

The Villagers of Catan

Playtest Ruleset v0.3 - 1/4/2021

Changes 0.2 -> 0.3

- Worked on wording cleanup. In particular clarifying two concepts: 1. While you deal with resource cards, the automa accumulates and spends dice pips, and 2. Clarifying that the turns do not alternate between the players.
- Revamped the trading system; discontinuing the trade with village possibilities and clarifying the trade with towns/villages concept.

Backstory:

Rather than starting on an empty island, full of wonderful resources to be exploited, you were a villager on the island of Catan. But not just any villager; you were a villager who saw the village life around you as slothful, and indolent rather than industry and empire building. With friends and henchmen, you've managed to build up two villages into towns, and not just any towns, but towns in the best island locations! You've started work on a couple of roads, because you have plans for this island. Alas, the villages around the island have taken notice and are not going to be taken over easily. They've developed a loose federation to consolidate villages into towns of their own. Who knows, they may even know of your plans for developing cities and the necessary support road system.

Game Play Overview:

In this game, you will play one faction in a very similar way to the normal Settlers of Catan game. The primary difference is that there will be significantly less trading, and depending on the difficulty level, you will likely not use the Largest Army and Longest Road cards. Your single opponent will be using an alternate growth system which will see villages grow into towns, build roads, then cities, and purchasing development cards along the way. Conceptually, your opponent uses dice pip increases/decreases in a similar way to how you acquire and spend cards.

Supplies Needed:

Settlers of Catan game (standard 4 player version), twenty 6-sided dice.

Setup:

Setup the board either with the standard initial setup, or with a randomized one (recommended). While the random setup is reasonably straightforward, there are phone apps ("Catan Assistant" is one) that simplify the process.

Choose the locations for your initial towns and accompanying road segments. Select one of the locations as your second placement and award yourself with a card for each surrounding resource. You will typically want to be nearest the higher recurring hexes, and also have access to all five resources. Note that if you want to add challenge, you can forgo this initial card acquisition.

The Villages: Each village on the board will be represented by a 6 sided die, initially placed with the 1 facing upwards. A die will be placed on each intersection with the following exceptions:

- intersections adjacent to your towns or road ends
- sea intersections that are not harbor locations which are also adjacent to two resources.

This should result in between 17 to 20 die being placed.

