

LIFE IS HARD IN A SMALL AMERICAN TOWN

WELCOME TO CENTERVILLE

HOW DICE AND POLITICS MAY CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Welcome to Centerville is a game published by GMT Games and addressed to standard and expert players. GMT is a renowned specialist for wargames but it is also publishing some boardgames (1846, 1989: Dawn of freedom, Battle Line, Churchill, Cuba Libre, Formula Motor Racing, Grand Prix, Leaping Lemmings, Pendragon, Santa Fe Rails, Time of Crisis, Winds of Plunder, etc., but the most successful of them was Twilight Struggle).

The designer is also a specialist of simulation games (he is very well known for his Combat Commander series or for the Fighting Formations series) but he also designed complex boardgames (Dominant Species or Urban Sprawl, for example, again by GMT). This time he offers to the players a game of medium difficulty that uses 6 dice as its basic mechanics.

When you open the box of **Welcome to**

Centerville you are slightly surprised, as the components are really "minimal" (see Picture 1) compared to the usual standard from GMT: in effect we find a small board (280x430 mm), four summary sheets, a cardboard sheet with 80 pre-cut tiles, 128 wooden cubes in four colors, some wooden disks on which you have to apply colored stickers, one turn token and 6 plastic "D6" dice with different symbols.

Players try to become the "administrators" of the little country town of Centerville, in the United States, and they fight to get the highest and more remunerative municipal assignments in order to favor the construction of new buildings, the research in the University, the green parks, etc. This is not a "hard" management game, where you make long term programs and then your brain has to work at his best in order to succeed in anticipating every single move, but

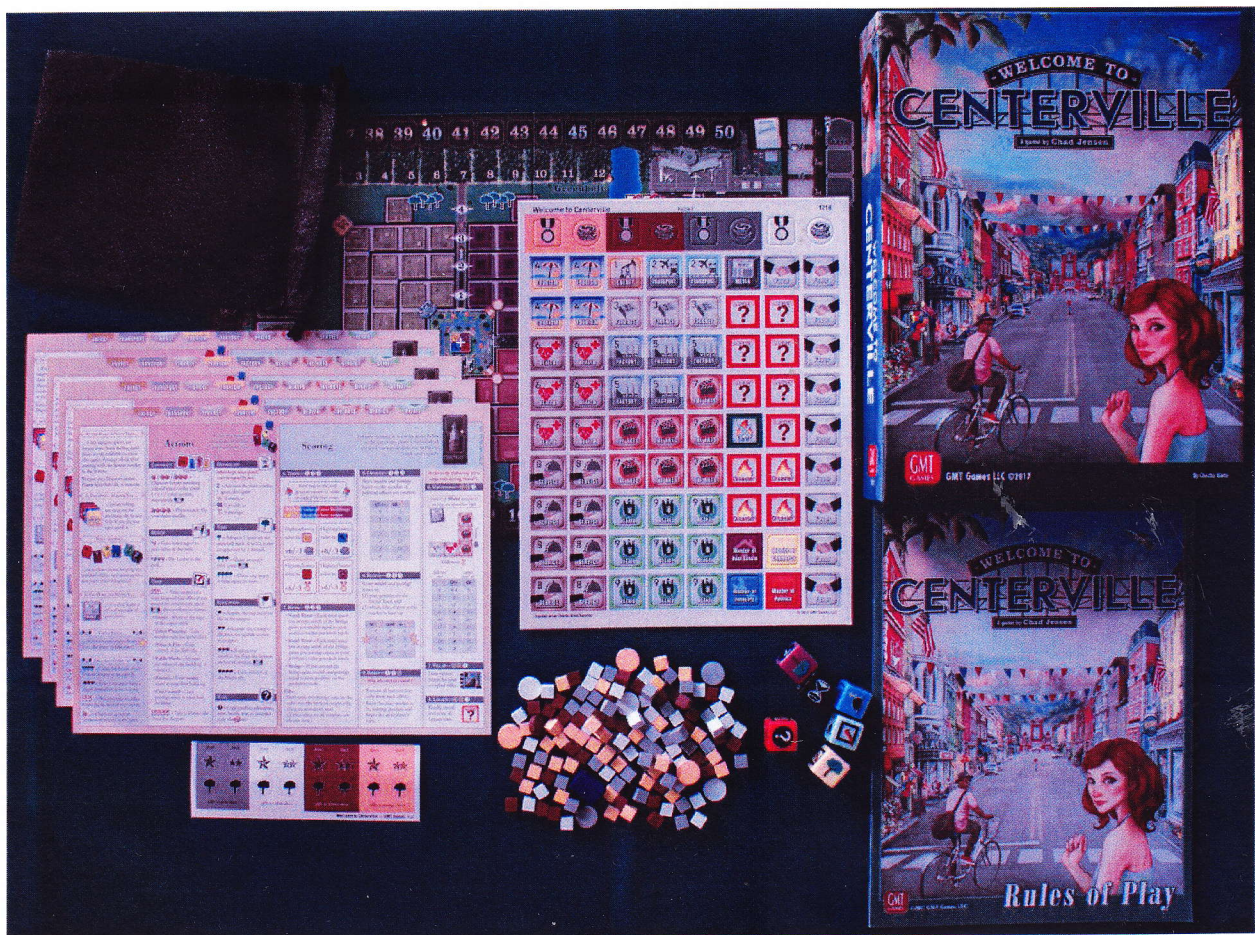
a lighter one where dice may help or slow down you: you may still make programs but you normally need to always have a "B" plan. With the help of Picture 2 we will start from the set-up

