

Game Name: *Catan | Dice Game*
Roll. Play. Settle

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Game Overview

• Game Objective

Compete to become the most dominant force on the island of Catan by building roads, settlements, and cities, and also expanding your army with knights.

• Concept and Genre

Catan | Dice Game acts as an introduction to the world of Catan and all its expansions. The concept of this dice game adaptation is the same as any other *Catan*-inspired game, build roads, settlements, and cities, and hire knights for your army. In the board game, *Catan*, it uses a much larger board which lets the players have free range to expand their territory. This version of the popular board game instead uses identical paper cards which makes the game heavily focused on collecting the right resources *Yahtzee* style. The genre of *Catan | Dice Game* is one of dice, racing, risk-taking, adventure, resource collection, resource gathering, building strategy, family, and quick play.

• Target Audience

This game can be played with 1-4 players at a time, with the players' ages being seven years and older. A full game takes around fifteen to thirty minutes, but I would expect twenty to thirty-five minutes if it is the player's first game. I believe this adaptation to be a source for returning players to introduce new players to, as well as them being interested in the new twist the dice game brings to *Catan*. I see it is very helpful to gather more settlers for game night when interests are being lost. On the other hand, new players can be slowly brought and introduced into this world of trading and expanding territory. With borrowed mechanics from the popular dice game, *Yahtzee*, it allows the more skeptical players to take a bite at it. The resource collecting in *Catan | Dice Game* allows the players to make crucial decisions on what's most important to them. The materials needed, like the sets of dice you can roll in *Yahtzee*, appeal to both fans of *Yahtzee* and ones coming from similar resource management and collection game titles.

• Emotions and Experiences

Two different game modes correspond to the two sides of the paper sheet. Island One, the starter game, uses "the player with the most points at the end of fifteen turns" as a win condition. Throughout this game, since the player only has fifteen turns, they must make the best choices in order to expand efficiently. Strategic building and rolling are put into effect, risky dice tosses may help secure big point turns but could also make you waste a whole turn if it goes wrong. The experience of Island One is more based on competing against yourself than it is against other

players. Island Two, the advanced game, uses victory points as a win condition similar to the board game. This game mode is definitely more “first come first serve” and prioritizing your own goals and strategies. Island Two is more of a race as the first player with ten victory points wins. The experience and competitiveness is more engaging than on the other island because players can compete for the longest road or largest army, like the board game. At the end of both game versions, it comes to a very peaceful conclusion. The dice game dials back a lot of the trading aspect between players, what's left is a solo game that you can just play by yourself.

Though this simple game doesn't give much of an emotional journey as others, emotions of letdown, excitement or anticipation, and especially a lot of “Ah crap” find their way into the gameplay. Everyone hates it when they come to one resource short of building. This leads to frustration and letdown because if they hadn't chosen to risk their turn and dice roll rather than playing it safe, they wouldn't be wasting a turn of theirs. This also happens when special victory points are going back and forth between players, which either brings happiness to the player who is taking the points and frustration to the player who is repeatedly losing the points. Towards the end of the game, whether it be the final turn or the last victory point to be checked off, it builds suspense to the dice roll. There is also the excitement of adding out your points at the very end of an Island One game, as well as the anticipation of achieving the win.

1. Time and Setting Gameplay and Mechanics

• Objectives

Settle Catan by building roads, settlements, and cities, collecting knights, and gathering resources. In order to build anything you must roll the required materials. Roads cost one wood and a brick; Settlements require one sheep, wood, brick, and wheat; Knights cost one ore, one sheep, and a wheat; and finally, a City costs three ore and two wheat. As you roll for your resources every turn, you must pick out the ones that are most useful to you. Build roads, settlements, cities, and knights to earn the most points, or be the first player to ten victory points

For Island One's path on the sheet, the point value of each settlement, city, and knight grows with the progress you've accomplished. A player's personal objective can change almost every time they roll their first set of dice. It comes down to what they are willing to lose vs. what they could possibly gain. For Island Two's path, the only buildings that give victory points are the settlements (one) and the cities (two). Instead of the roads and knights having a point value this time, special victory points are added. This means once a player's road is five roads or longer, they acquire the longest road (two). Along with the knights, if a player collects three or more, they can collect the largest army (two) The only downside is that these special victory points can be stolen by other players who have collected more knights or roads than you.

• Mechanics

On every player's turn, they get three dice rolls each. Every time the player rolls the dice, they can choose which resources they'd like to keep for the next roll as well as which ones they'd like to reroll. A very familiar mechanic as seen most famously in the dice game *Yahtzee*.

For Island One each player starts with the normal amount of dice, which is six, because the order doesn't matter when there is already a set amount of turns. Only on Island Two is where the order of players matters because there is a benefit in playing earlier than others. To balance the turn order, the first player to roll only gets three dice total. The next player gets four dice, then five dice, and then finally six. Once the maximum of six dice is reached, all dice are accessible to every player at every turn.

In addition to the standard brick, wood, sheep, wheat, and ore resources, a sixth was added. The gold material represents any of the five original materials but for this wild to work, two gold resources must be rolled. For an extra resource that was thrown into the game just so that a six-sided die works, amazingly this type of play mechanic is fair and opens up a lot more choices for the player when debating whether or not the gold is worth two out of their six dice.

