

Simple Solo Variant v 1.0

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Original game designed by Glenn Drover, Published by Forbidden Games

CONCEPT

I hate him. You hate him. That smarmy Raccoon. That silver-tongued, dapper son-of-a-trash panda is attempting to hoard all the commodities and drive up the market to the point of crashing it. He's such a menace. What are you gonna do about it?

OBJECTIVE

The game ends in 15 rounds if certain trigger don't occur earlier. You need to avoid the market from crashing (or time it to do so if it's in your best interest). Score more than the Raccoon dummy player. If at the end of any turn, two commodities are at their highest price, or the Raccoon has \$300, or any one (1) commodity supply pile is empty, go to final scoring immediately at the end of that turn.

SET-UP

Set the board in front of you. Beneath the board is your area for building tiles, money, cards, etc.

Railroad deck = Cats, Dogs, Bears sets. Town deck = three "2vp" cards, three "3vp", two "4vp", and 1 "5vp."

To the left of the board, place the stacks of cash and dump out all commodity tokens into their own supply piles. Put 3 of each commodity back into the box. Place one matching commodity token on the lowest \$ space of each Market column like normal.

Shuffle the *Price & Production Deck* and place on the right side of the board, near the \$13 of the Luxury track.

Above this deck, you can place the needlessly-large son-of-a-bitch Raccoon who will mock you for the duration of the game. He is rude, and whispers things about your mother. He is callous and calculated. He rules Astoria like a certain North Korean dictator. He eats with his elbows up on the table. You get the idea.

Create a deck of MISSION cards of the **Baron Goals Only**. Take 1 randomly for yourself. The rest go back in the box.

Take out the 6 starter production buildings (Iron Deposit, Tool & Die, Vineyard, Coal Deposit, Lumber Yard, and Wheat Field) and shuffle them. Randomly give yourself two. Set the other 4 basic buildings running in a vertical column along the right-side of the board beneath the *Price/Production deck*. This is the Raccoon's empire. Bah!

In a change from the original game rules, all of your commodity production buildings give their bonus potentially once per turn, but only when taking a token of the matching type. Example: if you choose to take an Iron, Coal, and Wood from the bottom of a Production Card, and you have the Lumber Yard and Iron Deposit tiles, you gain 2 wood, and 2 iron, and 1 coal. Another example: If you had the Wheat Field and the Iron deposit, and chose to take the production icons for Iron, Coal, and Wood, your Wheat Field wouldn't trigger, because you didn't take any wheat. In that case, you would take 1 wood, 2 Iron, and 1 coal. Sorry to be verbose, but I hope that is clear.

Put the Bank Tile in the Raccoon's area. Shuffle all other building tiles, stack them, and flip out four as normal.

You start with \$10 and a hand of 3 Price/Production Cards. Raccoon starts with no money.

Give yourself one starting commodity which matches each of your buildings. You will start with two tokens. Give the Raccoon two commodities from the supply matching each of his buildings. He will start with 8 tokens.

Now let's play!

PLAYING THE GAME

Every round Raccoon goes FIRST. First step = put \$20 into his play area. This will happen at the start of every round. He'll end the game with \$300 if you allow the game to reach 15 rounds which immediately ends the game. He'll never buy anything with that cash -- he just hoards it. Once you give him \$20, flip one *Price & Production* card into the discard area next to the deck. Raise the price of all commodities on the top half as normal, and then give the Raccoon **ALL** of the commodities shown on the bottom of the card. He never spends them, they're just a timer essentially. If he takes a commodity token matching a building in his area, he takes an extra token of that type FOR EACH TOKEN COLLECTED. This is unique to Raccoon's Empire! So if he has Vineyard, and he receives 2 bottle icons, he actually takes 4 tokens! His buildings might trigger multiple times on his turns, while yours still only trigger once each on your turns. This is a change from the core game.

Special Phase Step: When the Raccoon takes \$20 and he hits a \$100 dollar threshold (\$100 on the fifth turn, \$200 on the tenth turn, etc.) a few extra things happen on his turn:

Draw all of the following: One (1) from the top of the Town deck, and 1 from the top of the Railroad deck, and 1 from the top of the building stack, and put all three of those things into the Raccoon's area. Next, put the 4 building tiles currently on display onto the bottom of the deck and refresh the row. Replace the Raccoon's five \$20s with a single \$100 bill. *NOTE:* Ignore text on building tiles Raccoon gains during the special phase. They will only count as 1 VP at game's end and have no in-game effect. Only the *Bank* tile and commodity production tiles in the Raccoon's area have any effect on his game.

YOUR TURN

On your turn, **take two actions. You can do the same action twice.** *Mind-blowing, I know.* If you play a *Price/Produce card*, draw up to your handsize right away. Remember that multiple of your "B" Commodity buildings may trigger once per turn if you collect a matching commodity. The rule for "P" Production Building Effects stay as normal. (Example: if a production action would have you take a wood, wheat, and luxury, but you have an Iron deposit, you **do not** get an Iron token. You only get the bonus from your building if you collect from an icon on a Production card that matches one of your buildings.)

BUT WHAT ABOUT RAILROADS AUCTIONS? What Blasphemy have you concocted?

