

Uwe Rosenberg AT THE GATES OF LOYANG

A game for everyone who enjoyed
the ploughing strategy in Agricola
How the Designer explains his game

Narrative of the rules

Preface

What follows should give you an overall impression of the rules for "At the Gates of Loyang." It also serves as a guide for experienced players in explaining the game.

When it comes to game preparation and rules queries, please refer to the rulebook, as written by Ralph Bruhn (who has done a great job sorting and organising the rules)

"In the text boxes (in red) I give my own opinion, for advanced or keen players, of certain rules. I explain how the rule evolved into what it is, as opposed to other possibilities. When explaining the rules these boxes may be omitted."

I hope you have as much fun with the game as I have had over the course of its development.

Uwe Rosenberg October 2009

Aim of the game

Each player has a T-shaped gameboard with a Shop and a Path of Prosperity. The player who has progressed furthest on the Path of Prosperity, by earning the most money, wins.

The Shop

Each player has a Shop on his gameboard, but the Shop is not owned by any player. The player can buy vegetables from this Shop that he cannot currently get any other way. The Shop is stocked with vegetables at the start of the game – as shown in the picture. There are six kinds of vegetables in the game.

Ploughing the Home field

Each player has one Home field and 10 Cash*, the currency in this game. During the setup players buy, in turn order, either a pumpkin, a wheat or a turnip from his Shop, which will be used as seed for his Home field. He sows this seed by placing it on his Home field. This field is then filled with eight further vegetables of this type. (Take these vegetables out of the general supply.)

"This rule could have been: Each player starts with either (1) A wheat field and 7 Cash or (2) A pumpkin field and 6 Cash or (3) A turnip field and 5 Cash. Instead this rule introduces the actions of "Buying" and "Sowing", as used in the main game, right from the setup. There is no inherent advantage in starting with any particular vegetable. I have tried to design the game so that all three setups are equal."

Small extra rule.

At most 2 players can have the same starting vegetables on their fields.

"Is this because the game would be boring if all players had the same setup? No. In reality it's because there aren't enough counters for every player to start with the same vegetable (such as wheat for example)."

4+4 Private fields

Home field

10 Cash*

Shop

Storehouse / Cart



Turn Summary card

Path of Prosperity

Scoring marker

The Game Round

The game is 9 rounds long. Each round has 3 phases.

Harvest Phase (Phase 1)

Each player takes exactly one vegetable from his Home field and places it in his Cart. In addition each player may turn over one new field from his stack, onto which a new vegetable may be sown using the same method as your Home field.

Tip: You can use your Home field to keep track of the nine rounds. Once this field is empty, the last round has begun!

"This harvest mechanic was inspired by the game "Antiquity" (published 2004 by Splotter Spellen). I liked this mechanic so much I put a variation of it in two games: Firstly in "At the Gates of Loyang" (Spring 2005) and then in "Agricola" (November 2005)."

The player earns money by selling to both his Regular customers and to Casual customers. These customer cards form part of the action card deck.

Card phase (Phase 2)

Each player draws two new action cards. The newly drawn actions cards are placed on their own spaces on the board. (There is a specific method for distributing these cards. You don't need to know this to understand the rules, but is needed for deciding the start player, more on this later.)

Action Phase (Phase 3)

Players earn money using their vegetables and cards. There are a number of possible actions for each player, all of which may be done **more than once and in any order.**

*Footnote:

The Cash coins were in circulation in China for about 3000 years until the end of the nineteenth century, when they were replaced with the "Yuan".

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Actions in more detail than they appear on the player aid.

- The **Sow** and **Buy** actions are the same they were in the setup. There are four other types of field other than the Home field. Some have places for six vegetables, but cannot hold many different kinds of vegetables. Some have spaces for three vegetables of any kind. There are also 4 and 5 space fields.
- If you are short of money you can sell vegetables for 1 or 2 Cash to the Shop on your board, if there is space for them. Each type of vegetable has its own area in the Shop.

