



Rivals for CATAN

Part 6 – The Era of Gold

May 18, 2010

Introduction

The “Era of Gold” Theme Game is played with the Theme Set of that name plus the basic cards I introduced in my previous blog post. In the fictitious history of Catan, the environment of this set belongs to the Middle Ages and thus chronologically follows the “Era of Turmoil” set. The set intensifies the struggle for the Trade Advantage, and the resource “gold” gains importance, among others due to another Toll Bridge, the Mint, and the Gold Cache. Also, players who build their trading empire with trade fleets must be wary of Pirate Ships. This time, I’ll accompany the introduction of the new cards of the set with a little story.

The Story of Someone Who Went Forth to Find the Gold Cache

It was a sticky hot summer evening. My wife and I sat relaxed on our patio and played the “Princes of Catan” card game. Each of us had already assembled a sizable principality with our cards. We were, so to speak, the Prince and the Princess of our respective empires.

On my last turn, I had played the Pirate Ship and thus sent my wife’s trade fleet to the bottom of the sea. As a result, the Trade Advantage and the associated victory point were mine.

As befits a princess, my wife kept her composure and triumphantly played the hero Candamir on her turn. Candamir was a little stronger than the hero Osmund in my principality, and so she obtained the Strength Advantage.

I had expected more from Osmund anyway. Where was the event “Gift for the Prince” that was supposed to get me much-needed gold from Osmund?

The phone rang. My wife quickly placed the Gold Cache adjacent to one of her regions and went to the living room. “Could you please bring a beer for the Prince when you come back?” I shouted after her.

I yawned and looked at my hand of cards. “**Gudrun, Terror of the Seas**” and “**Reiner the Herald**” made a good couple. Particularly the Gudrun card fascinated me.



Not so much because of the bold-looking, attractive pirate woman imperiously sitting at the prow of her ship but because of the waves her ship cleaved so effortlessly. *How nice it would be to escape the mugginess of the evening, dive into the gentle waves and take a refreshing swim,* I thought, gradually losing myself in the depth of the card. I became drowsy and submerged myself, deeper and deeper ...

I surfaced spurring water. I was floating in a refreshing, slightly choppy sea, right next to Gudrun’s ship. She had become real and gave me a frosty stare.

„Hoist him up, boys! Another castaway who wants a seat on our rowing benches.”

Actually, I would rather have enjoyed the refreshing swim a little longer, but the men whose strong arms pulled me aboard had no consideration for it.

Gudrun planted herself in front of me. “What are you doing here, baldy?”

Slightly unsettled because of her irreverent form of addressing me, I stammered, “I was about to, um, play you ...”

Her stare became a bit frostier still. “Didn’t you know that all those who ever wanted to play with me ended up as food for sharks? Throw him back overboard, boys!”

I didn't want what was obviously a dream to turn into a bloody nightmare, so I hastily shouted, "Stop! I am your Prince!"

Gudrun looked at me in disbelief and then roared with laughter. "You claim to be my Prince? Nobody has seen him yet, but you definitely don't look like a prince. Now go ahead and throw him overboard, boys!"

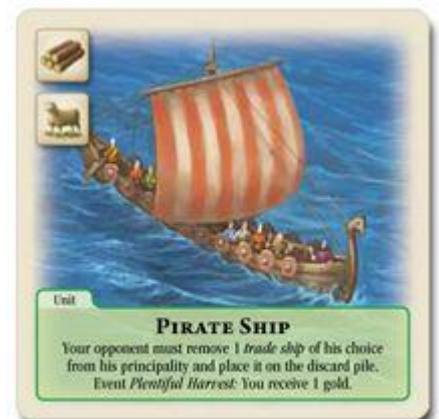
"Nooooo! I know where the Princess's Gold Cache is." A better argument didn't occur to me at that moment.

But it worked. Gudrun's eyes filled with greed, and she eyeballed me with revived interest. "Well then.

After all, I'm not going to benefit if the sharks eat you. I give you two days. But don't think you can trick me. My faithful companion Reiner will accompany you. Show him where the Gold Cache is, and you are free to go. Or else ..."

Reiner, a well-shaped young man with curly black hair, appeared next to Gudrun. He gave her a delighted look and then, clearly less delighted, looked into my direction and demonstratively played with his knife.

