

DWARVEN AGRICULTURE AND HUSBANDRY

CAVERNA

DIE HÖHLENBAUERN



When you open for the first time the big and heavy box of CAVERNA you immediately have two sensations:

- (1) - You paid something more than usual but you got "a lot" for your money
- (2) - If you already played AGRICOLA in the past everything inside is "familiar".

Both sensations are true and after a few games CAVERNA quickly entered in my personal TOP TEN games. But before going to the details let me first explain that I love AGRICOLA and I played it many times: for a whole year I used all the cards and I played exclusively with experienced gamers, but thereafter I tried the "family" version and I was immediately hooked. I succeeded to play Agricola also with my wife and other inexperienced players and all appreciated the game very much and wished to play it again and again. I also played a lot the 2 players version (AGRICOLA: ALL CREATURES BIG AND SMALL) especially with my younger son and we liked the use of special tiles (instead of the cards). CAVERNA is in effect a new version of AGRICOLA for Families and it uses tiles instead of cards.

MATERIALS

When you open the box of CAVERNA for the first time you should be prepared to spend a couple of hours to set all the materials. Lay down initially the seven large player HOME boards, the three Basic boards and the Additional smaller ones (necessary to prepare a board whose final dimension depends on the number of players). Then you have to separate and organize the colored wooden and plastic pieces: 145 animals (dog, sheep, donkey, wild boars and cattle), 145 resources (wood, stone, grain and vegetables), 35 dwarves (in 7 colors), 21 stables (in 7 colors) plus 45 black Ore and 20 red Rubin gems (plastic).

Finally find some place for the plethora of hard cardboard pieces (furnishing and landscape tiles, food, coins, weapon markers, action cards, etc.). All with the usual nice "Lookout" graphics.

But nice materials alone do not guarantee a good game, so let's see how all that works

THE GAME

For everyone that already played AGRICOLA the following notes will be easy to understand as the mechanics are very similar. You have as usual your personal board but this time it is divided in two parts: on your right

you have a mountain that you may dig to find minerals and rubies and to create new caverns to host your family; on your left there is a forest that you may transform in pastures for your animals or fields to cultivate your corn and vegetables.

The "composite" board is used to perform the different actions that will allow your dwarves to work, to feed and to increase the family as CAVERNA is basically another "worker placement" game. You start with two dwarves and therefore you may perform only TWO actions per turn, but you later you may increase your family up to seven dwarves, so you may arrive at seven actions per turn.

As in AGRICOLA you place one new card every turn to increase the number and type of actions.

During the game you may purchase a certain number of tiles to build extra "rooms" that will allow you to increase your family or some "shops" that will give you some bonus during or at the end of the game. But every new tile must be placed in a cavern inside the mountain, and to place a cavern you need to perform a special action on the main board.

You start the game with two dwarves and few coins (one for players 1 and 2, two for player 3 and three for the other players). From now on you have to rely only on your ability to get resources and food. There are no combats and the only interaction with the others players is to occupy the available actions spaces on the board.

The game proceed clockwise and players place one dwarf per round to immediately perform the selected action: take some resources (stone, wood, food, minerals, rubies, etc.) and eventually take a cavern/tunnel tile or a field/pasture to place on the personal board (mountain or wood). You may also get animals (initially only dogs, sheep or donkeys are available, but later wild boars and cattle also arrive) but you need the right space for them. Initially a couple of animals may be hosted in your cavern, like in AGRICOLA houses, but you are forced to prepare pastures, stables, etc. before being able to start a veritable breeding. During play some special cards will be discovered and used to increase your family, but do not forget to build in advance new caverns and new rooms for the new members or they will immediately ... die.

A new type of action was created for CAVERNA: the "FORGE". During the game you will find 2 action cards where you may send one of your Dwarves to forge a "weapon". You pay minerals and you get a numbered shield: the number is the "actual strength" of your warrior! Once you have a warrior you may send him to action spaces where he can make raids to get more resources

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A very interesting optimization game with a strong „bucolic“ feeling. You becomes really involved in the growth of your „dwarf“ family. And no „food stress“ as in Agricola.

or free actions: there are 4 "raid" cases and cards and they allow 1 to 4 raids. Each raid consists in comparing the strength of your warrior with the possible booty that you can get; at strength "2", for example, you may get 1 Grain or 1 Sheep; at strength "10" you may get a Cow or a Large Pasture for "half price"; at strength "14" (the maximum) you may get a new cavern for free, etc. Every time that one of your warriors perform a raid his strength is increased by "1" (until a maximum of 14). Raids are not addressed against the other players (this is a pacific game, after all) and their purpose is to give you something extra.

Another new rule is that of MINES: as I wrote before we have the opportunity to create tunnels and caverns inside the mountain spaces of our personal board, but we may also create mines on top of the tunnels if we send a worker on a specific action case of the board. There are two types of mines: "ore" mines and "ruby" mines. Both give you Victory Points (VP) if you build them, and both give you extra minerals or rubies if you place a worker in specific cases of the board. With "ore" you may forge weapons for your warriors or pay the cost for some special tiles. "Rubies" are a sort of "Jokers" and you may spend them "when you wish" to get resources, animals, terrains, etc. (a summary card explain all those possibilities).