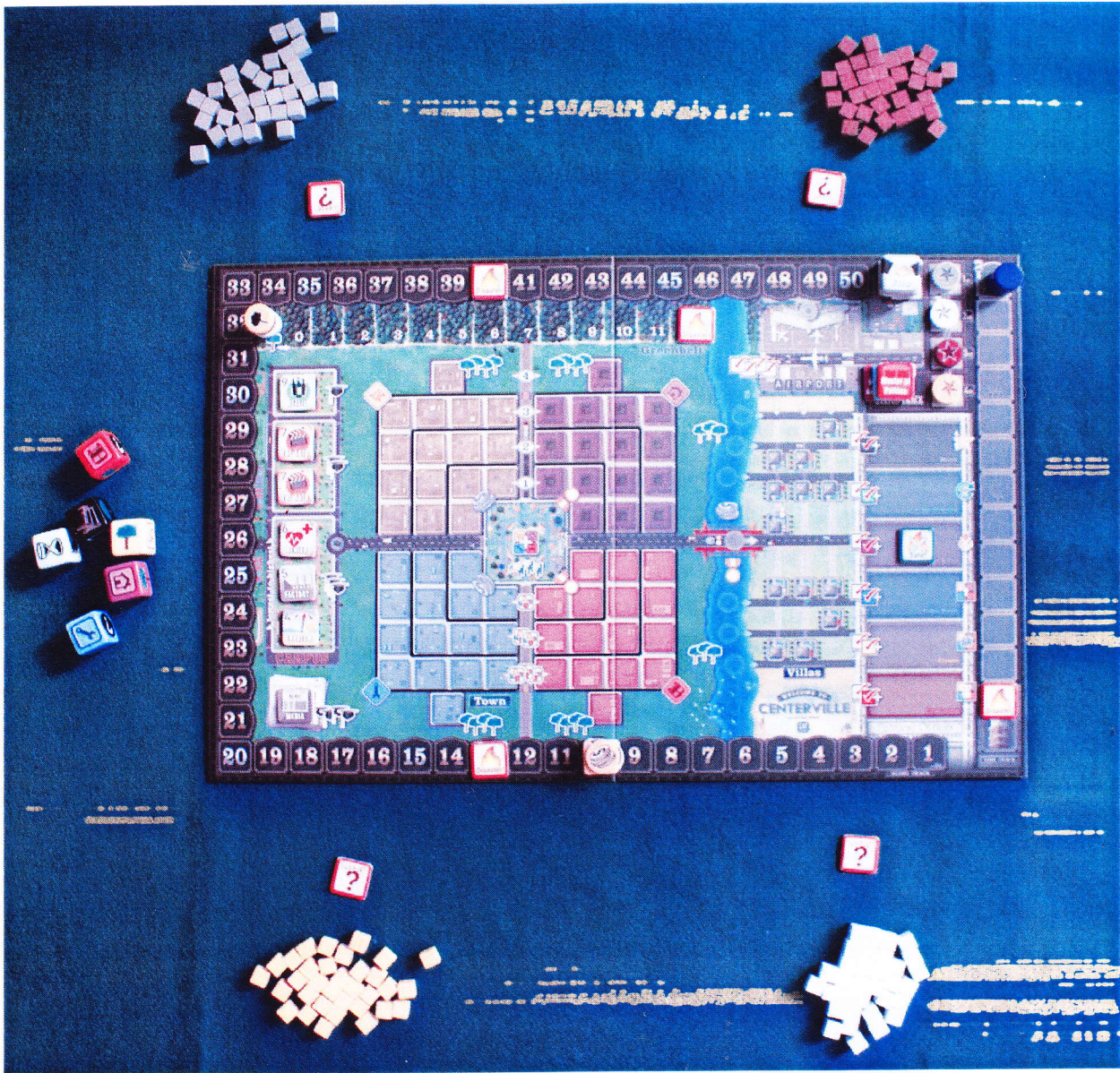
Pietro Cremona

An interesting game with a lot of opportunities, despite the fact that you need to throw six dice. But even with the worst combination that you get you may still do something to follow your "program" or to put some sticks in the wheels of your opponents.

As you see Centerville is divided in different areas: in the center you have four districts (pink, red, blue and yellow) where palaces are built; on its left we see the University, where six special tiles are placed; in the middle and north of the center there are a central park and a green belt; on the right, after the river, there are eight plots of land for individual houses; finally, on the extreme right, you can see the City Hall, with six main offices.

The players should start placing their tokens "Wealth" and "Prestige" on the Victory Point (VP) track, the "Green bell" in the Park and the "Status" on the turn order track





(on top right of the board). All also receive a "legacy" tile (this is a sort of objective), a summary card and 32 cubes of their color, to be used as building in the Centre and as political influence on the City Hall.

Four "Disaster" tiles are placed on the board, six "Vocation" (University research goals) tiles are placed on the University in ascending order and some extra special tiles in various cases (we will see their use later).

The first player takes and throws the dice and has to decide if he accept the result or if he wishes to throw all or some of them for a second and eventually a third time. You do not have special restrictions, but every die that shows an Hourglass must be taken aside and cannot be used anymore. All the dice have four equal faces: 1 tree, 1 university (academic hat), 1 political vote and 1 "fate" (a question mark) that will be used