A **Pirate Ship** – which couldn't neglect the opportunity to capture a trade ship along the way – brought Reiner and me to the Princess's **Harbor**.



It looked lonely and deserted. Hardly surprising – after all, my Pirate Ships had meanwhile sunk the Princess's entire trade fleet. Since then, she always got the short end of the stick when the trade ships started a race.

Grumpily, Reiner brushed back one of his thick black curls. "So, where do we go?" It seemed that being temporarily separated from his adored pirate lady didn't quite improve his mood.

On our way, I already had frantically tried to remember where the Princess, that is, my wife, had placed the Gold Cache card before getting up to answer the phone. Adjacent to her mountains? Or next to her pastures? I simply couldn't recall. So I bravely confessed, "I can't remember exactly, but we can ask, or?"

Reiner stared at me, disgruntled. “I knew from the start that you were taking Gudrun for a ride to save your neck.” He pulled out his knife.

In this very moment, something whizzed through the air and, with a thump, landed directly in front of my feet. Reiner stood with his mouth open and first gazed at the sky and then at the egg-sized lump of gold that had missed me by a hair. I picked it up and read the card attached to the lump. “**Gift for the Prince**,” it said, and “With best regards from your faithful Osmund.”

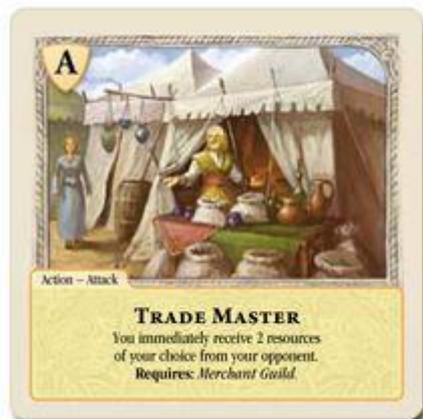


Ha! Finally the eagerly awaited event had occurred. Without a word, I handed Reiner the card. Thunderstruck, he fell to his knees and stammered, his head bent, “My Prince, I ask your forgiveness.”

“Rise!” I ordered him with newly found princely authority.

He got up and looked at me in despair. “Please have mercy with me, my Prince. If I don’t tell Gudrun where the Gold Cache is, she will never again allow me near her. Can’t we just pretend that nothing happened and look for the hiding place anyway?”

I actually liked the idea of continuing to roam Catan for a while and have a closer look at the buildings and settlers I only knew from the cards.



I gave him a comradely pat on his shoulder. “Sure, that’s what we’ll do. Let’s just ask our way.”

Filled with gratitude, Reiner once again fell to his knees and beamed at me. “Then why don’t we start right away and ask that rich merchant over there at the corner!”

The rich merchant turned out to be a **Trade Master** offering a choice of fine merchandise.

“Greetings, Master,” I began. “Do you know how to get to the Princess’s Gold Cache?”

“Do I look like I would give away my Princess’s best kept secret?”

“As a matter of fact, yes,” Reiner barged in. “You look like it only depended on the right price.”

„Correct, my young friend. If I were too honorable, I hardly had succeeded in becoming a Trade Master. So, if you bring me 5 sacks of salt, I’ll give you a hint.”

“But from where could we get 5 sacks of salt?” I interjected.

“From where? From the Salt Silo, of course.”

On our way to the Salt Silo we passed by the **Staple House**. Servants were diligently unloading sacks from a merchant cart and carrying them into the building.



Somber-faced, the **Merchant** was standing next to his cart and harshly said, “Well, do you also want to get rich exploiting a poor merchant’s predicament?”

Like all Merchants visiting the city, he was forced to offer his goods to the citizens at reduced prices in the Staple House. Only after a day had passed, he was allowed to continue his journey, usually with a strongly diminished supply of goods.

“Could you perhaps spare a few sacks of salt?” Reiner optimistically asked.

„Bah! The servant of the Salt Silo just snagged the 10 sacks I had – for 2 gold coins a sack. Just imagine! I normally get 4 gold coins for it.”

The servant of the silo had put up his stall directly in front of the **Salt Silo**. “Would you like to buy salt, gentlemen? Suuuper low prices today! Only 10 gold coins a sack.”