DOGS are a new type of animal introduced in the game: their function is to survey sheep on pastures that are still without fences. You may have in each pasture tile as many sheep as are dogs, plus one. A good help, especially in the first turns of the game, to maintain sheep even if you do not have yet the wood necessary to build fences.

Finally there is a variation of the Turn Action Cards: seven round cardboard tokens are placed on the last seven spaces of the turn track. Every time that an action card is placed on those spaces the tokens are overturned and you know if you have to feed your dwarves in that turn or if you have

some penalties when you harvest. Those tokens add some suspense to the game and oblige the players to maintain a little reserve of food ... just in case!

AGRICOLA players will remember the continuous "stress" that they experiment all along the game because they have to find food to feed their farmers: luckily getting food is not such a difficult task in CAVERNA and you do not need any special items (kilns, kitchens, etc.) to increase your food capacity. In our games we never had a real problem in feeding our workers, but of course you must always keep an eye on your reserves.

In summary every TURN is composed of a different number of rounds and in each round you may place a worker on the board to do something. You have to prepare fields where you may sow grain or vegetables and to cut the forest to create pastures where you will breed sheep, cattle and boars. Pastures must be closed with fences and you create fences only by getting wood. Inside the mountain you may create tunnels and caverns: tunnels will generate mines, while caverns are used to increase the family members and to purchase extra furnishing.

CAVERNA does not use cards (like Agricola's Occupation, Major or Minor Improvements, etc.) but you have the possibility to purchase tiles to improve your performances. Four double face small boards (90x295 mm) show you what is available and the cost to purchase it: face 1 shows 27 different types of tiles while face 2 shows 48 of them (and it is suggested with 6-7 players). The most used are "dwelling room" ORANGE tiles: each of them may host an extra dwarf and you cannot "generate" a new worker without having a dwelling ready for him. To install a dwelling you first need an empty cavern inside your mountain, then you have to go to the right case with one of your workers and pay 4 wood and 3 stone to get it. Each dwelling also grants you 3 VP at the game's end. "GREEN" tiles are mainly Artisans that give special bonus to their owners (extra resources, discounts to purchase other tiles, extra spaces for your animals, etc.), while "YELLOW" tiles are mainly "shops" to transform resources in food or to get special bonus at the game's end.

At the end of the last turn the players transform in GOLD (Victory Points) all their properties and the higher scorer will be the winner.

COMMENTS

The main source of VP are the animals as you get 1 Gold for each of them (including dogs): therefore you have to try to prepare very early in the game some pastures and

then fence them as early as you get the opportunity. Sheep can be hosted also in pastures that do not have fences, provided that you have bought enough dogs. Dogs are a "bonus" given in the same Action space that is used to add furniture to one of your caverns, so when you have enough resources to make a Dwelling add a dog to your board: they do not need specific spaces as the other animals, so you have nothing to worry and you may even accumulate many of them. In a couple of our test a player arrived to own up to 7-8 dogs and he used them widely to host 8-9 sheep in a small pasture. Donkeys may be placed ONLY in mines, so they are not so popular: but if the opportunity arises to take the available donkeys you may quickly transform them in food (1 donkey = 1 food; 2 donkeys = 3 food). Do not forget that at the end of each "harvest" turn you will get a FREE animal if you already have two or more of that type, so use the Expeditions to purchase the animals that you need to form at least a couple. Do not forget that you may get a couple of Boars covering two specific cases on your Forest.

The second most important source of VP are the mines and fenced pastures: each "ore" mine grants 3 VP, while each "ruby" mine gives 4 VP. Each small fence grants 2 VP while each big one gives 4 VP. Your ter-

ritory has 12 "wood" spaces and 12 "mountain" spaces, so you have to accurately program how to use ALL those spaces. A "big" fenced pasture need TWO adjacent green spaces to be built so the best solution could be to build FOUR double tiles (pasture plus field) and FOUR single green tiles (that you get for 2 ruby each). You may then fence FOUR big pastures (16 VP) where you may host 4 animals each (8 with a stable) while you still have four fields for your grain and vegetables. Inside the mountain you may work in a similar way, but you have to remember that you need at least 4-5 caverns: 2-3 of them are to build dwellings for extra dwarves while the other are for special tiles. Knowing that each "ore" mine can be built only on two adjacent tunnels, you know in advance that you practically will be limited to a couple of "ore" mines (6 VP) and another couple of "ruby" mines (8VP).

Finally we have the "special tiles". I do not wish to bore you here with a list of all the possible VP that you may get with those tiles, but in general you get VP if you have some kind of materials or a certain number of armed dwarves or rubies or ore, etc. If you are "late" in one of the above strategies (animals and pastures/caverns) you may eventually concentrate on special tiles and



try to maximize the use of 2-3 of them. Do not forget also that some Action Cards will allow you to get Gold (1 Gold = 1 VP) from different resources (for example giving "ore" for "gold and food", 3 gold instead of building, etc.) and additional gold may arrive through expeditions (from level 6 on).

