

Evaluation of the Game

The rules are clearly structured and nicely explained with examples. The meaning of the cards is self-explaining due to the symbols. The real challenge of the game is the optimum use of the Action Points. Events are well balanced and usually target either the value of a building or the number of buildings in a block. The event "Urban Renewal" has an effect only very rarely. Politicians change owners rather frequently so that there is no imbalance incurring. The shifting of money and prestige markers ensures a certain tension and challenge in the game. The same goes for the Vocation markers, as they initiate interaction and keep the game interesting. What about a strategy for the game? A player can decide on a certain tactic for his card selection: Collect Permit Cards or build Contracts. Valuable permits earn you money from investments. Contracts must be built immediately. For that the right timing seems to be essential! All the same, both kinds of cards are important. All in all I believe that the game meets even very high requirements and seems geared to provide good fun for meticulous strategic thinkers. ☑

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INFORMATION

Designer: Chad Jensen

Artist: Jensen, MacGowan, Nieto

Price: ca. 50 Euro

Publisher: GMT Games 2011

www.gmtgames.com

PLAYERS:

2-4

AGE:

12+

TIME:

180+

EVALUATION

Development game
For experts
Version: en
Rules: en
In-game text: yes

Comments:

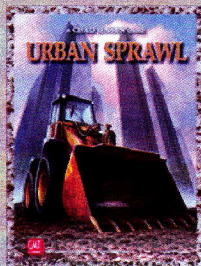
Self explaining symbols on the cards
* Action Points Allocation is central element of the game * This puts the emphasis on planning and thinking

Compares to:

Milton Keynes and other building games on given areas

Other editions:

Currently none



My rating:



THE ANGLO-FRENCH WAR ...

A FEW ACRES OF SNOW

... TO CONTROL CANADA



In 1758 the French writer François Voltaire made an acid comment in his book "Candide", referring to the situation in the French colonies of America (la "Nouvelle France") and particularly in North America (Canada). He did not agree that France had to defend those territories against Great Britain as they were just "quelques arpents de neige" (a few acres of snow). In effect the best and most productive territories were already in the hands of Great Britain and the rest was, and still is, unproductive and frost for most of the year so he considered a waste of time to fight and spend money and lives for this territory.

Martin Wallace used this "war" as an historical base and designed a deck building card game inspired by Vaccarino's best seller "Dominion". Hopefully A FEW ACRES OF SNOW is not a "clone" of Dominion, but a very interesting and addictive game for two players: a sort of interesting "connection" between board games and war games.

The game has a beautiful box and includes the following components: a "mounted" map (that shows the Nord-East part of America, from Norfolk to Louisiana and from Richmond to Detroit), two Players Aid sheets (with a summary of the rules on one side and a list of the "Imperial" cards on the other side, with the explanation of their use), 3 card decks (one for the British, one for the French and a small one for common use), wooden counters (to mark the control of the occupied cities and the fortifications), four "siege" markers (two black, one red and one blue) and coins (small "silver" and large "gold" discs). Rules and Players Aids are in FOUR languages (English, French, Italian and German), each one with its own booklet.

Please also note that the game comes in two different editions: "normal" and "limited". Aside from the "price" the only difference is on the components: the "normal" edition has blue and red disks (for cities), blue and red cubes (for villages), black disks (for fortifications) and plastic coins; the "limited" edition has small houses for villages, a sort of small churches for cities, special shaped forts and wooden coins: silver (1 coin) and gold (5 coins).

Nothing changes on the rules but they always refer to the "normal" components.

The set up is done placing villages and cities on the map on the colored locations: a red or blue village on the "square" locations, a red or blue city on the "round" locations. All the "grey" locations are neutral at the beginning of the game. Each location, besides its name, may have extra symbols: a ship (if it is a port), a number inside a small grey hex (the Victory Points (VP) assigned by the location at the game end), a "settlers" symbol (showing that this location must be colonized to be occupied) and a military symbol (to show that this location is defended by a garrison).