as a Joker. Four dice have two faces with a symbol for their color (red, yellow, blue and pink) and will be used for building in the districts, while the green die has one hourglass and one bench (for the central park) and the black die has two hourglasses and a bench (but not the Fate symbol).

Let us make an example, looking at Picture 3:

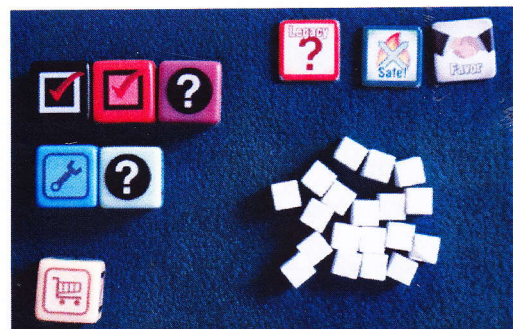
The player arranged the dice as indicated on the picture and decided to use them to:

- Become Major with three votes (black+red+joker)
- Build a "2" Building on the red district (red+joker)
- Build a "1" Building on the yellow district (yellow)

It is clear that the "alea" of the

dice may be partially corrected throwing again the dice that you do not like, but it is important to accept what Lady Luck decide to give and to try to use all the dice for something useful.

The most used action is to build palaces in the four districts. Each of them has three different zones: the closest to the Central park



has only 3 cases of value "1"; the second zone has 5 cases of value "2" and the third has 7 cases of value "3". To place one of your cubes on a district it is necessary to have the dice with the same color that shows one of the two colored faces (and symbols): this enables you to put a cube on the "1" zone, but if you add extra dice (for example a yellow die with a yellow face, or a joker) you may place the cube on the zone "2" or "3". In other words, you need at least the colored face that matches the color (and symbol) of the district, then you may add other dice.

Looking again at Picture 3 you may, for example, build a cube in a blue zone "3" using the second joker or adding the yellow dice to the blue and joker, or you may build in a yellow zone "2" using the second joker with the yellow dice, etc. Each district has also a very special Case "4" that may be used only spending four "tree" dice or using an "improved" action.

