

# Merkator

## SoloPlay Rules

Original game design by Uwe Rosenberg 2010 (Lookout Games)  
Additional rules 2014 SoloPlay-(BGG User: GameRulesforOne)

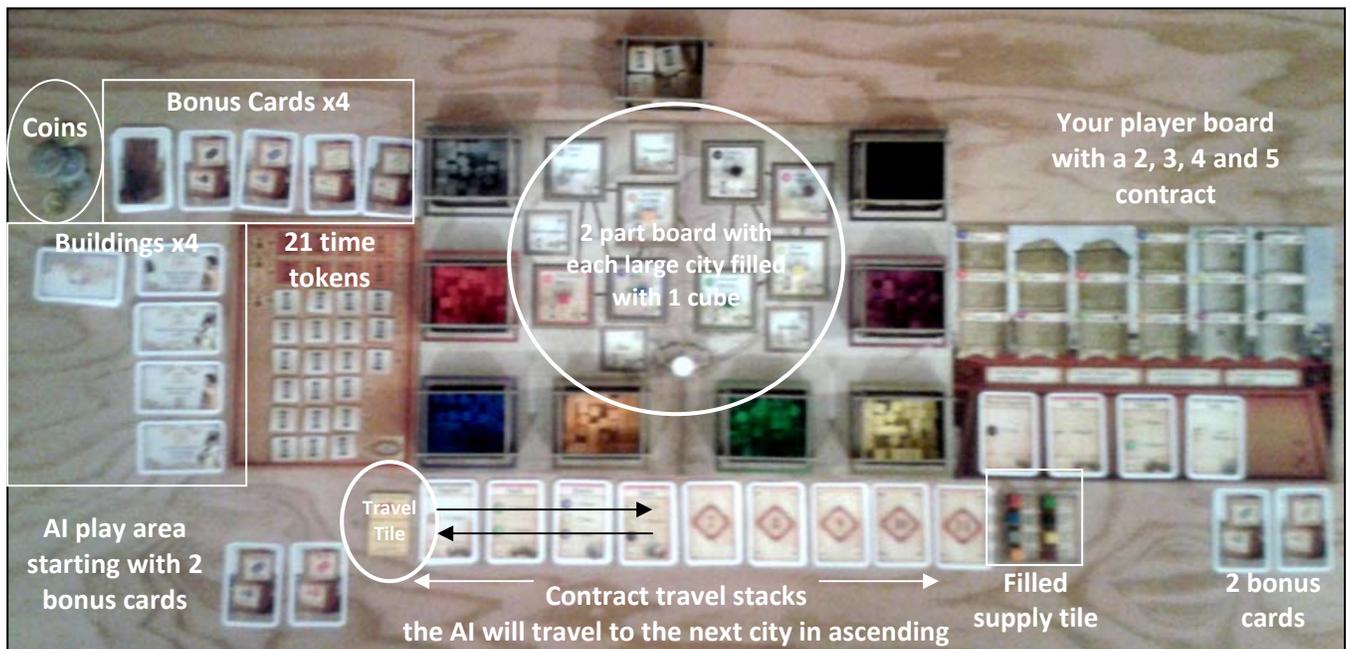
**Introduction:** The goal of this SoloPlay design was to provide a solo variant that incorporates all off the elements of the multi-player game to provide a fuller solo game experience. As such, the travel mechanic is an important mechanic and is reintroduced in this variant. An AI opponent will act as your opponent who will change the game state and drive the game to its normal possible conclusions. The game setup will take about 6-8 minutes with a play time of around 45 minutes.

