



Rivals for CATAN

Part 7 – The Era of Turmoil

August 4, 2010

Introduction

The “Era of Turmoil” Theme Game is played with the Theme Set of that name and the basic cards I introduced in part 5 of my series of blog posts about the reform of the Card Game. In the fictitious history of Catan, the environment of this set belongs to the mid-10th century, which is about 100 years after the first settlers arrived on Catan. The Viking chief Carl Gabelbart and his men are stranded on Catan. To conquer the island, he sows discord among the Princes and brings traitors, archers, and arsonists into the arena. Heinrich the Sentinel is in the thick of the action. His confessions will give us a better understanding of the Era of Turmoil.

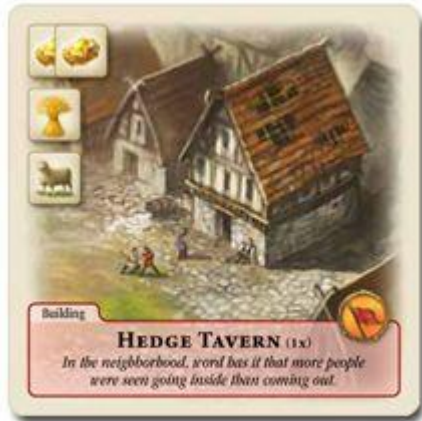
Confessions of a Sentinel

Allow me to introduce myself: I am Heinrich. Strictly speaking, it’s **Heinrich the Sentinel**, a loyal subject of the Prince. Well, let’s say: a fairly loyal subject.

Actually, the Prince is kind of in my bad books. After all those years of faithful service in the struggle against robbers and pirates, he fobbed me off with a job as a sentinel. He might as well have made me his latrine supervisor.

I’m living on the second floor of the city gate. It has a bedroom so small my predecessor must have been a midget. I’m not a midget, however, so I have to bend my knees and duck my head in order to squeeze myself into that lousy hole at night.





And my reward?

“Here, my dear Heinrich,” he said, “take this loaded die and get your payment yourself. There are so many boneheads in the **Hedge Tavern**, it shouldn’t be difficult for you to fleece some of the scoundrels there.”

And then he gave me a horn I should blow to warn the citizens when enemies were threatening the city. I must confess, until this day I haven’t blown the horn one single time. It isn’t possible anyway, because I plugged the mouthpiece. It serves me much better as a receptacle, to be filled with mead or beer. I quite often raise the horn to the Prince: “Thank you, my Prince. I drink to your downfall!”

It’s true, I’m really mad at him. Each morning, when I wake up in my dull chamber with aching limbs and a stiff neck, I curse his Highness.

The only bright spot in my life is **Irmgard**, my dear friend who lives in a spacious cottage in the swamp. Sometimes I sneak to her house at night. Then she pampers me with delicious food, and I enjoy falling asleep in her arms with my limbs comfortably extended. After dinner, we often have an animated conversation. There is one topic, however, that I rather avoid, because when the Prince is mentioned and I just can’t stop myself from making one or two bad remarks about him, I get barred from the cottage during the following days.



Irmgard adores the Prince – please don’t ask me why. She supports him whenever she can. For example, if a hero abandons the Prince or the Princess of the neighboring principality burns down one of his buildings, she pulls a few strings and sends the Prince a load of resources as a consolation.



The other night it happened again. The Princess must have smuggled an **Arsonist** into our city. Irmgard woke up from the screams in the city and ran out of the cottage. The glow from a building going up in flames illuminated the sky over the city.

“Ha!” I rejoiced, “I think the **Tithe Barn** is burning up and with it, all the grain and wool the old scrooge got out of the peasants.”

I smiled at Irmgard, but I might have guessed that she didn't smile back. Her green eyes gave me a harsh look, and it was clear that for the next days I would have to spend the night in my uncomfortable bedroom again.

“Had he built a **Fire Brigade**, this wouldn't have happened,” I grumbled. “Had you done your job instead of being here with me, it wouldn't have happened either!” she answered, went back into her cottage and locked the door.

The next morning, when I was standing in front of my city gate in a bad mood, a wispy youngster came staggering towards me. “Where are YOU heading, boy?”

“To the ... city of the ... Princess, Mister ... uh ... Sentinel,” he answered haltingly, reeking of alcohol. “I ... I'm an **Archer** and I'm supposed to ... um ... finish off the Princess ... no ... the hero of the Princess.”





“Don’t call me MISTER SENTINEL!” I ranted. “That sounds even more ridiculous than ‘night watch.’ You think you are an Archer? At best, you’re a boy who hasn’t even learned to properly carry his bow. Instead of getting drunk in the Hedge Tavern, you’ll go to the **Drill Ground** now and practice shooting a bow and arrow. If you come back sober in a couple of days, I might let you pass. But don’t you shoot a swordsman there!”

As the boy toddled off, out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a scurrying shape. Somebody was actually trying to sneak through MY city gate. In one leap, I stood next to the intruder and grabbed his right hand. “What are you doing here, you scoundrel?” “I’m not a scoundrel,” the captured guy stammered, who turned out to be another youngster reeking of booze. “I’m a **Traitor**.”



Of course, the Princess also had a Hedge Tavern in her city. It seemed that she had hired the young lad there to put one over on the Prince. I definitely wouldn’t have minded that, but I also had to think of myself and my finances in particular.

“I hope you’re aware that I have to blow my horn now, meaning that in the future you’ll only be able to betray the rats in the Prince’s dungeon?”

Since the lad couldn’t know that my horn was not suited for blowing any more, he nodded anxiously and furtively looked around. He apparently was looking for an opportunity to escape, but I maintained my tight grip on his wrist.