To build in the central districts may guarantee some VP at the end of each turn: the four districts are in effect examined and the player that has the higher total receives 6 VP, while the one with the lower total will lose 3 VP: depending on the district these points are spent to advance (or retreat) the tokens on the "Wealth" (red and blue districts) or the "Prestige" (yellow and pink) VP track.

Spending 3 trees it is also possible to place a cube on a river case, north or south of the bridge at your choice: at the end of each turn all the cubes in the river are moved on their right and they become residential houses (see the map on the right side of the river) and will grant extra VP at the end of the game.

On the left side of the City Centre we find the University (see Picture 4): here too we find 3 zones: the first has 1 case (and the symbol of 1 hat), the second has 2 cases (and 2 hats) and the third has 3 cases (and 3 hats): each case has a "vocation" tile and spending 1-2-3 hats from the dice you may collect one tile in the related zone. The tiles vary in number and value from the single "1" (the best) to the nine "9": at the end of the game you gain VP in two ways: having the higher number of tiles with the same value (five "6" or three "4", etc.) or having the longer sequence of successive values (1-2-3-4, or 7-8-9, etc.). A table on the board gives you the number of VP gained for each different combination.

On the right part of the board you can see the City Hall with its six offices: in order to place your cubes on those offices (to gain

one or more municipal charges) you need two votes of the right color if the selected case is empty, otherwise you need a cube more of those already displayed. Two black votes are enough to become Mayor, for example, but if in that office there are already 2 cube of another player you need 3 black votes. And when I say 2 or 3 this means, as usual, the you need the black dice vote (mandatory), to which you may add other colored votes and/or the jokers.

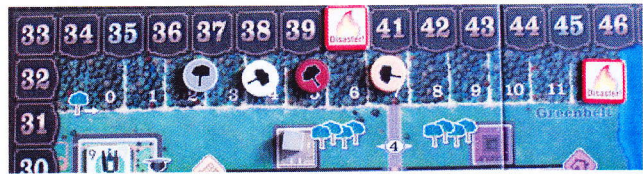
Each "charge" has its own advantages:

- Mayor (black votes): you place your status marker on top (you become first player);
- Chief Engineer (green): you may immediately play a second turn after the first, but without using the green die;
- Head of Police (pink): take the "Safe" tile (and you will be safe from disasters);
- Responsible for public works (blue): you may move one of your cubes on any district to a higher zone (example: from zone "2" to zone "3" or from zone "3" to case "4", etc.);
- Financial Responsible (yellow): you immediately gain as many "Wealth" VP as per your higher value building (so a cube in case "4" gives you 4 Wealth VP, etc.);
- Chief Assessor (red): you immediately gain as many "Prestige" VP as per your higher value building.

With four votes you may also get one of the four "Master" tiles: each of them allows you

to select the face of the die with the same color (without throwing it).

Any modern city needs good "green" politics and Centerville is no exception: there are in effect a Central park and a Green Belt

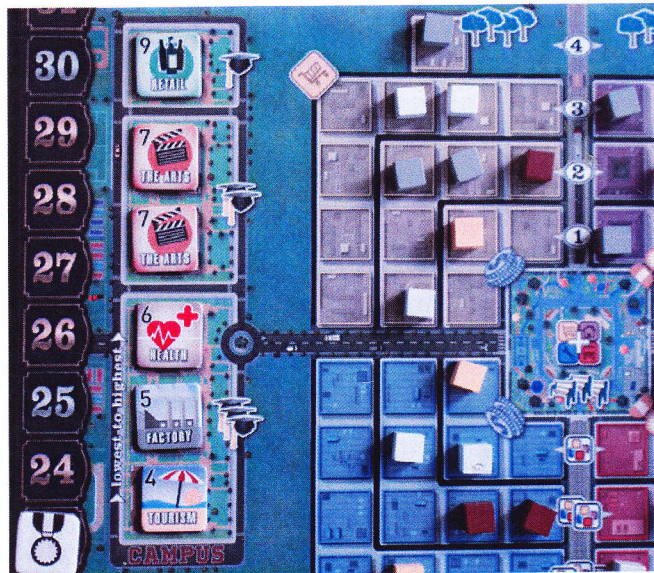


around the city (see Picture 5). You may place a cube in central park if you get 3 benches: of course, there are only two faces (one green and one black) that show a bench, so at least one of them must show, to which you may add two jokers, if you can. Having one or more cubes in Central Park is very important, because they give 1 VP to each of the four surrounding districts and, very often, they may help to win the majority in one or more of them.

