



CATAN

Explorers & Pirates

The New Expansion for CATAN

Part 1: The Development Begins

In February 2013, the fourth large expansion for CATAN will be released for German-speaking countries on the occasion of the Nuremberg International Toy Fair. The first three expansions – *Seafarers*, *Cities & Knights*, and *Traders & Barbarians* – had been released in 1997, 1998, and 2007, respectively.

Seafarers expanded CATAN beyond the limits of the original island, *Cities & Knights* added more depth and complexity, and *Traders & Barbarians* enriched the game with new variants and two large scenarios.

Which themes and what kind of challenges should be at the core of a new expansion? Or maybe the question should be: What do Catan players want?

Currently, more than 4,000 Premium players enjoy playing *Cities & Knights* and *Seafarers* scenarios on playcatan.com, our online gaming platform. The most frequently played scenarios are “Oceania,” “Treasure Islands,” and “The Fog Islands.”

All three aforementioned scenarios have one thing in common: part of the game consists of facedown terrain hexes – undiscovered areas the players still have to explore. As soon as a player places a ship so that its bow or stern points to a facedown terrain hex, the hex is turned over and thus discovered. As a reward, the player receives a resource of the type produced by this hex. In addition, the

hex is assigned a randomly drawn number token and can now be settled by any player.

No doubt, many CATAN players especially love the excitement of exploration and discovery! This is why the topic “exploration” occupies center stage in the new expansion.

In 1996, when I began to develop the *Seafarers* expansion, I was asking myself how to make seafaring work as a game mechanism. I saw two alternatives at the time. One was to string ships together in a static fashion so that they form a continuous connection, like roads. The other alternative conceived seafaring as something dynamic, where ships are moved by dragging them from edge to edge.

In *Seafarers*, I opted for the first, static alternative – it requires fewer rules and seemed easier and more accessible in the context of a board game expansion (which, in 1997 was still quite unusual).

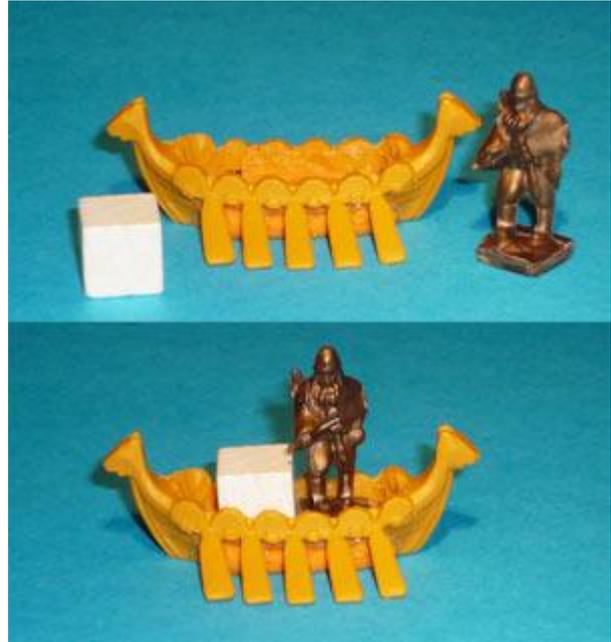
However, I never could quite forget the dynamic movement of ships. Maybe some of you know the German-language scenario “Seefahrer – Die Kolonien” (Seafarers – The Colonies). In this scenario, the ships on the game board could not only be moved, they could also transport commodities. The commodities were placed as tokens under the ships and, together with the ships, had to be moved across the game board. Although transporting the commodities was a little cumbersome and confusing, it added considerable zest to the game.

Based on these experiences, in October 2011 I had the following goals when writing the first concept for the new expansion:

1. There is a starting island and a large unexplored area.
2. Seafaring takes place in a dynamic fashion.
3. Besides the usual terrain hexes, the unexplored area also contains new hexes.
4. The new hexes serve as a basis for missions the players have to complete successfully.
5. The ships are loaded with game pieces that are required to complete missions.

