



Rivals for CATAN

Part 1 – Birth of the Card Game

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A revised version of the Catan Card Game with new content and graphics will be published in fall 2010 under the title of “The Princes of Catan” (working title).

In this blog and the following ones, I will talk about the background to this revision and introduce the new card illustrations as we go along. To make the reasons for revising the game easier to understand for you, dear reader, I will go back a bit and first tell you something about the origins of the Card Game.

In 1995, the board game “The Settlers of Catan” was presented at the game fair in Nuremberg, Germany, and that very same year it was nominated Game of the Year 1995. Very soon, an extension for 5 and 6 players followed, so that a larger circle of people could also play the game. What many players were missing, however, was a 2-player version. Sure, with a few rule changes the Board Game can be played by two players as well – but that won’t allow for the same kind of fun people experience when trading and switching allies in a multiplayer game.

Therefore, at the end of 1995 I already was desirous of creating a separate card game version of “The Settlers of Catan,” based on the underlying ideas of the Board Game. Why cards? Well, the wooden houses and little wooden sticks of the Board Game perhaps lent themselves to spark the imagination, but – except for the Development Cards – they otherwise revealed little about the life of the settlers, knights, and robbers on Catan.

A pure card game, however, offered the chance to take a closer look at the settlements' and cities' houses and at what's going on around them, and watch the inhabitants of Catan perform their daily tasks. I was fascinated by the possibility of being able to observe Catan through a magnifying glass, so to speak.



A selection of cards from the first prototype.

I started developing the game in fall 1995. Unlike in the board game, I did not include the aspect of spatial competition as part of the players' expansion of their settlement structure. The players should each have their very own little realm – a principality – to be expanded at their convenience. Competition would rather emerge through the tactical and strategic use of cards. What's the best way to expand my principality, so that I get resources faster than my opponent? Is it better for me to follow an expansionist strategy when building roads and settlements, or do I rather focus on expanding my cities with buildings that yield victory points? Do I prefer a trading strategy that enables me to get resources out of my opponent, or do I strengthen my knights so that I can spoil my beloved neighboring prince's efforts?

I designed the process of building a principality in a rather simple fashion: Road cards alternated with Settlement cards. The Region Cards above the roads with their painted-on dice roll numbers – reminiscent of the Board Game – took care of the resource supply. The resources could be used to add new roads and settlements to one's principality, upgrade settlements to cities, or expand the settlements and cities by means of buildings, knights, and trade ships. Expansion Cards were placed above or below the settlements or cities. Like in the Board Game, the turn sequence consisted of harvesting, trading, and building. Trading admittedly didn't quite get an equal share though, because unlike in the Board Game, it makes little sense to trade with each other in the Card Game.

That's the way things were right from the start. There were still some changes to come regarding the building costs and the function of some individual cards, but the basic structure of the game didn't change anymore. The largest modification was a formal one. Initially, I used rectangular cards – that is, a normal card format. However, since the

regions had to be rotated to modify the resource inventory, the square format I was already using since the second prototype almost imposed itself.



A selection of cards from the second prototype.

The card illustrations were created by Franz Vohwinkel, who had already designed the visual appearance of some of my games to my entire satisfaction.

The Card Game was published in September 1996, in time for the game fair “Spiel ’96” in Essen, Germany. Its success caught us all by surprise. In the very same year – that is, within a period of only three months – the publisher Kosmos sold 87,000 Card Games. To date, almost 1.5 million copies have been sold in Germany alone.

The Catanian 2-player game also appealed to reviewers and ambitious gamers. The game made it into the selection for the Game of the Year 1997 and, in the same year, took second place in the “Deutscher Spielepreis” (German Game Prize) competition.



*Box cover of the first edition
(1996)*



*Box cover of the second edition
(2006)*

An expansion of a successful game is a very natural thing today, but in the mid-nineties it was almost a novelty. The Seafarers expansion for the Board Game had already been published in 1997. The tournament option for the Card Game was released later that same year, providing more possibilities of playing the Card Game.

In my next blog I'll describe how the Card Game expansions came about.

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