Each player has to prepare THREE decks at the game's start: Deck One (or INITIAL deck) includes the cards owned by each player at the beginning (10 for the French and 7 for the British); Deck Two (or LOCATION deck) has cards with the name of the locations that each player may reach (19 for the

Pietro Cremona

A very interactive deck building game with an interesting historical flavor.

French and 26 for the British); Deck Three (or IMPERIAL deck, with 18 cards for the French and 21 for the British) includes a plethora of supports for the conflict: regular armies, leaders, militia, fortifications, rangers, natives, settlers, governors, ships, home support, etc.

Each LOCATION card has the name of one of the locations on the map, lists all the locations that may be reached from there and how (by boat, by ship, by cart). On the bottom of each card are printed one or more symbols in different combinations (ship, military, settlers, money, fur, boat, wagon). The players must search the deck and find the appropriate card when they occupy the location with the same name for the first time; then they add this location card to their discard deck.

Each IMPERIAL card shows the name of the card, the "cost" (in coins) to purchase it (from 0 to 8), a Naval or Infantry military symbol and some instructions for its use: some cards have also an "ambush" symbol (this means that they may be ambushed). These cards are freely selected by the players during the game.

Each deck has its own place on the board, where you also find a Reserve, a Discard Pile and two Siege "spaces" that we will examine

later.

The final 9 special "green" cards are placed aside the board and during play are available to both players: 5 "Native Americans" (free), 2 "Fortifications" (cost 5 coins) and 2 "Settlers" (cost 7 coins).

The British player receives 12 coins at the set-up, while the French gets only 5. Both players shuffle their INITIAL deck and take 5 cards in hands, putting the remaining cards in the DRAW DECK space on the board.

The British is always the first in each turn; the players alternate their turns and the game ends when one side has used (or lost) all his village (or city) counters. Each player then sum the VP of the locations under his control (doubling their value if a CITY is built in a location) and the higher score wins the game. The French player may also immediately win the game taking Boston or New York: the British win immediately if he takes Quebec.

Each turn allows the players to take TWO ACTIONS (only one in turn 1) to be selected between the following:

– EXPANSIVE ACTION:

(1.1) – Settle a location: you may enter a new location playing a card that has that location in his list of possible destinations, plus a card with the right transport symbol (ship, wagon, boat) plus, eventually, a card with a settlers symbol (if the destination has this symbol)

(1.2) – Develop a location: you may transform a village in a city by playing a card with the name of that location together with a Settlers card.



(1.3) – Fortify a location: you may add a fortification counter to a location if you play that location's card plus a fortification card, paying 3 coins to the bank.

– AGGRESSIVE ACTIONS:

(2.1) – Besiege a location: you have to play a card that has that location on his lists, then a card with the right transport symbol and a card with a military symbol (Naval or Infantry, depending on the attacked location). The latter is placed in your "siege" space on the board. You then place the siege marker of your color on the besieged location and one black marker on the siege track, adding your military strength and subtracting the defensive value of the location. The siege track is divided in three section; attacker section, neutral section (numbered 0-1) and defender section.

(2.2) – Reinforce a Siege: you play a military card on your siege space to counter an enemy attack or to reinforce your own attack. If at the beginning of his turn the attacker has at least 2 points on his side of the siege track he wins the siege and takes all his cards back on his discard pile: the defender must discard 1 "Imperial" card (back into the Imperial deck) and put all the other cards on his discard pile. If at the beginning of his turn the defender has at least 1 siege point on his track he wins the siege (same procedure and discards).

(2.3) – Raid: some cards (Native Americans, Coureurs de bois, Rangers) allow the player to launch a raid on his opponent's locations within range: no extra locations or transport cards are necessary. The opponent may block the raid using a defensive card (Native American, Rangers, Coureurs de bois and, only for the French, Militia) or the location card from his hand. If the raid is not blocked the attacker takes the village counter (and the location remain empty) or the city counter (and the location receives a village counter instead). The raided counters will give extra VP at the game's end.