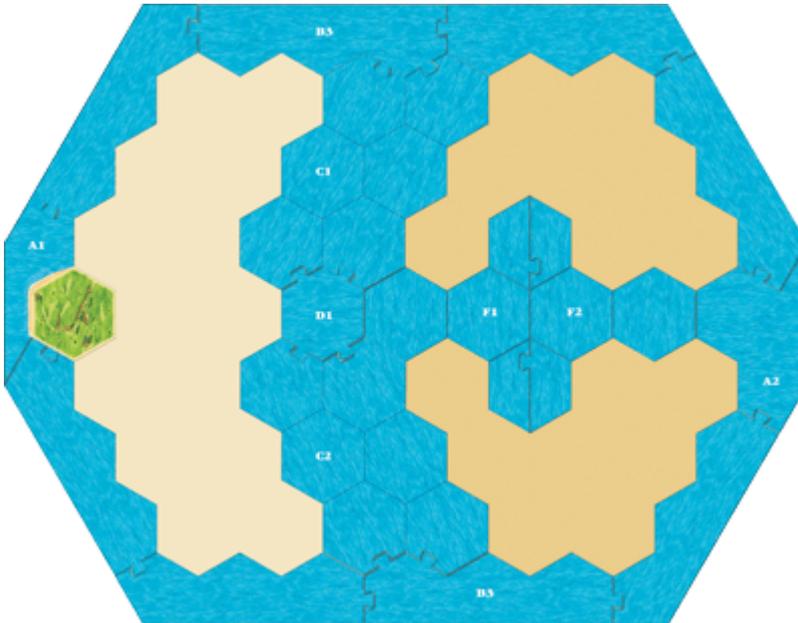
Being able to load the ships was particularly important to me. For my first model, I carved out a hollow space in a ship from the game “Seefahrer – Die Kolonien” and loaded the ship with a barbarian from “Traders & Barbarians” and a small wooden cube with an edge length of 8 mm.

At the beginning of the development, this arrangement stood on my desk, consistently motivating me to continue when the development of the new expansion stalled.



Part 2: About Harbor Settlements, Ships, and Settlers

To play with the expansion, you need the dice, settlements, roads, resource cards, some terrain hexes, number tokens for them, and the frame pieces from the Base Game. The additional frame pieces of the expansion allow you to assemble scenarios of different sizes.



The illustration shows the smallest scenario possible. To avoid spending too much time assembling the scenarios, you tile the surface inside the frame with composites of sea hexes (sea hexes that are joined together). Thereby, three areas are formed. In the light yellow area on the left, you assemble the starting island. On the right, in the two areas to be explored, you place terrain hexes of the expansion facedown.

The two unexplored areas of the smallest scenario accommodate 16 unknown hexes, while the largest scenario includes 32 hexes to be explored.

To explore, you need ships. Building a ship costs one lumber and one wool. The ships are not only used for exploration. They also serve to transport game pieces. Each ship can accommodate either 2 small game pieces or one large game piece.



Alert readers may have asked themselves why I didn't mention cities when listing the game components required from the Base Game. I did that intentionally, because building cities is not part of the new expansion.

Instead, you can upgrade coastal settlements to harbor settlements by paying 2 grain and 2 ore. Like a city, a harbor settlement is worth 2 victory points, but its owner receives only 1 resource when the number of an adjacent terrain hex is rolled.



