3 and 4, which are both slower than it unfortunately. We could try moving our 6 first to potentially block his assumed escape, and then push our 4 east to capture. Maybe we think that he is going to expect that, and think that he is going to move his 6 as his 2nd order. In that case, we should push east with our 4 as our first order. Of course, he could expect that as well. This conundrum is what Eli and I called "The Escalator". This is because we were trying to figure out at what level (like levels in a mall) our opponent was playing at to figure out the best strategy. We associated trying to capture with the first move to being on the 1st level and trying to block with the first move to being on the 2nd level. Wanting to outthink one another, we would often try to figure out if we needed to take the elevator up or down a level.

My general approach here is to start with the "obvious" choice. If I am threatening a lower numbered Epigon, I will simply push on the first turn to try to capture. Make them block me to succeed. Generally, I will do this the first few times in a game to set a precedent. Then, during a more important part of the

game, I will mix it up and start changing levels. This will usually catch them off guard since I have given them no reason to expect me to change my strategy. So in this situation, what has our opponent done earlier in the game when one of his Epigons has been threatened? We can use that info to infer what he might do here. Of course, he could be doing exactly what I just described and will switch things up on us, but people will often play consistently throughout a game.

Probably the most important advice I can give is this. When figuring out which Orders I will try to block, I will look at what my corresponding Epigons can do. I will lean towards using the Epigons that are beneficial for me to move anyway. If your block isn't successful, you might as well get a useful move out of your order.

Our last option here is to ignore both hot spots on the board and solidify elsewhere. In this situation, this is likely what I would do here. Why? Let's look at what is going through our opponent's head right now. "Should I capture his 2 or save my 6 or try to do both? Is there a way that I can block his 4 and move my 6 and block his 2 and move my 5?" There is a lot going on there. If he comes up with some intricate plan to block Epigons that we have no intention of moving, he is simply wasting moves while our moves have a purpose. He is going to be focusing on what order to move his 2, 4, 5, and 6 Epigons. Let him flop around while we come up with a plan that involves neither area. How about we slide our 5 west, then Super slide our 3 west, then push our 7 north. There is a good chance that our opponent is going to push his 6 south during one of his turns. That is why we want to slide the 5 to preemptive safety. If we get lucky, his 6 will slide an order after our 5 and will STILL be in risk of being captured. We also have a chance to counter our opponent's 5 with this move. It seems solid to me. I could see our opponent moving his 2 to block our 2, then sliding his 6 south to rescue it, then sliding his 5 south to capture our blocked 2. It is not the best plan, but it isn't unreasonable. If that happened, let's look at the result of mostly ignoring the two perceived focal points on the board.



For the record, my money is on blue in this game. We are now in good position to make a move towards the opposing 3 and 7. We are also in a good position to get a tank in between all of our opponent's Epigons... a position that will be very hard to lose from.

The proposed plan is obviously not the only way to approach things, and our opponent can see this coming and plan accordingly. Maybe it is simply best to try to capture the 6. I just wanted to show that sometimes it is best to focus efforts elsewhere. In either case, I would abandon the 2. It has done its job by taking a lot of orders to be captured.

I hope you guys enjoyed some insight into how I play Epigo. Now go capture some Epigons!

~ Gabe