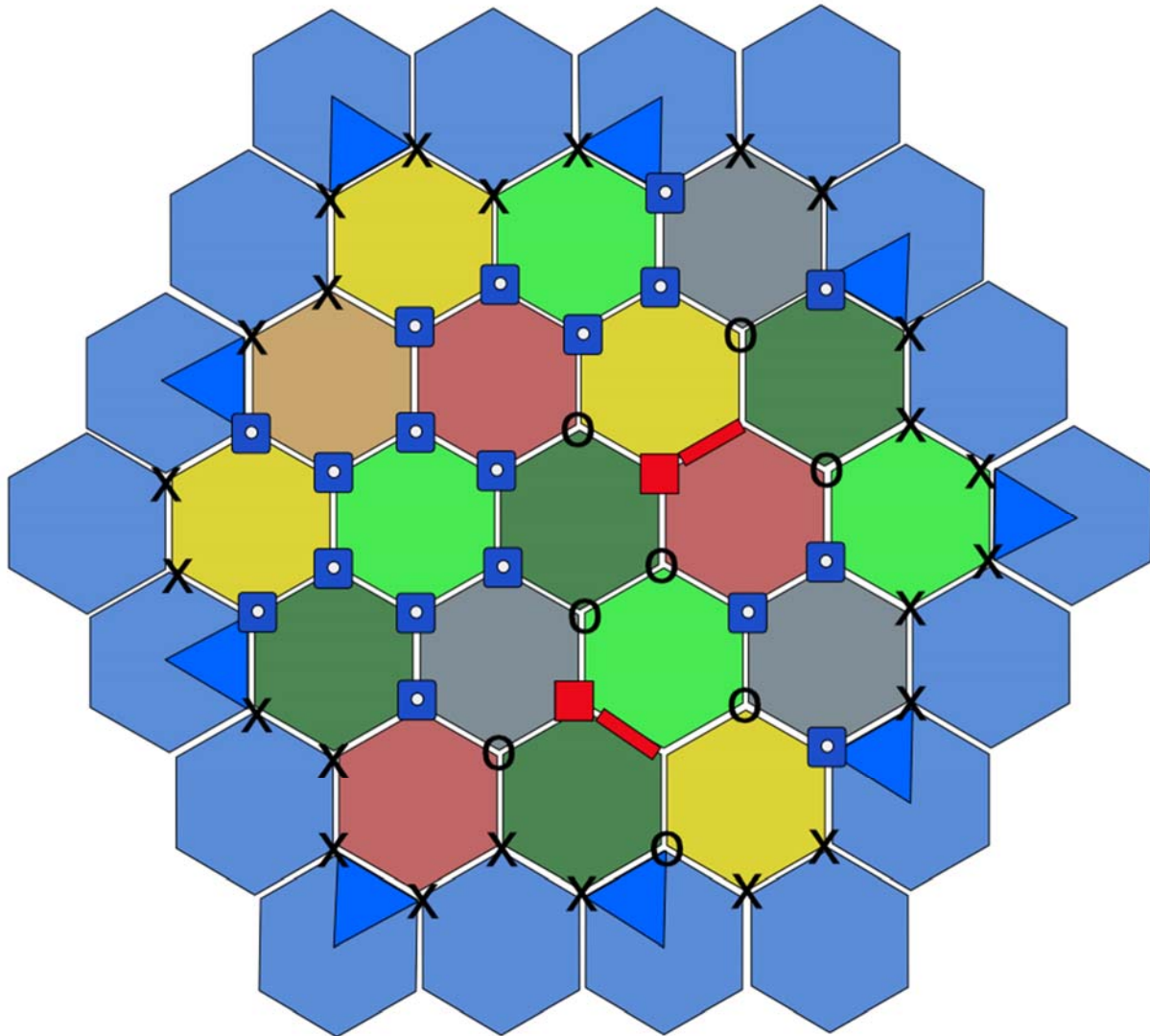


Diagram Explanation: The above diagram illustrates a typical setup (with the blue triangles indicating the harbors). The player color is red with two towns placed with one adjacent road each. The villages dice are shown as blue die with an initial value of 1. The "X" locations do not qualify as they are not adjacent to two resource (or desert) hexes plus a harbor. The "O" locations do not qualify for villages as they are adjacent to your towns or roads.

This should result in between 17 to 20 die being placed.

Choose a set of faction tokens (towns, cities, roads) for the villager faction. This will provide the primary limitation of only having 5 towns on the map at a time.

Gameplay

In the normal game of Catan, the dice are passed around to each player in turn. On their turn, the player rolls the dice, all players get resource (or if a seven is rolled the turn player gets to move and steal), and then the turn player gets to spend resources or development cards.

In this variant, there is no individual player turns. Each turn, in addition to receiving resources, both you and your opponent will be able to build (towns, roads, cities, development cards) and be able to use development cards. If there are two simultaneous builds, come up with a way to resolve who goes first – possibly with a dice roll (this is Catan after all). Play as aggressively as possible on behalf of the automa when it has choices to make (robber placement, pips to add, etc).

A round consists of:

Dice roll - giving a result between 2 and 12.

Resource distribution based on the die roll - You will receive resource cards per the standard game. The villages surrounding the rolled hex(es) will each increase one pip in value, with the die being manipulated to show the new value on the top. If a location is a city, increase the number of pips by 2.

Dice value progressions - when a village/town/city die exceeds the value of 6, the following actions will take place:

- If it is currently a village (the initial state; hasn't yet progressed to a town or city):
 - If there are towns available, this village grows into a town. Place a town token on the intersection, reset the die to 1 and place it beside the town token, and then remove any villages adjacent to it (honoring the rule that towns cannot be on adjacent intersections). This would signify one village outgrowing and subsuming the others.
 - If all five of the town tokens are on the board, award a pip to the nearest town or city (increasing its dice value) then reset the village die to 1. This would signify a boom/bust/growth/contraction of the village, with disillusioned young ones moving on to the town or city where prospects seem better.
- If the location is currently a town:
 - If it is connected to another town by a road, it upgrades to a city, the die is set to 1, and the town token becomes available for deployment elsewhere
 - If not connected via a road and is within three road segments of another town, a road is built towards the nearest town/city (or whichever route seems to be of the most benefit to the Village faction), then reset the die to 1.
 - If a town is isolated (not within three road segments of another town or city), draw a development card, reset the town die to 1.
- If the location is currently a city, draw a development card, reset the die to 1 (or a 2 based on value before the resource distribution, since the city gets 2 pips for adjacent resources).