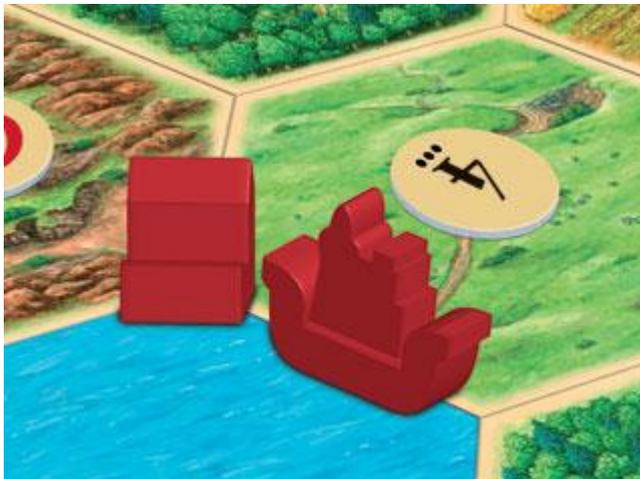
A harbor settlement consists of a group of houses with a basin in front of them. Like a ship, a basin offers room for either a large game piece or 2 small game pieces.

The large game pieces include the settlers, of which each player receives two.



Building a settler costs the same resources as required to build a settlement. If you have built a settler, you place him in the basin of a harbor settlement or directly on an adjacent ship.

Needless to say that the settlers' task is to found new settlements in the discovered area or on the home island. Since it is not allowed to move game pieces overland, a settler always depends on a ship that picks him up and transports him to his new home.



Part 3: Land Ho! - The Introductory Game

The Introductory Game gives less seasoned Catanians the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the most important basic rules of the expansion. At the beginning, each player builds one settlement and one harbor settlement on predetermined intersections of the starting island. Each player places a road adjacent to his settlement and a ship loaded with a settler (settler ship) adjacent to his harbor settlement. That way, on his first turn each player can immediately move a ship toward the unexplored area.

As is usual, on your turn you roll two dice for production; the roll result applies to all players. What is new is that you receive 1 gold as compensation if a number - other than the "7" - is rolled for which you don't receive a resource.

Afterwards, you may trade and build. As a general rule, you may trade 3 resources of the same type with the bank, for any 1 different resource of your choice. In addition, up to two times during your turn you may pay 2 gold to buy any 1 resource of your choice.

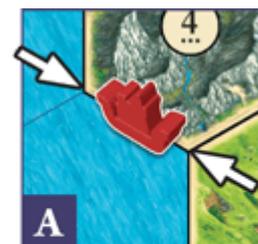
In "The Settlers of Catan" Base Game, your turn ends after the trade and build phase; in "Explorers & Pirates," however, a movement phase follows. You may move each of your ships (up to 3 ships are possible) a distance of 4 sea routes (A). If, along its way, one of the ship's ends points toward the corner of an undiscovered hex, the ship's movement ends (B). The hex is then turned over and marked with a number token (C). As a reward for your discovery, you receive 1 resource of this hex (D).

If you want to speed up your ships' movement, you have to pay wool. For each wool you pay, you may extend the movement of one of your ships by 2 sea routes.

By nature, roads cannot be built on sea routes, which is why the first settlement on the coast of a discovered area can only be built with the aid of a settler ship.

If one of the ends of one of your ships loaded with a settler points toward an intersection of a terrain hex (A), you may build your settlement there. For this purpose, you return your ship together with the settler to your supply (B) and place a settlement on the intersection of the terrain hex, at no additional cost (C). Of course, when you build a settlement with the aid of a settler ship, you must also observe the distance rule.

There aren't any further additional rules the players of the Introductory Game are expected to keep in mind. If you want to win "Land Ho!" you must reach 8 victory points by building



settlements and harbor settlements, which normally won't take longer than 30 minutes.

Experienced players can omit the Introductory Game and immediately take on the first mission, where the new expansion exhibits its full potential for the first time.

The Pirates

How come the new expansion is called “Explorers & Pirates”? “Where the heck are the pirates?” you'll probably ask.

In the Introductory Game, the pirates don't play a role. And neither does the robber. In fact, the robber stays in his game box during all scenarios, which some Catanians definitely won't be sad about. ;-)

However, in the second scenario the pirates get their chance. On the one hand, the pirates have entrenched themselves in fortresses in the unexplored areas (more about this in the fourth part of my blog post), and on the other hand, their ships terrorize the seas.