“That’s extortion!” ranted Reiner. “You wrangled each sack for just 2 gold coins from the Merchant.”

“By order of the Princess!” said the servant in his defense. “Her two trade ships are making additional profit with the salt. So we hardly can give the salt away here, can we?”

“But the two ships were captured,” I interjected.





“So much the worse, then the sack costs 30 gold coins as of now.”

Reiner’s face blushed with anger, and he fingered the handle of his knife.

“Never mind,” I whispered to my furious companion. “I have an idea. Let’s pay a visit to the **Trading Base**.”

The basement of the Trading Base was built of solid stone. We knocked at a heavy door that looked as if they originally had forgotten to build one and later temporarily inserted one into the crudely hammered breach in the wall. The man who opened looked like a twin brother of our Trade Master and probably was. He eyed us with distrust.

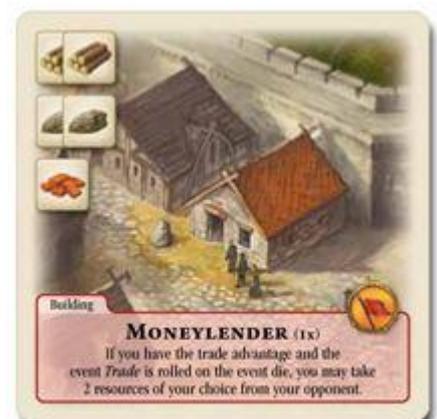
As a precaution, I put my foot in the door. “Master, we’d like to offer you a deal. As you know, salt is a scarce good, and this white gold currently costs 30 gold coins a sack.” I lowered my voice and pretended to be glancing around to see whether there were unwelcome witnesses to our conversation. “People say that the price will soon reach 50 gold coins because of the captured trade ships. What would you say if I offered you 5 sacks for 29 gold coins each?”

The Trade Master’s twin brother had taken the bait, and during the haggling that followed he did great credit to his brother. We finally agreed on 125 gold coins, 25 coins a sack. We sealed our deal with a commercial contract.

After we had left the Trading Base, Reiner took me aside. “But my Prince, we don’t have any salt for sale.”

“Ever heard something about short selling? No, impossible. Just wait and see, Reiner. We practically have the salt in our pockets.”

Our next stop was the **Moneylender**. He lived in a small, inconspicuous house huddled against the city wall as if seeking protection. We joined the line of waiting citizens. When it finally was our turn, we were received by two heavily armed guards that escorted us to the Moneylender’s parlor. Actually, it rather looked like a shabby chamber, which made me ask him why a Moneylender who apparently had abundant means at his disposal would live in such humble dwellings.



The Moneylender smiled knowingly. “More substance than style. It protects me from thieving riffraff. What can I do for you, gentlemen?”

“I’d like to propose a deal, Moneylender. You give us 100 gold coins, and at nightfall you’ll get 125 gold coins back.”

“What kind of collateral can you provide?”

Reiner was fingering his knife again. This time, however, he seemed to ponder whether his most prized possession might be acceptable collateral.

“If we had collateral, we wouldn’t be standing here. But I have a surefire business model.” I leaned across and whispered my plan into his ear.

The Moneylender grinned. “Who would ever think of something like that? It’s a deal! Here, take your 100 gold coins.”

“And now?” Reiner asked me, uncomprehending.

“Aren’t you a herald?”

“Yes.”



“Good, then go and do your duty now. Run through the streets and announce that the Princess has launched two new trade ships. Because of this great event, she’s organizing a feast for all citizens. Meanwhile, I’ll visit the **Mint** and trade my lump of gold for coins. Afterwards, we meet again in front of the Salt Silo.”

“But it’s a lie. What if the Princess gets wind of it?”

“No, she won’t. She’s talking on the pho ... well, it doesn’t matter. Believe me, by the time someone realizes that we’ve spread a rumor our deal is in the

bag.”

When we met again at the Salt Silo, I had traded my lump of gold for 11 gold coins and Reiner had shouted himself hoarse, obviously with success: from all quarters, people were flocking towards the festival grounds. Also the servant of the Salt Silo was about to close his stall.