The "Green Belt" track is used mostly to make more VP when you build on the river (wealth if you place the cube north of the bridge, prestige south): to advance your marker here of course you need "tree" faces on your dice. You may also place a cube ON the bridge, but only using also a "favor" tile: the latter are gained only when your turn marker is pushed out of the first place on the turn track. Spending a "favor" tile allows you: to place a cube on the bridge (if you have 3 trees); eject an opponent's cube from a district, placing on its place one of your color (of course if you have the right dice); steal a "Vocation" tile to one of your opponents when you have 3 hats; take control of an office in the City Hall even if you

have the same number of votes (remember: you normally need one vote more than the cubes already occupying that case).

Each hourglass obtained with the dice obliges you to move the time track marker down the same number of cases: when it arrives at case 13 (with four players)





the round stops and a VP count is made on the four districts (+6 VP or -3 VP), on the river and on the City Hall (the players without any "Charge" get -3 both on wealth and prestige, 0 VP for having just one charge and from 3 VP to 25 VP if you control 2-6 charges. See also Picture 6). Now every office loses one cube, to facilitate the "assault" to different "Positions" in the next round.

At the end of the third round you make the usual calculations and you also add the VP for the collected "Vocations", for the houses built on the right side of the river (1-2-4 VP) and for your own objective (legacy) tile. Now check which one of your VP markers (wealth or prestige) has the lower value: this is your final score and the player with the higher value wins the game.

I tried to summarize at best how Welcome to Centerville works, but dice have a great importance when you have to decide which combination to try or what you are in effect

obliged to accept: therefore you will be always confronted with a lot of possibilities, so the summary sheet (included) is really welcome (see Picture 7) especially in the first 3-4 games.

Personally I am not so interested in games where dice have such an importance, but I have a great respect for the Chad Jensen, and particularly for his wargames (the Combat Commander Series

or Fighting Formations) that I played extensively, so I was keen to give a try to Welcome to Centerville, and after more than 10 games I can say that it is nice and a little bit addictive, as after every game you start to discuss with the other players how things could have been if only ... and you are immediately tempted to play it again.

I purposely left aside a few rules about the "Disasters" (you may lose a few cubes or VP, or one office, or some Vocation tiles) or about the possibility to double VP on the status (if you turn that token over), etc. but they are minor details so I estimated that it was not necessary to add details: you will test them directly.

"Vocations" are usually underestimated in the first games, but they can give you a lot of points if you always keep an eye on them: with 6 different (for example) you will get 35 wealth VP, while with 7-8 of the same type you will grant 23-29 prestige VP. You

have therefore the opportunity to "balance" the normal VP gains with some Vocation VP in order to keep the two totals (wealth and prestige) more or less even: it absolutely unuseful to gain, let's say, 80 wealth VP while the prestige are at 10 VP because your final score will be 10 VP. This is the major typical mistake of the first two games, so be careful.

About the "City Hall Charges", I appreciate initially the "Green office" (that gives you a second turn with 5 dice) and the "pink" one (that save you from disasters), but later, when you have some buildings in the districts, you may shift to the "yellow" and "red" because you get VP extra. Again, try to gain control of two "opposed" districts in order to maintain your "balance" of wealth and prestige points.

To spend 4 "votes" in order to get a "Master" seems very costly, and indeed it is, but if you have the opportunity to get it in the early turns of the game it is worth the effort as you do not need to throw that die anymore for the rest of the game: you simply select the face that you wish, a very powerful move. ☑

Pietro Cremona

INFORMATION

Designer: Chad Jensen
 Artist: R. MacGowan, C. Nieto
 Price: ca. 55 Euro
 Publisher: GMT Games, 2017
www.gmtgames.com

PLAYERS:
2-4

AGE:
14+

TIME:
90+

EVALUATION

Urban development, dice
 Users: For experts
 Version: en
 Rules: en
 In-game text: yes
Comments:
 Planning is necessary * Dice can counteract * Low player interaction * Good, easily understood rules
Compares to:
 Urban development games
Other editions:
 Currently none