In contrast to the Seafarers expansion, the Explorers & Pirates expansion not only includes a neutral pirate ship the players can move when a “7” is rolled - in addition, each player also has a pirate ship of his color, which in due course he can use to “play pirate.”

The first player to roll a “7” places his pirate ship on a sea hex. Except for the frame pieces and the hexes around the starting island, any sea hex is allowed for this purpose. The player will probably place his pirate ship on a sea hex adjacent to which his opponents have placed as many ships as possible.

The reason is that in addition to being allowed to steal a resource from the owner of one of these ships, all adjacent ships are blocked as long as the player's pirate ship stays on this hex. It goes without saying that the ships belonging to the owner of the pirate ship – maybe we should better call him the current “friend of the pirates” – are not affected by this blockage.

What can the affected players do? There are several options:

- They can patiently wait until the next “7” is rolled, because when this occurs, the player who rolled the “7” can use his pirate ship, and the “established” pirate must return his pirate ship to his supply.
- The players may also pay 1 gold for each ship they want to move along the edges of the pirate hex.
- The last option is to chase away the pirate ship. A player can do this with any of his ships if one of its ends points toward a corner of the pirate hex. All he has to do is roll a “6.” If he succeeds, the “friend of the pirates” must return his pirate ship to his supply, and the lucky player may gladly move his ships toward their destinations. In addition, he is now the new friend of the pirates and may use his pirate ship for his own benefit.

Part 4: Pirate Lairs

Logbook: *The Council of Catan sent our ships to an unexplored area where, as rumor had it, countries with rich gold deposits existed. Our mission was to find those gold deposits and secure them for Catan.*

First, our mission led us to a large, uninhabited island. There was no gold far and wide, but the fertile island was very appropriate for establishing our initial outpost. After we had found a suitable place for a harbor and built an outpost there, we hoisted anchor and sailed further east.

After a couple of days, a shoreline emerged where a small river flowed into the sea. We followed the river and soon found the coveted metal auspiciously gleaming in the riverbed. Full of excitement, we prepared to build a settlement at the river mouth. We barely had rammed the first posts for our houses into the loamy ground, when we heard a loud rumble, and moments after a cannonball hit right in front of our ship anchored on the riverside.

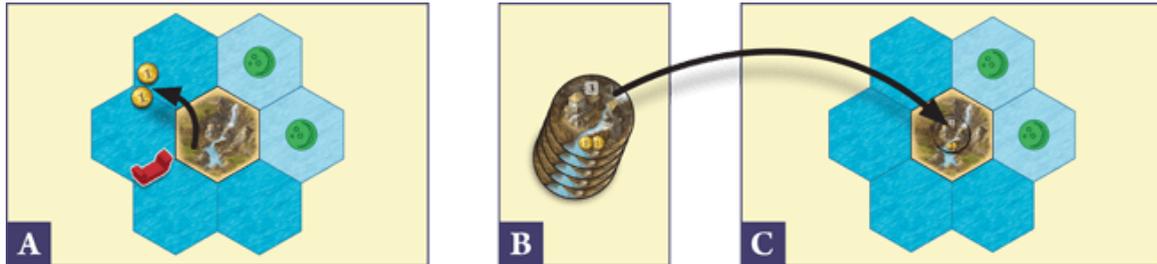


Then our scout came running and informed us about a well-fortified pirate lair controlling the river - and thus, the gold it contained - at a strategically favorable location. As peaceful settlers, we were no match for the pirates bristling with weapons, so we quickly loaded our possessions on the ship and hoisted anchor. We consoled ourselves with the hope that we would discover other islands containing gold deposits.

