

Carcassonne Prototype

Itai Thomas Yavin

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Abstract

For this prototype we were tasked with the assignment of taking an already existing game, and changing a property of said game (or adding something new to it). To answer that assignment, we as a group decided to change a property of the game Carcassonne. In the end we ended up changing the otherwise, slow, turn-based and strategical game into a dynamic and fast-paced one, with the change of a single rule.

1 Introduction

For this assignment we chose to work with the boardgame Carcassonne. Carcassonne is a turned based strategic game, where each player take turns to place a tile and their meeples (board pieces resembling small people) on to table, to slowly form a map og cities, roads and farms. Each player is then rewarded with points depending on the meeple placement on roads, cities, farms and monasteries. Each player only has a set amount of meeples and a meeple is only returned when whatever it is placed on is finished (for farms this is never), for this reason each meeple placement is both a risk as well as a chance. A game of Carcassonne can range from between 30 minutes to about 1.5 hours. The assignment tasked us to change a property of our chosen game (or add a new property to it).

2 The Change

We as a group decided to try and change the game from being turn-based to being simultaneous turns. The way it would work was that each player would have no limit to when they could take and place tiles. The only rule for tile placement was that only one hand was to be used, and only one tile could be taken at at time. Only when a tile was used, would a player be able to take a new one. The usual rules for meeples would also apply (only being able to place a meeple on the last placed tile), but each player would not be allowed to hold both a tile and a meeple. Needles to say, this a was a very drastic change to the game play of Carcassonne. The usual core game loop of Carcassonne consists of a player talking a tile, then overlooking the possible placement. After thinking through the options the player would then place the tile and decide whether he

would place a meeple on it. If the player could and wanted to place a meeple, the player would then decide on what part of the tile the meeple would be placed. After placing the meeple the players turn would end, and he would have to wait until his next turn. This loop could take a player around 1 to 10 minutes to go through (depending on the player and the options at hand). While the loop stayed roughly the same, the player would take his tile, place it and then decide whether a meeple would be necessary. One core difference is present, instead of waiting for the other players, the player would then restart the loop by taking a new tile. While this could seem like a minor difference this changes a lot in the core dynamics of the game of Carcassonne.

2.1 Resource values

The rule changes the value of the resources within the game. The original game had the different point sources of castles, roads, farms and monasteries. The first change here would be that farms were deemed impossible to administer, it would simply be too difficult (due to the speed of the game) to know whether a farm was already owned or not. Secondly the value of castles rose quite a bit, since a single player goes through tiles much quicker, it became easier to finish castles without the interference of other players. Roads would also often act as point sinks, as they would become easy and quick to decide where and how to build further on. In the end one of the largest value changes were in monasteries, due to the value changes of the other point sources in the game, the monasteries ended up being worth much less.

2.2 The Loss of Strategy

Due to the speed of the game, the change forced players to focus more on quick decisions than on strategy. Simply put, it would be much more worth while for a player to go through as many tiles as possible, than it would be to gain the highest amount of value for each tile. This meant that there was simply no time for strategy, and while a player could still make tactical plays (such as stopping other peoples roads), there would rarely be time to think ahead. One interesting example is shown through the dynamics of stealing other peoples point sources. In the normal game of Carcassonne, only the player(s) with the most meeple on a point source would gain points from said sources. This meant that if one player had two meeples in castle, while another only had one, the first player would gain all the points. This would be hard to accomplish though, since a player is limited to only place meeples on unowned point sources, and would thus have to connect point sources to gain superiority of one. While this would still be a possibility in the changed game, a new kind of stealing developed. For example, say player A places a city tile, while player A takes his hand back to grab a meeple, player B places another city tile connected to player A's, and by simply being faster than player A, player B steals player A's city by placing his meeple first.

2.3 Balancing

To balance the changed Carcassonne, a few balancing rules were put in place. The first rule was that of the one hand rule. A player would only be able to use one hand, and only be allowed to hold one object (meeple or tile) in said hand. This rule was made because the game would simply be too chaotic without it. The rule added the slight amount of time a player would need to react to the other players placements, without it, the game would have very little interaction between the players. Due to the speed of the game, errors in tile placement would be very likely, and also next to impossible to catch during the game. To alleviate this, a rule for error correction was made. If two tiles didn't fit, the one furthest away from the starting tile would be removed, and if any tiles connected to this tile, didn't have any connection to the starting tile, they would also be removed. In the end, the point source of farms had to be removed. As mentioned earlier, it was simply impossible to make sure that a farm was unowned during the game, which made farms way to easy to abuse.

3 Breaking the Game

In many ways the changed game simply breaks the game of Carcassonne. Aside from the obvious fact of making errors impossible to avoid, and farms impossible to overview. It also ended up removing a lot of interaction between the players (as players would tend to simply build in their own direction, as this was often more beneficial than obstructing each other, and also because of the focus on speed). It also made one of the core player interactions (the possibility of stealing each others point sources) next to impossible to plan out for the individual player. It also heavily skewed the game from being about careful and strategical tile (and meeple) placement, to being about "who can go take and place tiles the quickest". The main game shift is that of a shift from Agon (the idea of competitive and skillfull play) to a mix of Ilinx (perceptual emotion) and Alea (risk and chance). This change is cemented through he idea of the quick and dynamic play, together with the luck of the draw (which could be alleviated by the individual player by going through more tiles, thus the focus on speed).

3.1 Benefits

One of the major benefits of the change was the way it shortened gameplay. In the changed version of the game, the game would be done in roughly 5 to 8 minutes. This was a dramatic change from the previous 30 to 90 minutes. This in part also had the effect that losing the game felt much less like that of a loss, because the length of the game made a round a much lesser investment. There is a big difference in losing a game in which you have spend 60 minutes of careful placement and planning, and losing one of 5 minutes of quick and chaotic placement. A loss can simply much simpler be attributed to chance than to individual error, or inferiority. This is one of the larger reasons for the shift away from Agon play.

4 conclusion

In this assignment the game of Carcassonne was changed by a single rule, from a turn-based game, to a game with simultaneous turns. This was found to fundamentally change the game play of Carcassonne, and mostly break it. Mainly it was found that it changed the game from a semi slow strategic game, to a fast-paced dynamic one, favouring the fastest player. It was found that this manifested primarily in a change from Agon game play to that of an Ilinx Alea based mix.