"After each player's setup, the Shop isn't fully stocked with vegetables. One space each for beans and leek is free so that players may sell to the Shop for 2 Cash. (Which is the selling price for a bean or a leek) Early in the game this is a very profitable move."

- At a **Market stall** a player can **exchange vegetables**. The number of bowls show if you need to trade one or two vegetables to get the vegetable you want. Each market stall can make three different types of trade.
- **Helpers** are action cards with text. They are used once then discarded.
- The players earn money through their **Regular** and **Casual customers**. Regular customers provide long term business opportunities (the same pair of vegetables must be delivered each round for four rounds). Casual customers are served once. Each Casual customer has a shopping list of three vegetables.
- The **Two-pack** action gives the players the option of getting two new action cards. If a player wants to keep both cards then they must be played on top of each other. The price of this action depends on the cards in play. The Two-pack is the only action that can only be used **once** each Action phase.

Concluding the Action phase

At the end of the Action phase the player stores his vegetables and moves his prosperity counter forward.

- A player's Storehouse may only store one vegetable over to the next round. A player who has more than one vegetable left must either sell the rest to the Shop, discard them or expand his Storehouse. For 2 Cash you can permanently increase the Storehouse capacity from one vegetable to four vegetables. (At the start of the next round all the vegetables in a player's Storehouse – along with the newly harvested vegetables – are placed in the player's Cart.)



- The Path of Prosperity goes from one to twenty. **The first space bought each turn costs 1 Cash regardless of what is printed on that space. The cost of buying any additional spaces is the price shown on that space.**

"This rule means that money earned early in the game is worth more than money earned later. At the start, buying an extra space on this path may cost 3, whereas later it could cost 15 or more! The rule that the first space per turn costs 1 is important, as it encourages players to advance as far as they can each turn, making the most of their cheaper move, as opposed to saving all their money to the end of the game before moving."

Winning the Game

The winner is the player who had advanced furthest on the Path of Prosperity. In the case of a tie, the winner is the player with the most money (if this is also tied then the winner is the player with most vegetables on his fields and in his Storehouse).

"The first tiebreaker highlights that earning money is the overall goal. The second tiebreaker shows which player has the best potential if the game had continued for more rounds. This is why only vegetables on his fields and Storehouse count, not vegetables in his market stall and Shop."

Up to this point was an overview of the game rules

The following are detailed descriptions of: Loans, Regular and Casual customers, the Two-pack action, a method of distributing the action cards and the Start player token.

Loans

Any player may take out a Loan at any time, taking 5 Cash from the bank. Loans can **not** be repaid. At the end of the game the player goes back one space on the Path of Prosperity for each Loan he has.

"It's unusual for a Loan to be non-repayable over the game, even if you want to. A Loan in Loyang is more expensive for an advanced player, since he may lose a space costing 20, whereas a newer player might lose a space costing 15. A Loan is only useful early in the game. Later you shouldn't need them. If you were able to pay it back early on in the game then you must have gotten it too cheaply. The only motivation to repay it would be to save interest. Interest isn't needed in this game, so why make it more complicated than it has to be?"



Regular Customers

Place a satisfaction marker on each Regular customer when it comes into play. It begins blue side up on its spot on the card. If a player fails to supply the customer with the vegetables he wants, the marker is turned over to its red side. (This frequently happens during the first round the Regular customer comes into play.) If the marker is already red side up when he cannot fulfil the customer's order then he must pay the customer 2 Cash in compensation. (This doesn't happen so often)

"The game is designed so that players can choose when not to deliver to a Regular customer: Aggressive play, would be to take the customer now, even though you can't deliver, in order to secure it for next turn. Defensive play, would be to choose not to deliver to a Regular customer because you have a better deal offered by a Casual customer."