And that's what we did. However, all the other gold fields we discovered were also controlled by pirate lairs. It almost seemed to us as if someone was playing games with us, games that were anything but funny. Since our mission was to secure the gold fields,

and the hostile pirate lairs stood between us and the precious metal, there was only one solution: the pirate lairs had to disappear.

In the game, if you discover a gold field (A), you take a Pirate Lair token (B) and place it on the gold field (C). The back of each Pirate Lair token depicts a number.



To capture the pirate lairs, the players build crews. Each crew costs 1 ore and 1 wool. After you have built a crew, you place it in the basin of a harbor settlement or in a ship adjacent to a harbor settlement. The cargo bay of a ship can accommodate up to 2 crews.

When your ship - which may carry 1 or 2 crews - reaches a gold field with a pirate lair, you may place your crew(s) on the pirate lair.

As soon as one or more players have placed a total of 3 crews on the pirate lair, it is captured. Now the booty is divided: each player who participated in the capture receives 2 gold.



In addition, the mission progress is recorded on the victory point scoring track named "Pirate Lairs": each player who participated in the capture may move his marker forward 1 field on this track. If you are elected "hero" in a dice duel (sum of number rolled and number of crews placed), you may move your marker forward yet another field – in return, however, one of your crews dies a hero's death.



The number of victory points you receive for your mission progress is depicted to the right of your marker. The player whose marker occupies the most advanced position, or in case of a tie, the player whose marker is at the bottom of the stack receives the special victory

point card “Greatest Pirate Scourge.” The first player to reach 12 victory points on his turn is the winner of this scenario.

After capture, the Pirate Lair token is turned so that its number side faces up. Only now the players may build settlements at the corners of the liberated gold field. If the number of the gold field is rolled, the owner of an adjacent settlement or harbor settlement receives 2 gold.

Part 5: Fish for Catan –

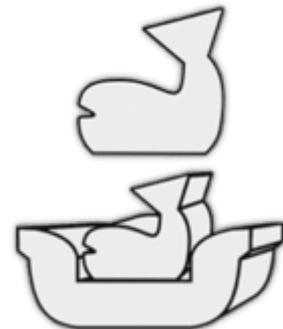
Why There Are No Whales on Catan

In this mission, the Council of Catan sends the settlers to an area with abundant fish stocks. The settlers are supposed to catch the fish and bring the haul to Catan. Fish? In times of the Middle Ages, when commercial fishing fleets weren't overfishing yet – didn't abundant fish stocks exist everywhere? Why did the Council of Catan have to send the settlers to a remote area to satisfy Catan's demand for seafood?



When I designed the mission, it wasn't fish the Council of Catan asked for. It was whales. And consequently, the mission was named “Whales for Catan.” In the Middle Ages, whale oil was a much sought-after commodity. During the long winter nights, it allowed people to illuminate their gloomy dwellings. Whales were also an important source of meat for a population suffering from frequent crop failures.

Compared with today's industrial whaling, hunting whales wasn't a cakewalk in those days. To be able to use spears and arrows to inflict a mortal wound, the medieval fishermen in their fragile boats had to get very close to their mighty prey. It wasn't uncommon for the whale to win the battle, and the sea became the whale hunters' grave. I had these images in my mind when designing the mission and creating the depicted whale piece for the wooden edition of our American licensee.



Our American licensee did not agree with this. The argument was that now there is a global ban on whaling (indigenous peoples such as the Inuit are exempted), and that a Catan game shouldn't promote whaling.

At the beginning of the modern age, particularly in the 19th and 20th century, people devised ever more sophisticated hunting methods that hardly left whales a chance to escape their fate. By then, people coveted more than just whales' oil and meat, because various other products such as margarine, soap, synthetic resin, perfume essences, vitamins, and glycerin were made from whales. Therefore, despite the ban on whaling – which unfortunately is not respected by all countries – many whale species are currently facing extinction.

I wondered – maybe most players actually don't distinguish between my medieval whaling in “Explorers & Pirates” and modern whaling. So I replaced whaling with fishing – “in case of doubt, in favor of the whale” – and created a new fish piece, which now resembled a fat goldfish rather than a whale.