As it happens in AGRICOLA you lose VP if you have some empty spaces on your personal board or if you do not have all kind of animals.

So what to say as a final comment? My friends and I appreciated very much CAVERNA and everybody affirm that it is a step forward, compared to Agricola. Easier to play, no "food" stress, not too many cards to read and understand (and no extra decks to purchase ...).

The game is very "logical" and the rules are really very clear, with lot of examples, frequent reminds for detailed rules of particular actions (something like "for more information about the use of XXX go to page YYY") and a detailed summary about the Action spaces on the board, the Action cards and the special tile.

A very very good game. ☑

Pietro Cremona

INFORMATION	
Designer: Uwe Rosenberg	PLAYERS: 1-7
Artist: Klemens Franz	AGE: 12+
Price: ca. 60 Euro	TIME: var
Publisher: Lookout Games 2013 www.lookout-spiele.de	

EVALUATION	
Development, worker placement Users: With friends Version: it Rules: de en fr it In-game text: yes	
Comments: Loads of components * Topic based on Agricola * Clear concise rules * Takes approx. 30 min per player	
Compares to: Agricola, Ora et Labora	
Other editions: 999 Games, Lacerta, Filosofia, Homoludicus, Mayfair, uplay.it	
	My rating:

SPELEOLOGY FOR AMATEURS

THE CAVE

POTHOLERS IN CAVES

You have always wanted to be a speleologist? You learned to dive in freezing water? Have learned to spot when carbon monoxide is satiating the air instead of oxygen? You love narrow gorges and dark gaps? Then this is the right place for you!

The Cave is a game for 2-5 speleologist who explore the underground universe of a large cave system. At the start of the game there is only a cave entry with a few starting shafts or ducts - their number varies from three in case of two speleologists to six shafts for five speleologists. Each player stuffs his backpack with necessary equipment. There are rubber rafts, photographic equipment, oxygen tanks, ropes and food rations. You can even take along a tent to set up a camp with equipment somewhere in the depths of the mountain.

The game itself comprises cave tiles, a lot of equipment markers, many, many markers which you acquire for overcoming obstacles and other feats, player boards and figurines for speleologists and camp tents. The Cave tiles are divided into four groups of tiles, according to their backsides. For each number of players you randomly remove some cave tiles. The remaining cave tiles are introduced into the game one after the other and their random grouping results in a game that remains challenging all the time. The tiles show different kinds of passages and crossings, and there are a number of obstacles in the shafts. There are three levels of shaft constrictions, called squeezes, and there are water areas, landmarks and abysses. To be able to cross all those obstacles you should have the respective equipment with you. This is the purpose of the player boards.

At the start of the game you put equipment on your player board. But take care, there is limited space available, a mechanism that reminds one of Bakong. You should carry a good variety of things, space is limited and don't forget that a speleologist is human and needs to eat sometimes. The longer such an explorer stays away from cave entry or camp the more space is taken up by food in the backpack. The more food the less equipment. The less equipment the fewer opportunities to explore the cave. Thus the filling of your backpack is the first obstacle or challenge in the game. Food, Rope and oxygen

tanks are really used up when used and so the backpack empties in the course of the game. A raft in your backpack offers a great variety of opportunities to cross water. As can be expected, you can use photographic equipment more than once. That's something, for sure, as you only need one space in the backpack for the photo equipment and one for the raft. And yet some players leave both those things behind in the camp. There is a separate area on the player

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A thrilling game with friends that plays differently each time and offers a different challenge each time

board representing stores in a camp set up in the cave system. But those stores must be fetched from the entry and taken to the camp....

The second purpose of the player board is to couple actions with action points (AP), just as we have seen it in the classic Tikal. In his turn a player has 5 AP which he can allocate anyway he wants. To explore the cave you must place tiles. To place a cave tile costs you 1 AP and you must be positioned at the edge of a tile that you have explored already. You draw a cave tile from the stack and place it in congruency with your position. Reminds one of Carcassonne, somehow. Doesn't it? If you cannot place the tile you take a Blind Alley tile and place this instead. To enter a new cave tile costs you yet another AP. For obstacles you have to pay a surcharge, but as a compensation the first player to overcome an obstacle is rewarded with a marker that scores victory points at the end of the game.

Water can be crossed with a raft. The raft can be inflated, used, deflated and repacked into the backpack. This complete procedure costs you only one additional AP. (What a pity that you passed on bringing the boat). But, should you want to acquire the water obstacle reward for the lake you need to dive and for this you need oxygen tanks. The price for using them is 2 AP and spending one oxygen tank. How nice that they come in a double pack! You can also dive to cross water, if you did not bring your raft in your backpack, just divesting you of another 2 AP surcharge and one oxygen tank.