

Worth Your Attention

Edo is the former name of Tokyo, which at the start of the 17th century was just a small fishing village. However, it was also the location of the fortress of the Tokugawa clan, and they had recently gained the Shogunate and thereby become the effective rulers of Japan. It was a position they would hold until the middle of the 19th century, and during their rule Edo became the country's administrative centre, and over time its most important city. It is this rise to prominence of a city, and the means by which it is achieved, that provide the theme for this new game from Queen, which is not to say that when you play it you will get much feeling of anything in the way of a story. As is the case with most German games, the theme is simply a peg on which to hang an interesting assemblage of mechanisms, and here it means little beyond the fact that some of the pieces are called samurai and wages are paid in rice rather than money. This observation is not to be read as a criticism. I am a great admirer of the games of Stefan Feld, and all his games fit this description. Theme first or mechanisms first, what matters is that a game should be interesting and enjoyable to play, which Edo is.

At its base Edo is another game which sees you collecting resources in order to build buildings, which then give you victory points. It is a much used idea, but fortunately it is just the foundation in this case, and the structure that has been built upon it is sufficiently original to make the game stand out from the crowd.

The novelty comes in the way you are required to choose your actions. Each player begins the game with five officials, three authorization cards and a rack into which the cards will fit. The cards, which are actually fairly large, square, cardboard tiles, are divided along their diagonals into four areas, each showing a possible action and the number of times that the card authorises you to take it.

At the start of each round you choose one action from each card and then place the card in the rack so that the chosen action is the one at the bottom. You then decide how many times you want to take each action and place your officials in front of the cards, each official enabling you to take that particular action once. It's a planning process determining which actions you will take in the next phase of the round and how often. The number of per-

missions on offer for each action is in the range 1 to 4, and this immediately presents you with some hard decisions, as your paltry allocation of five officials simply isn't enough to enable you to do all that you would like. It also won't surprise you to learn that actions you'd like to take have an irritating habit of being on the same card, and what the whole process adds up to is a clever and original way of forcing you to make difficult choices.

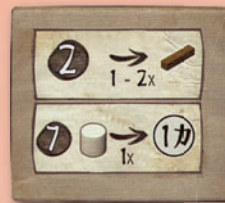
Bureaucrats recruiting more bureaucrats

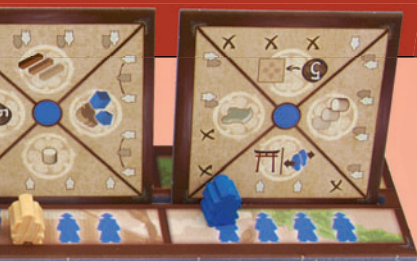
The officials are to be thought of as civil servants, organizing things from behind their desks, and some of their

activities they can do unaided. These include recruiting more officials and acquiring more authorization cards. No matter where you are in the world, or at what point in history, there are few things that bureaucrats enjoy more than recruiting more bureaucrats, especially ones in positions junior to themselves, but this is no time for you to start interfering with their wishes, as the situation here is one where the usefulness of having more officials is clear: You can get more done in the same amount of time. However, gaining extra authorization cards is equally desirable. The extra cards, of

which there will be a selection on offer in each round, don't introduce any new activities, though they do often feature slightly more efficient versions of the old ones. The more important reason for wanting them is that they will put you in the position of having specific activities on more than one card, and this will free you from some of the restrictions you were under when you just had the original three and found yourself having to choose between two actions on the same card, both of which you really wanted to do.

But none of this more efficient planning back in the office generates victory points, or much in the way of income. For





these you need to trade, to acquire supplies of wood, stone and rice, and to put up buildings, and while our civil servants can issue the orders, they also need men on the ground to put them into effect. These are the "samurai", and the only way you can acquire them is by redeploying some of your officials – another reason why the five you start with are nothing like enough.

Samurai operate by moving about on the main board. Head Office decides that it needs wood; a samurai will have to go to one of the places where supplies can be found. Similarly with stone and rice. They also need to travel from city to city in order to oversee the construction of buildings, and when you want to trade, it is they who will have to meet up with the merchants. All this travel costs money, which thus joins the list of things that you need to have in sufficient quantity.

I More functional than pretty

The board itself is double-sided to allow for different numbers of players and shows the city of Edo, several nearby cities and locations for the various resources. The depiction is more functional than pretty – just a collection of coloured circles connected by "roads" – but it serves its purpose. The main feature is that each of the cities is surrounded by a ring of building plots, with those nearer the start of each circle being more prestigious than those that come later.