The knights on the board are located on top of the resource icons in the middle of each hex. These icons represent what's called a resource joker. Once a player builds the knight, they also unlock its resource joker on the certain hex. The joker can only be used once per player and only at the end of your third dice roll. The significance of the joker is that it gives you one free resource but at the cost of one of your dice. For example, if I was aiming to build a city this turn, I would need to roll three ores and two wheat. So after my three dice rolls, I end up with two wheat, two ore, and two wood. Since I previously built the first knight, I have access to the ore resource joker, which means I can exchange any of my wood to convert into the last ore through the use of the joker. This now means I have sufficient resources in order to build my desired city. On Island Two, there are two middle hexes with two knights above their resource joker. These icons show a question mark, which means they can be any of the five resources. Since they are the stronger jokers, a player must have both knights in order to use the question mark. Though this seems like a waste, the two knights are individually accounted for when obtaining the largest army.

• Strategies of play

There are surprisingly a lot of different play styles a player can choose from, especially in a game that already has the expansion path laid out in front of you. One core strategy that everyone decides on, and depending on the scenario, is whether they want to play it safe or risk it for a larger payout.

Strategies of Island One could be to head for the cities, which overall give you the most points over fewer turns but ultimately is risky given how pricey they are. You can also expand through roads and settlements only, where the player plays it safe by equally balancing the construction of roads and settlements every other turn. Or a player can follow what the dice are giving you, which allows for more risk-taking where lucky dice rolls are in your favor and the option for more expanding is open. Personally, I favor having options so in a game, I'd build roads and then use one of my other turns afterward to either focus down a settlement or city. If that doesn't work out for me, my next best thing would be to go for a knight.

On Island Two, strategies could be to only focus on the special victory points but even then, in total, they are only worth four points if you collect both of them. Besides being aggressive toward the special victory points, a player can pursue being a pacifist. This could mean they sit back and watch the fireworks as they slowly make their way around the board-building settlements and cities. Personally, it depends on how I'm playing against and what the other players already have built. If I'm way behind in winning over the longest road, I'll start aiming for knights and vice versa. I believe knights play a bigger part in this mode than the other one because they actually count for something bigger rather than increasing your scores by increments of one. I also think pursuing the largest army is a lot safer and more efficient because you are also collecting the resource jokers as you build your army. Having access to more jokers means you have a bigger cushion to fall on when you are aiming for a certain structure.

2. Story, Setting and Character

• Story and Narrative

New land has been discovered, and you, the settler, must collect resources in order to build their roads, settlements, and cities. Become the most powerful and dominant force on the newly claimed island of Catan. Build up resources and expand your civilization. Hire knights to increase your army and compare it against enemy armies. Expand roads for both expansion and economic purposes, and branch off to increase your chances of becoming the top dominion. Every player's story can be analyzed differently depending on their point progression and dice rolls. The player can make up their own story of their settlements and community. For example, if a player has terrible dice rolls for say sheep that they so desperately need, their imagination can say that there was a mass population of wolves that caused such a wool depression. Of course, the reason for it was actually bad luck but it gives more to create about the settler's story.

• Characters

The characters in the game, aka the players, are seen as settlers building upon this newfound land of theirs. There isn't much player interaction throughout the course of the game, the players can only compete over special victory points as stated before. The other unseen characters in the game are your townspeople, workers, farmers, and lumberers. After all, they are the people who have been providing you with all the materials you happen to be rolling for. Though the points are only points, the player can see it as their own progression bar. It can tell them what strategy they should change or where their strategy has worked so far, and why change it.

3. Game Art

The Catan artwork for both sides of the sheet looks directly from the game, giving that older map and era feel. I love the hexagonal game board in the original *Catan*, so seeing it transformed into a smaller grid but still holding a bit of significance is great to see. The resources are simple to understand, it also helps that there is a cheat sheet if a player forgets what they need

for a certain building they need. The style of *Catan | Dice Game* is simplistic but at the same time very realistic and detailed. The land hexes of the different biomes are very detailed and colorful, matching their respective resources they hold within. In between the hex tiles are the very simplistic silhouettes of roads, cities, settlements, and knights. For a pencil fill-in sheet, they seem to have left just enough space for everything to fit nicely into place, leaving little to no confusion when played.

4. What does the game do well? And where does the game do poorly?

If this game was the first time I was introduced to the world of *Catan*, I would be very bored and unenthused. Personally, I see this game to be lacking in everything that makes *Catan* the multiplayer trading rush that it originally was. This dice game has nothing to do with multiplayer because of the extremely low interaction between players. On Island One, you are only competing against yourself and none of your opponents are trying to take the win from you because they have no way to do so. On Island Two, the nonexistent multiplayer is raised to a still very very low level because the only time the players interact with each other is when special victory points are being tossed around and stolen. I'm very glad that I had played the board game before seeing what this game was about because I feel so sorry for the players who got their taste of *Catan* spoiled by this adaptation that doesn't bring anything close to the original flavor. In a sense, what this dice game does well is its single-player mode on Island One. It plays exactly as if you were playing with others but I enjoy the high-score beating, back and forth with myself. Always trying to get a higher score is the sole reason why I still have *Catan | Dice Game* lying around in my closet.