

Castello Methoni

Walls? Triangular spaces? That sounds familiar. Right – in 2006, Hans im Glück published MAUERBAUER (aka MASON), by Leo Colovini. The author has maintained his topological concept, but has now turned it into something completely different. On your turn, you play one or two cards, each of which shows one of six types of landscape. For each card, you then place a wall on any free border of a space of the corresponding type. Finally, you put one of your own houses (actually, cubes) on either of the two spaces next to the wall and a house from your left or your right neighbor on the other side of the wall.

Once you place a wall and, in doing so, completely enclose a domain, you acquire it by paying to the bank one ducat per domain space and buying other players' houses on these spaces from their owners – an offer they cannot refuse. If the domain contains one of the six market spaces, you receive the ducat lying there and hope for income from the market from the next turn on. If there are other domains abutting on the newly-acquired land, you may buy them from their owner(s) without their objection by paying two ducats per space plus the price of all buildings there. If there are at least three houses of the same color in one area, they are upgraded to a villa; for future businesses, such a building will have a value of five ducats.

Once all the walls have been used up, the game ends and a final scoring takes place. Each of your own land spaces gives you three ducats; and the owners of the two largest domains earn extra points. Houses are worthless in the end, whereas you get one point for each ducat. Your secret Objective card (initially allotted to you) awards you one ducat for each of your spaces of the matching landscape type; but in practice, this hardly turns out to be crucial for the win.

Two aspects are particularly interesting in this game: First, which of my neighbors should I please with the placement of a house? This can lead to alliances, which might be frustrating in the beginning for the disregarded player, especially in the

three-player setting. But as long as there is no actual couple sitting at the table that always closes ranks against the rest of the world, what fortunately prevails is the intention of doing harm to the leading player. And besides, it can sometimes happen that a preferred player is running

also, such a cash cow is much more lucrative at the beginning than it is towards the end of the game. Therefore, you shouldn't fret if you have to surrender all your domains, since you might even win the game nevertheless because of your sales. Taking your opponents' liquidity into account, the special appeal is to



out of cubes

so that he and his neighbors are forced to resort to others.

Secondly, acquiring territories, expanding, and then merging them is something that has already been fun in other games, such as ACQUIRE (1962), where players establish hotels and consolidate them with one another. Here, in Greece (Methoni is located in the southern of the Peloponnese), merging is also recommended in most cases. Provided you have the right cards, you can gain a pretty large domain by cleverly placing two walls. An annexation appears even more lucrative. Both players involved might benefit, since the annexed player gets twice as much for the spaces and profits from the value increase of the villas. But unfortunately, you might sometimes not have enough money for such a coup. Towards the end of the game, some players might realize too late that, after having paid for expensive villas, they get stuck with them, and that the increase in land value and a possible bonus according to the size don't compensate for the investment costs.

Domains with a marketplace naturally attract the competition all the more. Here

use the topology in your own interest and to conceive its actual value.

However, all players should have understood the interrelation of the game's elements; winning because other players unnecessarily presented good assists is not really satisfying. Basically, CASTELLO METHONI is an abstract game. Its simple rules, paired with a good deal of depth of play, can lead to very different game courses; they work perfectly with any of the suggested numbers of players, and they make for brisk playing fun. Obviously, no European company has warmed to the game so far. It would have found a worthy place at Winning Moves, where CLANS, an award-winning game by the same author, was published back in 2002 – if this series in the square boxes still existed. *Christwart Conrad/sbw*

CASTELLO METHONI (Mandoo Games) by Leo Colovini, for 3–5 players, about 8+ years, duration: about 40–60 minutes, price: about 45 €

↑ TOP

↗ GOOD

→ FAIR

↓ POOR