For an action, to buy a particular Railroad card, the cost you pay is equal to the "4-card set VP" value of that railroad (Fat Cat is 19 dollars, Top Dog is 23 dollars). If you're buying a railroad line, but already have one or more cards in that matching line, add the coin value(s) from the cards you already have to the total cost of the new acquisition. *For example, your first Fat Cat is \$19, your second Fat Cat is \$19 + \$4 = \$23, your third Fat Cat card costs \$19 + \$4 + 4 = \$27. The fourth Fat Cat is \$19 + 4 + 4 + 4 = \$31.*

note: If the Auction House tile happens to be in your game, it gives you \$5 after you fully pay for a Railroad line, and also every time the Raccoon takes a Railroad during his "Reaching \$100" special phase step.

ENDING THE GAME

The game can end in several ways:

1. As soon as the Raccoon has \$300, meaning he has completed his 15th turn, and should now have three Towns, three Railroad Cards, and a total of 8 buildings in his area, go to final scoring. (Avoid this end condition! Raccoon scores a minimum of 45 points this way!)
2. If one supply pile of commodity tokens is empty at any point, complete that player's turn (yours or the Raccoon's) and go immediately to final scoring. (less likely)
3. At the end of the player's or the Raccoon's turn, if two of the Market tracks are at their maximum value, then go immediately to final scoring. (Most common way the game ends.)

FINAL SCORING

Raccoon scoring – the Bank tile gives the Heinous Rat Monster 1 points for every \$20 he collected. Plus one point for each building. Plus the VP value for any sets or individual Railroads. Plus each Town which scores its normal printed VP plus its +2 VP since all towns in the Raccoon's area are connected to a Railroad card.

Human Player Scoring – Score your game as normal. Most VP wins.

SCALING DIFFICULTY

Too easy? Try this: Start the Raccoon with \$40 in his play area, remove 6 of each commodity token from the starting supply during set-up instead of only removing 3 each, and replace the 4 Cat Railroads during deck set-up with the more expensive set of Raccoon Railroads. The challenge increase is substantial. The game still ends when Raccoon has \$300. This makes the game only 13 rounds instead of 15, and triggers his special phase collection on rounds 3, 8, and 13.

PLAYTESTING THIS SOLO VARIANT: NOTES

This was interesting and really weird. No one should be making solo variants of this kind of game, and definitely not this one. With the Coronavirus really picking up steam in Mid-March 2020, I decided to look through my collection and make solo variants of games I enjoyed, and also consider taking on the challenge of “making solo the un-solo-able.” It's kind of hilarious, and surprisingly fun. It was a great distraction, and I particularly like that this can be played in less than 25 minutes.

Early testing had me using dice and trying to mimic blind bidding, but it was clunky, and it was too many steps between human turns. Also, using dice to affect things like Automa decisions was too random or had to may “if/or/then” things going on, and frankly thinking so hard on a dummy player's turn is a huge turn-off to me. It is why I admire the Automa for Scythe, or even more than that really, Wingspan. So smooth and quick playing.

A lightbulb went off when I created the idea of constantly flipping *Price and Production Cards* every turn on the Raccoon's turn. It mimics the market swelling over time. I like to think that shitty Raccoon is insider trading with the market and is pumping up a bull market with cooked books! A little theme there, what little I could squeeze out of it.

Don't be fooled that there isn't a bit of a puzzle here. There is. You control how heavily you buy Towns or drive up Market prices. You can have the power to end the game when it's best for you by having two of the Market tokens reach their maximum value. I playtested 4 games with the above rules. I won thrice, and lost once. My three wins were games that ended by two tracks maxing out, in the 12th or 13th rounds. I won all three games with me in the lower-to-mid 40-VP range, and the Raccoon in the upper 30s. The game I lost ended with a supply pile running out due to a few bad luck production card flips on the Raccoon's turn. I should have sold “Goods” to keep that track from maxing out, but I let it ride and paid the price. The Raccoon beat me by one point, 38 to my 37 points. I also shouldn't have nabbed at least one more Town, and I would have won.

The delightful thing about this variant is the luck that comes with what Railroads the Raccoon randomly collects from the top of the decks the second time he reaches his special phase by hitting \$200 in the tenth round. Is it a match? Two Dogs? Oh sweet lord, NO! I love it. Letting the game go the full length of 15 rounds is very dangerous. He can score around 58+ VPs if he gets lucky and collects 3 dogs. And don't dismiss your Baron Mission! That can be a critical 4-6 points.

I'd considered leaving the original rule in for production buildings where, no matter what you collect from a production card, you can activate one building you possess and take a commodity of that type. The new alignment of only being able to get benefits from your bonus buildings when you're already collecting that type of good intrigued me, and it makes driving up the prices dangerous. Yes, you want to collect a bunch of Iron since you upgraded your building tile “Iron Deposit” and are now getting 3 Iron instead of 1, but drive the price up too quickly and you may end the game prematurely when the Raccoon flips and unlucky *Price* increase. Anyway, you enjoy you solo animals. Careful sifting through garbage, trash panda.

- Matt Lowder, March 2020