

Rivals for CATAN

Part 5 – The Introductory Game

May 18, 2010

Follow-up comments on my last blog posts as well as comments in various forums repeatedly expressed concerns that the revised Card Game might become deprived of its depth, in favor of being easier to play and more “appropriate for the public.”

Well, all those of you who fear for the complexity of the new version may rest assured. The Tournament version will continue to exist and, therefore, also the possibility to assemble one’s own deck from a variety of cards.

Maybe in my previous blog posts I didn’t express clearly enough that the simplification mainly consists in the fact that it facilitates an easier understanding of the rules. Therefore, the “Introductory Game” is an important component of the new rules system. It only takes 20 to 30 minutes to play and familiarizes the players with the basic game rules. However, it does not replace the old Basic Game. Although the Introductory Game is already an exciting race for 7 victory points, the manifold possibilities of the Card Game are not fully exploited here.

After 2 or 3 Introductory Games, the players should be ready for the three Theme Sets with their additional rules, which are also included in the game box.

A Theme Game requires the cards of the Introductory Game plus the cards of a Theme Set. As far as complexity and game depth are concerned, a Theme Game is on a par with the old Basic Game. However, each of the three Theme Games is clearly more theme-related, and the duration of the game is also shorter.

But more about this in my next blog posts. Today, dear reader, I would like to introduce the Introductory Game to you. It is titled “The First Catanians,” and the card motifs suggest that the Catanians haven’t prospered much yet.

As in the old Basic Game, the stacks containing the center cards Settlement, Road, City, and Region and the Event cards are placed in between the players. In addition, there are 3 stacks containing 12 Expansion cards each. I already presented the illustration of the new center cards in the section “Catanian Fog” of my last blog post. This time, I’m presenting the new cards and the rule changes that apply to the Introductory Game and the Theme Games alike:

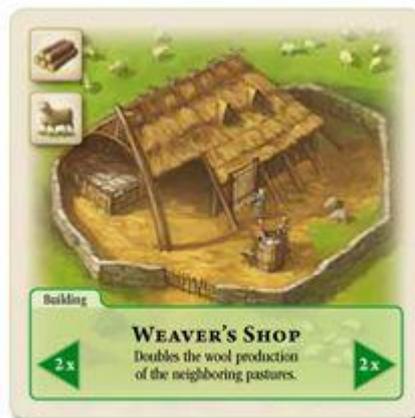
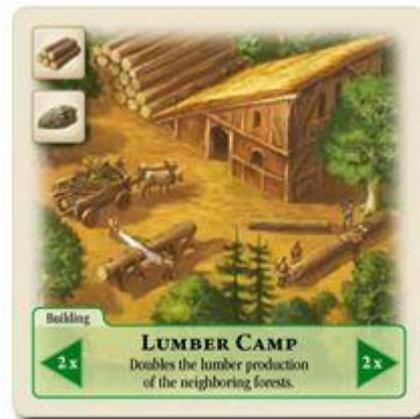
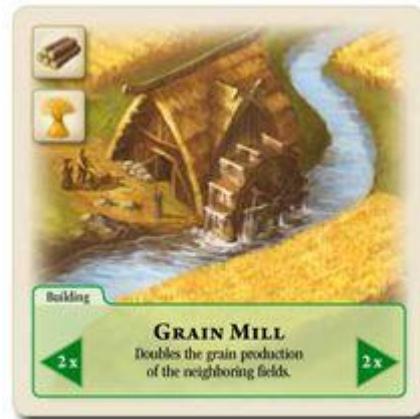
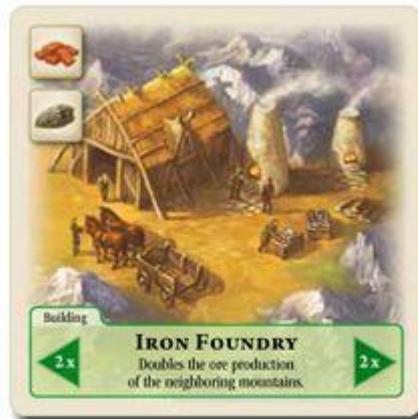
Regions

We have redistributed the numbers on the regions. Before, it could happen that identical numbers on forest and hills regions allowed the player with the black coat of arms rapid expansion via roads and settlements, while his opponent’s wool and gold regions were bursting at the seams. The new distribution makes everything a little fairer. The numbers on brick and lumber now correspond to the numbers on grain and ore. And there’s good news for all gold fans: due to the increased demand for gold, we have reinforced the Region card stack with a fourth gold region.