(2.4) – Ambush: similarly to the above action (and using the same cards), you may play a card saying that you want to ambush your opponent and he may block you (same rules as the raids) or discard one card with an Ambush symbol (this card will go back to the Imperial deck) if he has one in his hand. Otherwise the Ambush has no effect.

(2.5) – Priest/Indian leader: those cards (2 French and 1 British) oblige your opponent to give you (from his hand or his reserve) a "green" American Native card. If he hasn't it he must show you his complete hand to prove that.

– FINANCIAL ACTIONS:

(3.1) – Take money: you play a Location card and take the value indicated in the gold

circle

(3.2) – Merchant: you play a card with a ship symbol plus 1 or 2 cards with gold symbol and take that amount of coins

(3.3) – Trader: you play a TRADER card plus extra cards with a "fur" symbol, and you receive 2 coins per exposed fur.

(3.4) – Piracy: this is valid only for the French player and only if he plays the card LOUISBURG, together with another card with a ship symbol. Then he takes 2 coins from the British player.

– CARD MANAGEMENT ACTIONS:

these are actions that you may use to take new cards from the Imperial or Green decks (paying the cost, if indicated), discard one or more cards from your hand to the Discard pile (the first is free, the following ones cost 1 coin each), placing cards on the RESERVE space of the board (one card per action) or taking all the cards from the reserve (free action) paying 1 coin per card. You may also play special cards that give you the opportunity to increase your hand (Home support), search for a card from the discard deck (Intendant), and so on.

– Finally you may also PASS your turn (doing nothing) or CONCEDE A SIEGE (same procedure seen in 2.2).

When you finish your turn you refill your hand (to a maximum of 5 cards) from the Draw deck: if this is exhausted you take the discard pile, shuffle it and then refill. If you have more than 5 cards in your hand at the end of your turn (this may happen if you play HOME SUPPORT) you cannot draw any card.

The first game or two may be confusing as you need to know the cards and their "power", but thereafter everything is very simple and intuitive, so you may concentrate on your strategy: these are very different for the French and the British.

The British have a stronger military power and must try to use it since the beginning: almost all games start in effect with the British attacking Halifax, a very important location from which it is possible to reach Louisburg and, if you take it, Quebec, thus winning the game. To this strategy (that was discussed deeply for weeks in Internet until Martin Wallace changed a few rules, as we will see later) the French must counter besieging immediately Halifax (in order to oblige the British to spend a lot of time and add military cards to the siege) and/or fortifying Louisburg to better sustain an eventual siege.

If the Halifax strategy is halted then the British player must move inland and take the most important locations (the ones that will give many VP, such as Deerfield, Albany,



Richmond and Baltimore) protecting them with fortifications to avoid the French raids. Then he may improve his most important locations from villages to cities to double their VP.

The French player must protect Louisburg, raiding Halifax as soon as possible (as we have seen) and advance along the Great Lakes to take most of the locations that gives him a good flow of VP (Fort Frontenac, Oswego, Fort Niagara, Detroit, etc.): then he may advance quickly from Oswego to Fort Stanwix and/or from Montreal towards Ticonderoga in order to raid Albany and Deerfield until the British will be able to fortify them (raids are not allowed against or through fortifications).

To accomplish those strategies you have to increase your initial hand with new cards: the location cards arrive ... free of charge when you conquer the location on the map, but all the Imperial cards have to be selected and bought as "actions".

The British has a "light" Initial hand: just 7 cards that becomes 8 after turn 1 (with the acquisition of Halifax). All those cards are very powerful and you must use them at the best in order to quickly "turn" your deck again and again. At the beginning use the action "Merchant" as often as possible to acquire 5 or 6 coins every turn discarding three cards each time. If you wish to try the Halifax strategy you must maintain a light hand, so buy a minimum of Imperial cards (the Rangers, one Regular Infantry, the Artillery) and never stops the Merchant action to accumulate money. If this strategy is countered by the French do not lose too much time but try to win the siege as quickly as possible and fortify Halifax: then go for the VP locations. Another dirty tactic is advancing on Fort Halifax in order to raid Quebec as often as possible obliging the French player to defend it: for this strategy you need to acquire as early as possible at least two green cards Native Americans.