“Here’s a conciliatory proposal. I’ll roll the die.” With my left hand, I pulled a die out of my vest and shoved it right under the Traitor’s nose. He gave me a blank look. “If I roll a 3, 4, or 5, I take the coins the Princess gave you for your treason and send you home. If I roll a different number, you may enter the city and I only take half of your coins. Agreed?”

Given that his only alternative were the rats in the dungeon, the lad nodded eagerly. He seemed to have lost his tongue. I dropped the loaded die. It fell to the ground, bounced a few times, and then – as expected – came to a stop with the 6 facing up.

“You were lucky, boy! Fate has decided that you may perform your task in the city.” I held out my hand and received half of the pay for his treason.



In the evening, the young Traitor appeared again. He had **Carl Forkbeard** in tow. Carl was a giant of a man and notorious for his **voyages of plunder** that terrorized the coasts of Catan. I knew that the Prince was negotiating with Carl because he wanted to win him over and have him among his followers. But that wasn't going to happen now. Thanks to her Traitor, the Princess would be the one to have access to the hero carrying the huge double axe.

I smiled and let the odd couple pass through my city gate. As of now, Carl would ravage only one side of the island with his raids: the side belonging to my unbeloved Prince.

A couple of days later – I still wasn't allowed to enter Irmgard's cottage – **Riots** threatened the principality. A horde of peasants had been sighted from the **Lookout Tower**. Armed with sticks and forks, they were marching towards the city, determined and with grim faces.



The peasants' anger didn't come as a surprise to me. Without batting an eye, the Prince had ordered to rebuild the burnt-down Tithe Barn and once again collect the tithe from their grain and wool harvests.

The **Chapel**'s bell sounded the alarm and the herald shouted, "Enemies at the gate! Citizens, barricade yourselves in your houses!"

The streets quickly became empty, and an eerie silence filled the city. Only the followers of the Prince were still out and about and gradually gathered in front of my city gate. A fight was about to occur. But before the Prince ordered his heroes to confront the peasants, he pulled an ace out of his sleeve.

The band of heroes opened ranks, and **Sebastian the Itinerant Preacher** stepped forward.



He wore a long, brown habit and his hair had silvery strands, which gave him a presence that exuded authority. He appeared to be above simple human needs such as food and shelter.

"What are you going to tell those poor devils?" I asked Sebastian.

"What I always preach in such situations – and what always helps – is this: 'Whatever your worldly lord takes from you on Earth, the Lord will repay you for it a thousand times in heaven. But he who lays hands on his worldly lord will burn in hell for a thousand years.'"

Thus spoke Sebastian in front of the peasants, and the episode was over. Sebastian, unperturbed, moved on to continue spreading his heavenly pearls of wisdom among people.

A week later, I strolled across the Fairgrounds watching the hustle and bustle of the heroes of our city. They were preparing for the upcoming celebration. They were singing, making music, and dancing. Some were practicing elaborate speeches, others were performing a farce. Two heroes were competing in a spectacular sword fight exhibition.

On my way to the city gate, a messenger boy stopped me and handed me a message he was holding in his dirty little hand. It was from Irmgard; she invited me to go with her to the celebration of the two principalities which was taking place in the city of the Princess. It seemed that she had finally forgiven me. I gave the boy a coin and happily continued on my way. At the city gate, the young Archer was waiting for me – this time absolutely sober.

“Yes, you may go!” I told him good-humoredly before he could open his mouth and gave him a benevolent slap on his frail shoulder. “But don’t hit the target too well!”



And he didn’t.



Two weeks later, when I was sitting with Irmgard in the Princess’s magnificent **Large Festival Hall** enjoying the presentations of the celebration, an incident occurred that diminished my grudge against the Prince.

The Prince was standing next to his opponent the Princess, and both peacefully applauded the presentation of a young heroine who had sung a melancholy song about love and treason.

At the same time, behind the two applauding members of the royal family a hero of the Prince and a hero of the Princess, both armed with sword and shield, were getting ready for an exhibition fight.

The Archer had meanwhile sneaked up to the Festival Hall from behind and – through a small window – was aiming at the leg of the Princess’s hero. Shortly before the arrow left the bowstring with a faint whirring sound, the hero lowered his shield to scratch his shin with the shield’s rim. The arrow grazed the shield boss and then took another, more fateful direction.

In the dim light of the hall, nobody had noticed that an arrow had penetrated into the Prince’s rear end. The Prince suddenly stopped applauding, emitted a bloodcurdling scream and then jumped about like crazy, and nobody knew whether to applaud or call the guards. Only when the Prince reached back and tried to pull out the arrow, it began to dawn upon everyone what had happened.

Irmgard was so surprised and appalled that she didn't notice my gleeful grin. Then, when she looked towards me, I already had put on a shocked face and shouted, "Our poor Prince!!! Get a doctor!"

Irmgard put her hand on my arm and smiled at me. I sighed; the next nights in her comfortable cottage were granted.

Notes Regarding the Theme Set

The face-up card stack available to both players consists of the two Hedge Tavern cards. If you have built a Hedge Tavern, you can put Traitors, Archers, and Arsonists onto your opponent. This means that in the Theme Game with this set, the players' life is a little harder than in the "The Era of Gold" Theme Set I introduced in my last blog post. And if you have the strength advantage, you will often find opportunity to vex your opponent.

Gold also plays a major role in this set, because you can protect your units from the Riots event only if you have enough gold at that crucial moment.

In my next blog post, I will introduce the cards of the set "The Era of Progress" and explain the rules of the Card Game's next level, the Duel of the Princes. I'll say only this much now: The Duel of the Princes is played with the basic cards and the cards of all three Theme Sets.

And if someone hasn't noticed yet: All cards and Theme Sets I describe in my blog posts about the new version of the Card Game are included in the box of the card game "The Princes of Catan."

Klaus Teuber