New players can be helped in learning the game by giving them a secret Regular customer in their hand from the start of the game. This may be played in place of an action card during the Action phase. (see distributing action cards). This makes it easier for the new player to plan ahead.

"Without this rule a new player may go for several rounds without money, or even have to take several Loans. With this rule each player has an objective from the start. He knows what to plant on his start field during setup and which other vegetables he will need to get. He can then play his Regular customer once he has planted the vegetables he needs and is ready."



Casual Customers

The money received for each Casual customer depends on the number of Casual and Regular customers a player has in his play area: If he has more Regular customers, he gets the amount printed on the Casual customer card plus 2 Cash. If he has more Casual customers then he gets the amount on the Casual customer card minus 2 Cash. If he has the same number of each, then he gets the amount as printed.



"A player with more Regular customers has higher demands placed on him. When he meets these demands he should be rewarded."

"A player with many Casual customers can pick and choose when to serve these, making the game easier for him. This type of player should earn less."

The Two-pack

This is the only action that can be done at most once during the Action phase. This action gives a player the opportunity to get two additional cards in a round. Unlike the cards you get during the Card phase (which are usually free) the Two-pack must be paid for, and can't be played separately. If you choose to keep both of these cards, they must be played on top of each other. A player can choose which card is played on top. You can choose to keep both, one or none of these cards.



"A player cannot use the bottom card of this stack unless he discards the top card. You have to think carefully about how to stack these cards. Remember Helper cards are the only cards that can be discarded easily. All other cards have to be completed before they are discarded."

The price of the Two-pack is calculated as follows:

The price is equal to the number of Helpers you have or the number of markets stalls you have. Use the larger amount. It is possible to sack Helpers or discard market stalls just to get this price down!

"The price of the Two-pack can be manipulated. This makes the game more interesting for the players. This design forces a player to think about each card before it is played. It puts pressure on the player to keep a balance between keeping cards unplayed for too long and having useless cards in play: Unused Regular customers must be compensated if a player fails to deliver. Having Casual customers in play that are not being served mean the player will make less from future Casual customers. Market stalls and Helper cards increase the price of the Two-pack."

Not only cards from the Two-pack must be paid for. Since **new fields** are the most valuable action cards, they each cost **two addition Cash** - both in the Two-Pack and in the card phase.

Now how to distribute action cards.

Distributing Action Cards

Players can buy the Two-pack described above during the Action phase. Each player gets his first two action cards for the round in the Card phase. These cards, unlike the Two-pack, can be played individually.

"The cards drawn in the Card phase are not played on top of each other like the Two-pack. The reason being that the players select these cards, they are not given randomly. This is so that a player can use them straight away as part of his strategy."

How each player gets these cards is best shown using an example.

Each player draws **4 cards** into his hand. The aim is to select two cards using just **1 card from this hand** and exactly **1 card from the "Courtyard"**. The Courtyard starts empty. Play proceeds clockwise. On his turn a player can either make his selection of two cards, or put one card into the Courtyard.

- 1 Since the Courtyard starts empty, the first player (the one with the large first player marker) must place one card in the Courtyard.
- 2 The next player has the choice of either selecting the Courtyard card to go with a card in his hand, or adding another card to the Courtyard. In this example he chooses to add another card to the Courtyard.
- 3 The third player chooses one card from the Courtyard and another from his hand. The other cards from his hand go into the Courtyard. He then decides where to play these two new cards in his playing area.
- 4 Player 1, after looking at what cards are in the Courtyard, decides to add another card to the Courtyard.
- 5 The second player now makes his card selections and discards his leftover cards into the Courtyard.
- 6 Once only one player is left, he can no longer place cards in the Courtyard. He now has to select his cards and end this phase.

"If a player likes two of his starting hand of cards, he shouldn't be able to keep them too easily. He should be forced to think about which card he will offer to everyone by placing it in the Courtyard. If he is unlucky it will be picked up by someone else before his next turn comes around."