“Hey, wait a moment! We’d like to buy your salt. 10 sacks for exactly 100 gold coins. Since the Princess has launched two new ships, the price per sack should be at 10 gold coins again.”

The servant opened his mouth, probably to voice an objection.

“And on top of it,” I continued, “you receive a commission of 10 gold coins.”

“So you can really go for it at the feast,” said Reiner and gave him a wink and a nod.

That seemed to finally convince the servant. He closed his mouth, took the gold coins and handed us 10 sacks of salt.

We delivered five sacks of salt at the Trading Base and collected the 125 gold coins as agreed. We brought the 125 gold coins to the Moneylender, who rejoiced over the profitable deal. There were still 5 sacks of salt and 1 gold coin left for us. We went to the Trade Master.

“Here are your 5 sacks of salt, Master. Now we’ve complied with our part of the agreement.”

The Trade Master received his salt and whispered his hint into my ear. Afterwards he also gave me a letter of recommendation. I thanked him and shook his hand. Then we headed for the **Merchant Guild**.

Reiner walked along beside me in a pensive mood. “Wasn’t that fraud, my Prince?”



“Why? The small Merchant at least didn’t incur a loss. All the others made good money: the servant of the Salt Silo obtained a profit of 8 gold per sack and a decent bribe on top of it. The Moneylender collected 25 % interest, and the Trade Master and his twin brother now have the salt monopoly and will surely sell their sacks at a high profit.”

“So we didn’t harm anybody?”

“Well, come to think of it, we did. The baker will resent the price of the salt and be forced to sell his bread at a higher price. And the prices for pickled herrings and salt meat will surely surge too.”

“So once again the losers are ordinary people,” Reiner concluded.

“That’s probably right,” I answered thoughtfully and was relieved that I seemed to be only dreaming and thus wouldn’t have to deal with a guilty conscience after waking up.



A Merchant Caravan stood in front of the Merchant Guild. We gave the Trade Master's recommendation letter to the leader of the caravan and were allowed to board one of the wagons and go with them. The Merchant Caravan would travel directly to the Gold Cache, to get the gold the Princess intended to pay for the lumber and wool required for a new trade ship.

On our way, I noticed the Princess's lush grain fields. Sadly, mine were withered at the moment. It probably wouldn't be a bad idea to have my **Brigands** carry out a raid soon.

The Merchant Caravan had arrived at the Princess's **Gold Cache**. Since I would soon part with Reiner, I gave him my last gold coin. "Use it to buy something nice for your Gudrun."

"Thank you, my Prince. You are very generous." Reiner sighed. "Sometimes I think that we are all cards in a huge game. We are shuffled, end up in random stacks and have no bearing on what is being done with us. I only wish I would land with Gudrun in the same stack more often." He smirked. "Preferably very closely together."

"I can arrange that," I laughed. "I'm your Prince, after all."

"Hello my Prince. Wake up! Here's your beer." I awoke from my dream, rubbed my eyes and gave my wife a grateful look. Then I took a deep pull at the bottle. I had earned it.

Notes Regarding the Theme Set

In general, the following rules addendum applies to all Theme Games:

In the middle between the two players, 5 expansion stacks are placed face down next to the center cards, 3 consisting of the basic cards and 2 of the Theme Set cards. In addition, there is an open stack containing cards which – like the center cards – are "built" directly, meaning that the players don't have to add them to their hand first. In the Theme Game "The Era of Gold," the open expansion card stack is formed by the two Merchant Guilds. The player who has reached 12 victory points at the end of his turn is the winner.



The “rule of ’7” applies neither to the Theme Games nor to the Duel of the Princes nor to the Tournament Game. Action cards can always be played if potentially existing conditions are met.

Probably in mid-July, I’ll tell you about The Era of Turmoil.

P.S.: For the card “Reiner the Herald,” the illustrator Michael Menzel used a photo from Dr. Reiner Dürer’s youth for reference. During the past years, both of them accompanied the development of the Card Game with help and advice, and they are currently participating in the editorial work on the redeveloped Catan Card Game.

Klaus Teuber

The logo for the board game Catan, featuring the word "CATAN" in a bold, serif font with a curved line arching over the letters.