In the German Kosmos edition of the expansion, an entire shoal of fish is caught instead of a single fish.

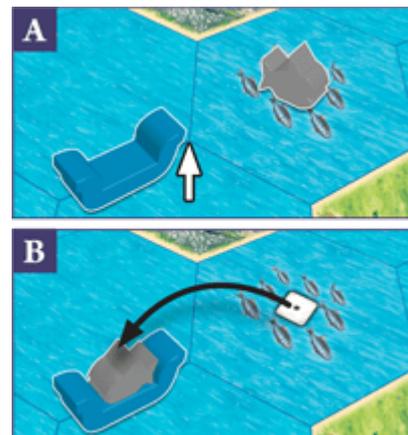
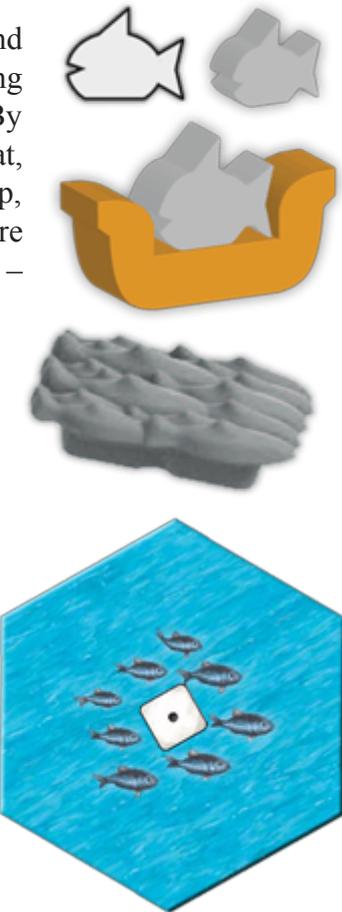
The Mission

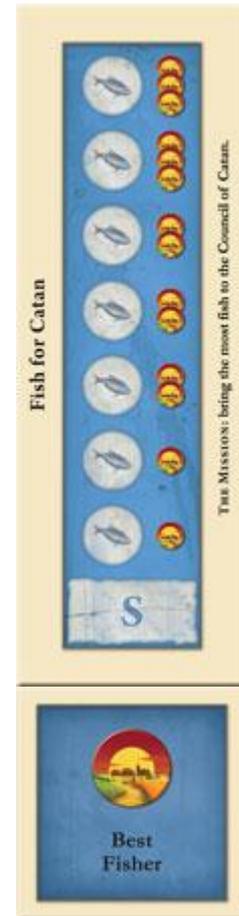
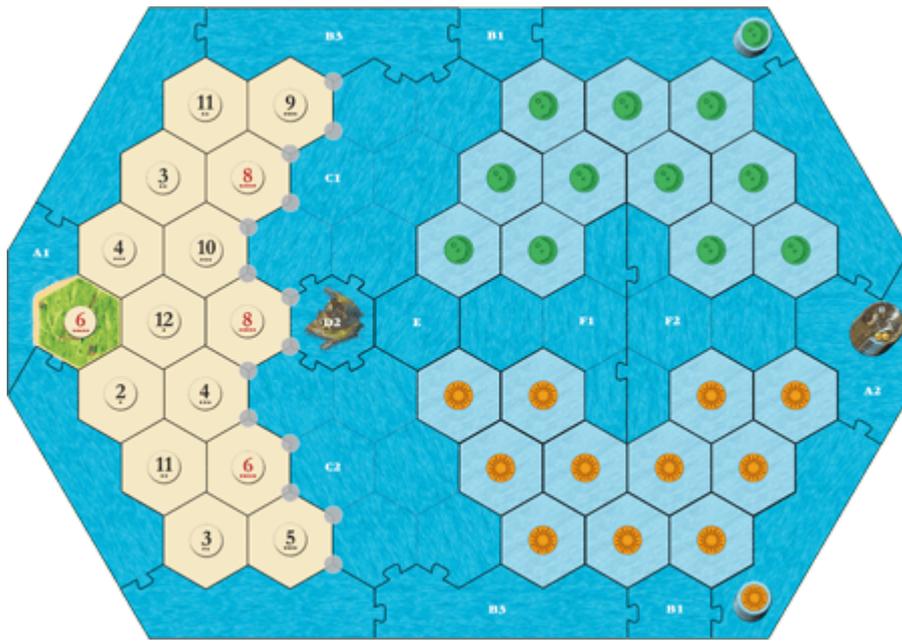
The third scenario, “Fish for Catan,” includes two missions. One of them is “The Pirates' Lairs,” which I presented in the previous part of my E&P blog post; the other mission is “Fish for Catan.”