The cards leftover from the Courtyard form a Discard pile until the next Card phase. This Discard pile is not shuffled into the rest of the deck until **the start** of the next Card phase.

"The discards are not shuffled in straight away so that players don't get cards they already rejected if they buy a Two-pack. The cards are shuffled in every round so that experienced players can get the same Helper every round if it is offered."

The method for two players

Before each players turn he may choose to draw an additional card from the deck to place in the Courtyard. (He is never forced to.)

"The players should have just as large a selection of action cards to choose from as in the four player game. In "Loyang" players often try to get the same Helper for as many turns as they can. (That's why there are only 20 different Helper cards). For this strategy to work you need a large selection of cards each round."

The Start Player Token

At the start of the game decide randomly who gets the first and second player markers. After that: That player who selects his action cards in the Card phase **last** receives the large start player marker. The player who chose his cards **second last** gets the second player marker. The player with the large start player marker begins the Action phase, followed by the player with the smaller second player marker. In a three player game the player with no token is third.



"This rule was added due to the advantage the start player has in the final round. The tokens used to rotate clockwise. This rule adds new depth to the game as they are now competed for. A player can choose whether he wants to secure his favourite action cards early in the Card phase or wait so that he can become the start player for the next round."

The rules for four player games

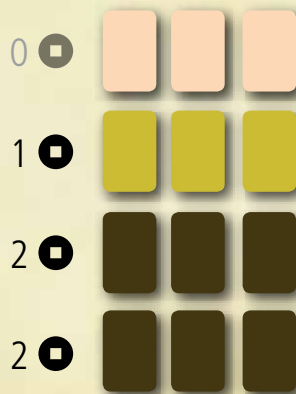
The rules for a four player game are a little different. The player with the large start player marker chooses a player without a marker to be his partner for the Action phase. This then forces a partnership between the player with the second player marker and the player who wasn't chosen. The first partnership then complete their Action phase playing only with each other. The other partnership may also complete theirs **at the same time**. Certain Helper cards have texts that mention **another player**. This refers to your current **partner** for this round.

"This rule speeds up the game. The partnerships play parallel to each other, without watching the actions of the other partnership. This adds more excitement in competing for the first player marker so you can choose your partner for the turn, or to being the second player to stop someone spoiling your fun with Helper cards."

The Solitaire Variant

"The three main games I have published between 2007- 2009 have a lot in common. One is that the players harvest vegetables. Agricola, Le Havre and Loyang also all have a solitaire version, in which players are trying to beat their highest score. The solitaire version of Loyang is a good way of learning the mechanics and strategies of the game, especially for the Action phase."

The difference between multi player games and solitaire games is in the card mechanics. The solitaire player buys his cards using a 4 x 3 grid. The cards in the first row are free, the cards in the second row cost one Cash and the cards in the third and fourth rows cost 2 Cash. The solitaire game is highly strategic as the majority of these cards will remain on this grid, allowing you to plan for them for future rounds.



After each Card phase the cards left in the second row are placed in the Discard pile, the cards in the first row remain where they are. The cards still on the board then slide up, and replacements are drawn from the deck to fill the newly emptied spots. The new grid is now ready for the next turn.

The economy of this variant is harsher as the player must now pay for the cards he draws.

"A player must carefully consider his choices in the Card phase. He may take a card from the first row so that a card from the third row will be free in the next round. Cards from the second row would be chosen carefully. Either he decides to take a card he would otherwise lose, or he might choose none from the second row in order to cycle through the deck more quickly."

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Curious about the game?

AT THE GATES OF LOYANG

The new big game from Uwe Rosenberg!
Test it at the Hall Games booth 9-64

The English Version!



I want to say a special thank you to my proof-readers and play-testers: Ralph Bruhn, Andreas Odendahl, Julian Steindorfer, Ann-Katrin Drogi, Timo Loist, Michael Wißner, Stefan Schmid, Inga Blecher and Susanne Rosenberg.

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