Dice development cards: Point cards should be played immediately, put face up near the board. Monopoly and Year of Plenty cards will allow two selective dice pip upgrades, ideally in the most advantageous location for the dice faction. Road building should be done in the most advantageous way possible, ideally linking towns. Soldier cards are used to move the robber and steal a card (player discards a random card, dice faction increases a dice pip adjacent to that resource).

Your actions - play resource cards to build roads, towns, cities and development cards per the standard game. You may build roads past automa villages; it does not remove them nor limit you in building further down the road. Building a town results in the current village (if one) and adjacent villages are removed from the board.

Trading - You may trade if the automa has a town or city adjacent to the resource that you need, and has more than one pip on its dice. Your cost will be two resources, and you will get one resource in return. Decrease by one pip one of the towns/cities next to the resource in question. Discard your two resource cards and increase one pip for a town/city that is adjacent to each of the resource cards.

The Robber - If you have more than 7 cards in hand, you will still need to discard half of them. Robber movement will alternate between the two factions, with the village faction placing the robber when the first 7 is rolled.

Village faction robber placement: the robber will be placed on your best hex (likely a 6 or 8) in such a way as to be most bothersome to yourself and least bothersome to your opponent. You will discard a card at random. Your opponent gets to add a pip to one village/town/city that is adjacent to a hex of that resource.

Your robber placement: You can move the robber to a hex, and decrease one pip of an adjacent dice. You get one of the resources of the hex on which you placed the robber (unless you place it on the desert).

Development cards - play as normal with the following changes/clarifications:

Play the monopoly card as a year of plenty card, getting two free resources.

Soldier cards can be used to relocate the robber, and get the extra resource (and pip reduction). Pip reductions cannot take a city or town below 1. Only play this when the robber was last placed by the Villages faction and on a space inconveniencing you.

Winning

Whoever reaches 10 points first is the winner. The nature of dice not always matching probabilities (and the robber possibly blocking rolls that due) means that a typical game can be lopsided, or a close fought battle. If you desire more predictability, the "Deck of Dice" is an option, providing the proper ratio of rolls within a 36 draw deck (and more grief when the robber blocks a key hex when the corresponding card is drawn).

Adjusting difficulty level possibilities:

Using the largest army and longest road cards will make it easier for you to win, as the villages faction will not be working towards earning these cards

To increase the difficulty, you have the following options:

- remove the longest road (2 point card)
- remove the largest army (2 point card)
- increase the starting value of each of the villages, usually set at 1

Playtesting thoughts:

Is it fun? I enjoy watching the villages coalesce into towns and cities, and don't mind losing to them, but that might not be everyone's cup of tea. Growing up in the pre/early personal computer age, I sometimes enjoyed playing the life game, where things evolved based on rules. This sort of gives me the same vibe.

While I initially tested with the Deck of Dice to get a standard distribution, I've found for me that the games end up being pretty even, often with us both sitting at a score of 9 and hoping for a favorable next throw of the dice. I don't play with the largest army or longest road bonuses, not do I take cards at the start of the game.

Initially, it may seem like 20 dice are a lot to keep track of. However as villages grow into towns, adjacent dice get removed from the board, so the number drops off fairly quickly.

Questions? Suggestions?

Design Thoughts/Conundrums:

Trading – village pips aren't really equivalent to resource cards, so I did not include villages in the mix. With requiring the decrease of a city or town pip adjacent to the resource you are getting, I'm trying to provide some limits to what can be traded as in a normal Catan game, resources may not readily be available for trade.

Starting Dice Placement – I wanted to keep the number of dice reasonable (only 17 - 20!), so dropping out most of the edge hexes which likely wouldn't progress made sense.

Playing with more than one automa – I've played a couple of games against two automa. This required two different colors of dice and changed the game somewhat. I'll likely include it as a variant but it will require its own set of initial dice placement rules. As part of the playtest, I also developed some rules allowing the automa to use harbors for trading; due to the fact that harbors were populated more often, and the automa needed additional resources to compete. The gist of this was the ability to trade 2/1 and 3/1 pips for villages/towns located on harbor spaces – but did complicate the game somewhat. Consequently, I won't be including them in the base solomode.