For this scenario, the frame is extended so that the additional 6 fish shoal hexes can be placed in the unexplored areas. Each fish shoal hex depicts one side of a piped die (representing a number between 1 and 6).

If you reveal a fish shoal hex, you receive 2 gold. During the movement phase of your ship, you have the opportunity to catch a fish haul. For this purpose, you roll a six-sided die. If an already revealed fish shoal hex depicts the number rolled, you place the fish haul on this hex. To collect the fish haul, one of your ships must reach the fish shoal hex. That is, one of the ends of your ship must point toward any of the hex's intersections. If this is the case, you may load the fish haul on your ship. Obviously, you will only roll the die if you have positioned your ships favorably.

Now you must take the fish haul to the island of the Council of Catan and deliver it there. The island of the Council of Catan is located on the east side of the starting island **(D2)**.





If you have delivered a fish haul, you may move your marker forward one field on the victory point scoring track named “Fish for Catan.” Also in this mission a special victory point card is awarded; here, it goes to the most industrious fisherman.

The game ends when a player reaches 15 victory points on his turn.

Part 6: Spices for Catan

Logbook: “Once more, the Council of Catan sent us to an area with abundant fish stocks. We have to get fish again, but that's not all. Apparently, the fish are too bland for the Catanians on the home island. Why else are we also supposed to obtain spices now? Fortunately, people say that there are no pirates' lairs in this area ...”

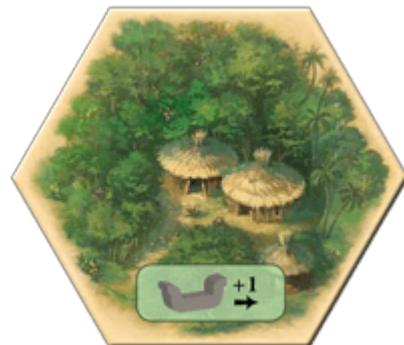


This scenario includes the missions “Fish for Catan” and “Spices for Catan.” To acquire spices, the players must first discover hexes whose inhabitants harvest spices.

If you discover a spice hex, you receive 2 gold. In addition, you place as many spice sacks on the village of the spice hex as there are players in the game.

“Finally we have discovered an island whose inhabitants harvest spices. We hastily equip a crew, put him on the next available ship, and bring him to the spice island. Needless to say that this time, the crew isn't an intrepid warrior who puts the fear of God into the pirates. No, in this mission our crews are polite merchants who are so likeable that a smile on their lips is usually enough to win the villagers over.

Gaining the friendship of the villagers pays off. For one thing, they give us a spice sack, which we hurriedly load



on our ship – for another, the villagers bestow certain advantages on us.

*The inhabitants of two villages are experienced seafarers and **help us to move our ships faster.***

The “Swift Voyage” advantage immediately increases the number of movement points of all your ships by 1. You thus may move your ship a distance of 5 instead of 4 sea routes. If you are friends with both villages marked with the “Swift Voyage” advantage, you even have 6 movement points per turn for each of your ships.