The French need to launch a strong reaction to the Halifax strategy, as we have seen, in order to make very difficult for the British to go for Louisburg, but his main goal is to reach the locations along the Great Lakes (to accumulate VP) and to raid the British as often as possible. To get this goal the French must acquire some native Americans as soon as possible and use them continuously to oblige the British to spend time and cards for the defense. Also try to trade as much as possible, especially at the beginning when your deck is low and the cards turn quickly, as you will need later the money to purchase troops for your defensive sieges or for your own attacks against

the British locations. Do not lose the opportunity to use Piracy against the British (remember? The Louisburg card plus a ship) as you will gain "only" TWO coins, but your opponent loses them ...

Of course the more cards you take (reaching new locations or purchasing from the Imperial deck) the more difficult is to have in hand the "right" ones at the right moment (you have to wait until the draw deck is exhausted before turning the discard pile back in play): you must be patient, sometimes, and slowly build your hand card by card, playing a good "combo" when you are ready. A good action may be to reach a location with your first action (2-3 cards) and to immediately fortify it (2 cards and 3 coins) to avoid the risk of a raid. This tactic will take time but is very powerful as you secure a location from enemy raids and you change 4-5 cards in a single turn.

When you have too many location cards in your hand and you know that some of them are practically useless (no money, no military, no need to use them for a move inland, etc.), it could help the use of the Governor, that will allow you to discard TWO cards back into the Location deck.

The game is very interesting and very interactive. Once you learned the game mechanics and how to use the cards you will be able to play it in 90 minutes: we were unable to play it in 60 minutes (as written on the box) even after more than 20 games as the "middle game" is very important and you have to think a little about your next actions.

We (my friends and I) are all expert gamers and/or wargamers and we never fell in love with Dominion (even if, sometimes, it is nice to play) so we started our test with a certain "negative" attitude, despite the good evaluations of BGG. But after the first test we were really hooked and we wanted to play again and again to find a new winning strategy or how to counter it. At the moment we are happy to say that we were unable to a sure path to the victory, thus we may admit that the game is really well done.

But it is important to say that we always played with the "officially" modified rules (by Martin Wallace) that are listed here:

OFFICIAL ERRATA

- Remove the French "Bateaux" card from the initial deck and place it in the Imperial deck (the French starts with only 9 cards)
- You cannot place LOCATION cards into the Reserve space
- The raid distance is increased to TWO connections (plus the usual extra connection per additional card played)
- The HOME SUPPORT card allows you to take only the card available on the Draw

deck. If there are less than three cards left you take only what remain and you cannot shuffle the deck to pick up the remainder. You shuffle the deck only when you need to refill your hand.

EXTRA "RULE GENERATOR" SHEET

At PLAY 2012 in March (the Italian "Festival dei giochi" or gaming national convention) Martin Wallace and his Italian distributor (Asterion) presented an expansion for A Few Acres of Snow: a simple cardboard sheet with the instructions for a randomly generated series of rules. You use 1D6 and you randomly select a set of "extra rules": then you dice again and you pick up the selected rule.

For example: with an initial "4" you select the second group of rules. With a further "3" you select the rule "An Ambush is blocked and the action is not counted"; with a "5" you get "Put a fortification marker on Quebec at the beginning of the game"; and so on.

This introduces some "random" effects on the game that I personally do not like, but obviously it varies the game very much, as this is a game that you want to play again and again probably this rule will keep it fresh for a long time. Try it anyway. ☑

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INFORMATION

Designer: Martin Wallace

Artist: Peter Dennis

Price: ca. 30 Euro

Publisher: Treefrog Games 2011

www.treefroggames.com

PLAYERS:
2

AGE:
13+

TIME:
100+

EVALUATION

Deck building game
For experts
Version: multi
Rules: de en fr it
In-game text: yes

Comments:

Harmonious symbiosis of deck building and conflict simulation * Gaming experience and some "learning" games are necessary * No guaranteed winning strategy

Compares to:

Dominion and other Deck building games

Other editions:

Currently none