Expansion Cards – Buildings

The “resource-doubling cards” such as the Foundry, Grain Mill, Brick Factory, Lumber Camp, and the Weaver’s Shop are carried over from the old Basic Game, retaining their function but in some cases having new names.



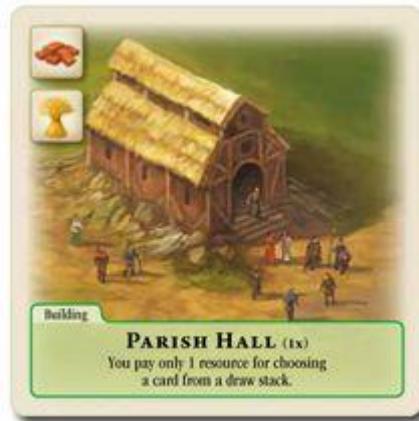
The old Toll Station became a Toll Bridge. We had a long discussion whether the card should keep its commerce point. Finally, the toll lobby prevailed and successfully defended its commerce point. However, the storekeepers were less successful. Their supplications were in vain – their storage facilities were stripped of their commerce point. As usual, the monks kept a low profile and thus survived the reform unscathed. After praying the Our Father a couple of times, they even gained a little advantage for their Abbey. More about this when the Event card “Productive Year” is presented.



The Expansion cards of the Introductory Game don't include city expansions and, therefore, no Town Hall that would give the princes the privilege to pay only one resource for choosing a card from an Expansion card stack. This function is now carried out by the Parish Hall, the card that regulates the structures of a village community and thus makes it easier for the prince to follow through with his plans.

The function of the Marketplace is new. It had always bothered me to see my opponent build his third settlement before I could do so, while I was lagging behind with my resource income. If you build a Marketplace in the new version of the game, you receive an additional resource each time a number is rolled of which more appear on your opponent's Region cards than on your own Region Cards. You may choose a resource your opponent has received too.

The Marketplace strengthens the concentration strategy. The players have more time to expand their principality before expanding via settlements and roads. The Marketplace also counteracts the possibility for a player to take the lead early on, a possibility which later – combining the advantage of having built more settlements with favorable dice rolls – could make him unbeatable.



Expansion Cards – Units – Trade Ships

Taking into account the humble beginnings of the settling of Catan, the Trade Fleets became Trade Ships. Similar to the situation before, there is one Trade Ship for each resource. The Great Trade Fleet is also still part of the game but now is called Large Trade Ship.



Expansion Cards – Units – Heroes

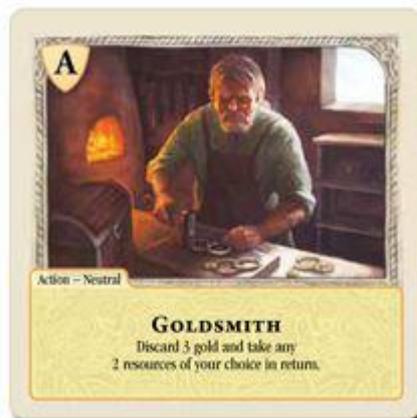
Until now, the male component in the form of heavily armed knights in armor predominated the Card Game. This predominance doesn't correspond to reality, because women and men always participate equally in the development of a community. Therefore, we replaced the word "knight" with "hero," a term that applies to both genders. The strength remains unaffected – and strength doesn't just refer to plain muscle power but also includes intellectual flexibility and the influence this flexibility has on the strength of a community. The tournament points were replaced with skill points. We defined skill as all the abilities to endure contests or delight one's fellow men. The skill of prevailing in an exhibition fight is on an equal footing with talents such as telling an electrifying story, singing a captivating song, or beautifully playing the harp. The harp thus became the symbol for a hero's skill and the die roll event "Celebration."



Expansion Cards – Action Cards

The Action cards of the Introductory Game can all be played without requirements. The Merchant Caravan is the new version of the old Caravan, the Alchemist was substituted with Brigitta the Seer, and the rather modern-sounding Land Reform is now called Relocation. The Scout remained unchanged.

The Goldsmith is a new card. For three gold, the Goldsmith hands over two resources of the player's choice.