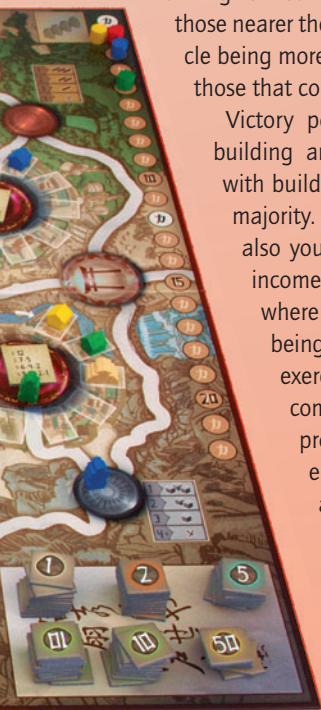
Victory points come from building and from trading, with building providing the majority. Buildings are also your main source of income, and this is where the game stops being a largely solo exercise and becomes competitive. Each provincial city generates a fixed amount of money, and during phase 3 of the round, this

will be distributed among the players who have buildings in the city. However, the distribution is not an even one. In each city a pecking order will be determined based on who has the most valuable collection of buildings. The calculations involved here are usually close and result in much jostling for position as players add new buildings to the board.

The city of Edo also gives money to those with buildings there, with the only difference being that here the total pot is not fixed in the way that it is for each of the provincial cities. Instead it grows as more players establish a presence in the city, a difference that neatly reflects its increasingly dominant position in the country. A further thematic touch here is that unless you have at least one building in Edo by the end of the game, you can't win, no matter how many victory points you have gained elsewhere. It is not a condition that is in any way difficult to meet, but it has been included to reflect the fact that the Tokugawa insisted that the other clans invested some of their wealth in the Edo area.

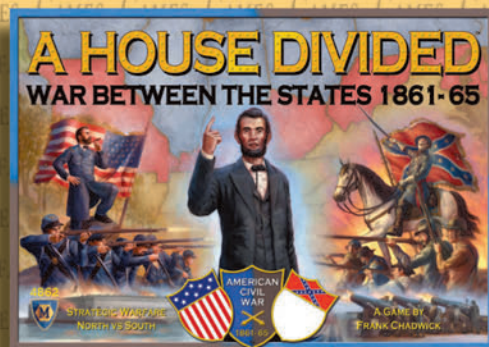
Money is vital in this game. We have already seen that it is needed if you are to make full use of your samurai, but it is also required for the construction of buildings, as each one you erect involves expenditure as well as the obvious supplies of wood and stone. The buildings come in three types: houses, trading posts and communal fortresses. It is the third of these that give you the most victory points, and the closing rounds of the game will often see a race to build them, a race in which you will be at a big disadvantage if by this stage you are not rich.

No mention so far of why you need rice: The answer is that your samurai need to be fed. In the final phase of each round, when you are collecting your income, the samurai require lunch, and those that you either cannot or do not wish to feed are removed from the board. You don't lose the pieces when this happens; they just revert to being ordinary officials. Redeploying them again as samurai in the following round is possible, but it will cost you planning actions that you would sooner use in other ways. Better to feed them. For some reason ordinary officials do not require to be fed. This is not logical in terms of the theme – unless the Tokugawa were sufficiently forward-thinking



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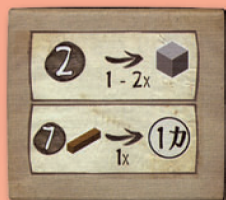
FIND YOUR STORE!



to provide a free canteen for their staff – but it is necessary to make this part of the game work.

Edo is not played over a fixed number of rounds, but to a VP target, with the game finishing at the end of the round when someone meets it. The target looks at first sight to be a low one, just 12 VP, but, as in *SETTLERS OF CATAN*, where the target is even lower at 10, the effect here is to increase the tension. Each VP has to be worked for and the contest will usually be close.

Edo is not a game that makes a strong initial impression. The game summary, “collect resources, erect buildings, score



victory points” is more likely to prompt thoughts of “here we go again” rather than “I must try that”, and reaction to the setting of Imperial Japan is not likely to be

much more excited. It’s another place we’ve been before. Nor do the graphics really draw you in. The artists have done their best, but they haven’t been given much scope and the general effect is mainly beige. Had the game made its debut at Essen, I would almost certainly have walked passed it, my attention drawn by something that sounded more exciting and looked shinier. That would have been a mistake, because once you

sit down and actually play the game, you discover that it has real quality. It is well designed, well developed and offers something new and different. Edo is worth your attention and deserves to be a success.
Stuart W. Dagger



Title: **Edo**
 Publisher: **Queen Games**
 Designer: **Louis und Stefan Malz**
 Artist: **C. Stephan, M. Fiedler**
 Players: **2-4**
 Age: **about 12 and up**
 Duration: **about 60 minutes**
 Price: **about 45 €**

Not a nice move

As early as in 2009, I came across a prototype called “Edo” at the Sauerland game convention. It was also set in Tokyo; however, it had completely different rules and came from other authors. Queen Games knew this prototype and was apparently taken with it – at least with its title. Father and son Malz originally had called their game “Altiplano.” Under this name, it was awarded as the best full-evening game at the Hippodice authors' competition in 2010. Queen looked for a new theme and remembered “Edo.” This brought the authors of the above-mentioned prototype into the unpleasant situation of having to rename their game. Now it is going to be published by eggertspiele, under the name YEdo, an older notation for Edo. *kmw/sbw*

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Stuart W. Dagger	8
Udo Bartsch	6
L. U. Dikus	8
Stefan Ducksch	8
Wieland Herold	7
KMW	8