*“The inhabitants of two villages have experience fighting the pirates and **increase our chances to successfully drive away the pirate ship.**”*



One village depicts the face of a die with 5 pips, the other village depicts the face of a die with 4 pips. If you are friends with one of these two villages, you drive away an opponent's pirate ship not only by rolling a “6” but also by rolling the number depicted on the village.

*“The inhabitants of two villages are experienced merchants. **They buy our resources and give us gold in return.**”*

If you are friends with one of these two villages, once during the build and trade phase of your turn you may trade any 1 resource of your choice for 1 gold. If you are friends with both villages, you may trade 1 resource for 1 gold twice during your build and trade phase.



“And what do we give in return? We leave our merchant in the village, as a permanent representative. In exchange, until the end of our mission we enjoy the advantage the villagers bestowed on us. In addition, the villagers kindly allow us to build normal settlements and harbor settlements on the periphery of their territory.

We deliver the spice sack that we received as a welcome gift to the Council of Catan's island stronghold.

Meanwhile, two more villages have been discovered. Great – then our next ship will set sail with 2 merchants aboard. That way, by means of one single voyage we can transport two spice sacks to the Council of Catan's island stronghold.”



A victory point scoring track also exists for “Spices for Catan.” Every time you deliver a spice sack to the Council of Catan's island stronghold, you may move your marker 1 field forward. If you occupy the most advanced position on the track, you receive the victory point card “Best Spice Merchant.”

The game ends when a player reaches 15 victory points on his turn.

Part 7: Explorers & Pirates

The fifth and last scenario bears the name of the game itself. This is so because *it is the game*. All scenarios described before only serve to familiarize the players, step by step, with the missions and their tactical and strategic possibilities and comfortably lead them to the last scenario, that is, to the actual game.

To play “Explorers & Pirates,” you assemble the largest frame possible and include all three missions.



This results in a wide range of choices and decisions. Let's listen to the thoughts a player might have after launching a ship:

Should I use the ship to catch fish, or should I rather load it with crews to obtain the advantages bestowed by the villagers? Or maybe it is wiser to load a settler on the ship, to use him for founding a settlement in the more distant, unexplored area? If I later upgrade the settlement to a harbor settlement, I can build ships, crews, and more settlements there and thus would have to travel shorter distances. In the long run, that would be useful. But wait – Wolfgang has placed two crews on the Pirate Lair over there. I got to send a crew to that place quickly, otherwise he might take away the victory point I received for the Greatest Pirate Scourge ...

For experienced players it is certainly okay to skip the introductory scenario. However, I strongly advise against starting immediately with the final scenario, i.e., the actual game.

The first photo shows the final score of a 4-player test game of “Explorers & Pirates” that took 135 minutes and ended with 17:15:14:13 victory points. The second photo shows the

final score of a 3-player test game of “Explorers & Pirates”; it took 100 minutes and ended with 17:16:13 victory points.



Prototype test games – click to enlarge

During the process of creating the expansion, I had developed further missions; however, they eventually didn't end up in the game box. The reason was that three missions already filled the box to the brim with game components, and additional missions would have made the game even more expensive.

One of the omitted missions was about protecting an island from a storm surge; in another, as many inhabitants of a volcanic island as possible had to be rescued by ship to save them from the lava flow; and the search for artifacts was the topic of a third omitted mission.

So, in the end, the three missions that were most well-received during the tests and also went best together were incorporated.

“Explorers & Pirates” also works well as a 2-player game. In this case, trading between players largely ceases to exist, but due to the varied strategic and tactical options and the competition for the three important special victory points the fun of playing the game is hardly affected.

*As part of our [Explorers & Pirates game presentation page](#), I address the issue of whether or not Explorers & Pirates **can be combined with the three first expansions Seafarers, Cities & Knights, and Traders & Barbarians** in a way that makes sense.*

Klaus Teuber