You might be worried now about the “mean” Action cards of the old Basic Game, such as Spy, Arsonist, or Brigands. Don’t fret, dear reader, the reform did not devour its children. These fiends continue to exist in the Theme Sets, although they are hiding behind new names.

Event Cards

The new name for the former Event card “Progress” is “Invention.”

The Year of Plenty not only provides the regions adjacent to Storage Facilities with an additional resource but also the regions adjacent to an Abbey.

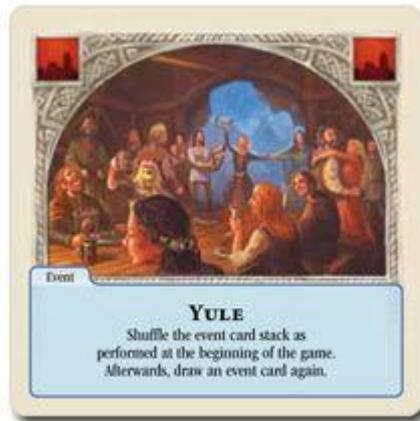
The Fraternal Feud (formerly Conflict) and the Feud (formerly Raid) allow the player who has the Strength Advantage to make his opponent's life as a gamer a bit more difficult. But since each of these cards exists only once, the damage is not excessive.



The Yule corresponds to the old Year End – but there are two important changes:

1. When the Yule is drawn, the card stack is shuffled and a new card is drawn immediately.
2. Shuffling of the card stack: Except for the Yule, all cards are shuffled face down. Three cards are placed face down. Then the Yule is placed on top of them, and the remaining Event cards are placed on top of the Yule.

These rule changes make the Event card stack more predictable, and it no longer happens that the Yule is drawn repeatedly and no event occurs.



Two new constructive Event cards help to make the game a bit faster yet:

If the Traveling Merchant visits the principalities, each player may buy any one resource of his choice for one gold – up to two times. Happy the player who hasn't spent his gold yet and is able to strike a lucrative bargain. When the Event card "Trade Ships Race" is played, the player with the most Trade Ships receives any one resource of his choice.



There are also two innovations regarding the die roll event "Tournament." First of all, the Tournament is now called Celebration, acknowledging the fact that not only weapons are wielded but people now also sing songs and play instruments. Secondly, both players each receive any one resource of their choice when the Celebration is rolled. Only if his heroes have more skill points than the heroes of his opponent, a prince receives one resource of his choice all by himself.

Production and Event

Even though the old rule stipulated that the result of the Event die should be resolved before resolving the result of the Production die, hardly anyone adhered to it. In the new Princes of Catan version, therefore, we followed intuitive behavior and inverted the order. The players collect their production first and then resolve the event. The only

exception: if the Brigand Attack is rolled, the robber strikes before the production is distributed. To make sure the players don't overlook this detail, the club is red.

Trade Advantage and Strength Advantage

“What, in addition to my 3 commerce points I must have built a city to get the Windmill token? Then I've played this the wrong way for years.”

I can't tell you how often I have heard or read this phrase during the past years. As it seems, the requirement to have a city was hard to understand or went in one eye and out the other. So we bowed to reality, very much like good politicians, and dropped the requirement to have a city. Instead, we reduced the number of commerce points a little, thus making it more difficult to reach 3 commerce points.

In a matching fashion, a player obtains the Strength Advantage if he has placed heroes that show a total of 3 strength points.

Replenishing One's Hand and Swapping a Card

The modification: First, the player draws or discards cards so as to adjust his hand to the allowed limit.

Afterwards, the player may swap a card. To this end, he discards a card; then he pays either one or two resources to select a card from a stack, or he draws the top card from a stack for free.

Conclusion

In terms of difficulty, the Introductory Game is certainly not a “heavyweight.” It has less – and also simpler – rules than the previous Card Game. The aggressive Action cards are left out too. Compared to the old Card Game, the Introductory Game thus offers beginners much easier and less frustrating access to the world of the Catan Card Game. And if, after the Introductory Game, people want more – they are cordially invited to explore the advantages of the University in the predominantly peaceful Theme Game “The Era of Progress” or, in “The Era of Turmoil,” to attack their opponent with the Traitor and Arsonist or take away his resources by means of the Voyage of Plunder or the Brigands.

In my next blog post, I will present the cards and rules of the first Theme Game “The Era of Gold.”

Klaus Teuber