**Goal:** To score better than your AI opponent when the game ends.

### Setup:

- 1) **Retrieve the 2 part game board, material containers and cubes needed to play.** Place all components within easy reach.
- 2) **Place one cube of the corresponding type onto the cities on the game board.**
- 3) **Retrieve the time board:**
  - a) Mix the time tokens facedown and fill the time board to the short 2-player level. (21 tokens)
- 4) **Retrieve your personal supply tile:**
  - a) Fill the board with one of each cube.
- 5) **Retrieve your player board:**
  - a) The AI will not use a player board during play but should have an area for its collection of contracts, buildings and bonus cards that it will gain.
- 6) **Setting up the contract display:**
  - a) Shuffle the contract cards for each level separately
  - b) Retrieve one level 2, 3, 4 and 5 contract placing them on your player board.
  - c) Set aside the remaining level 2 contracts
  - d) Create a facedown stack with the designated amounts of cards of the remaining contracts in a sequential row as follows:
    - i) Retrieve (3) level 3 contracts, (4) level 4, (5) level 5, (5) level 6, (4) level 7, (3) level 8, (2) level 9 and (1) level 10 contract and the Peace of Westphalia card. All other contract cards are placed out of play.
  - e) Turn the top card on the level 3, 4, 5 and 6 stacks faceup. All other stacks remain facedown.
    - i) Game Note: The faceup cards will indicate the cities that the AI will attempt to travel to during its travel phase.
  - f) Place the **Contract Travel Tile** (included at end of these rules) below/next to the #3 faceup contract. This tile will be used to denote which stack the AI will block and its next travel destination.
- 7) **Setup the bonus cards:**
  - a) Shuffle the bonus cards and deal one 3 and 4 value card to both the AI and yourself.
  - b) Shuffle and set the bonus cards near the play area and turn 4 bonus cards faceup to be potentially gained by the AI or bought by yourself.
- 8) **Setup the building stack and options: (use all of the building cards)**
  - a) Shuffle the building cards and place near the game area
  - b) Turn the top 4 cards faceup in the order drawn
    - i) Game Note: This will be important because the order may determine which building the AI will gain over another.
- 9) **Retrieve the action pawn (Merkator):** Place it near the game board
- 10) **Have some coins available to use during play**
- 11) **Setup is complete, you will take the first action.**

## Setup Example



then descending order only to qualifying  
faceup contract cities (3-14)

### How to Play:

#### Your Action Sequence:

- 1) You may buy building and/or bonus cards. This may be a mandatory action.
- 2) Move the Merkator to a city of your choice as long as you can pay the traveling cost.
- 3) Take the cubes, if any, in the location.
- 4) Fill all connecting or designated locations on the main board with the appropriate cubes.
- 5) If able, complete a contract(s), gaining an unblocked contract(s) from the contract display.

#### Your Actions Detailed:

- 1) Trade/Purchase Phase:
  - a) **Trade**:
    - i. You must sell for coins any contract(s) that do(es) not fit on your player board (6+).
    - ii. You may sell contracts to gain additional funds but never your last contract.
  - b) **Purchase**: (if you have 15+ coins a purchase is mandatory)
    - i. You may/must purchase any number of bonus cards and/or buildings that you can afford replacing the one that you chose after each purchase. It is important to keep the building card offer in order by sliding forward to fill the open slot before adding a card to the end of the line.
- 2) Move the Merkator: (optional)
  - a) You may move the Merkator to any city on the main board that you can pay the time cost for. You may instead choose to leave the Merkator in the city it ended its previous movement in.
    - i. Pay the time cost, if required, for traveling to/remaining in the city.
- 3) Collect the goods cubes that are in the city, if any, using the normal rules for adding them to your supply. If you gain 2+ cubes at least one cube must be put in each storehouse/depot of that color before adding more cubes.
  - i. If you have a bonus card for the city moved to, collect those specific goods from the supply.
  - ii. The AI will not travel with you to the city regardless of any bonus cards it may have.
  - iii. Collect time marker(s):
    - a. If the city indicates that you gain time tokens, you must now do so. If you take the last time marker for a row, flip the tile over to see what payment you need to make in goods.

If you don't like the tile flipped, you may choose instead to flip the first tile in the next row giving up the indicated good(s) payment replacing the time token gained with it. It is possible that the token may indicate an empty storehouse/depot for no effect.

- 4) Add the appropriate cubes to the neighboring and/or designated cites:
  - i. This is done just as it is within the normal rules even in the last turn due to AI end game bonuses.
- 5) Complete any number of contracts that you have the goods available to fill for the city the Merkator is on:
  - i. Draw a contract of one value higher than the one completed, if able, immediately after it is fulfilled.
    - a. The AI's Contract Travel Tile will block your ability to collect a contract of the noted value. If you desire, you may take a contract of the same value of the one completed, if one is available, in this case.
    - b. **Note:** The AI will not spend time to complete contracts.
    - c. If you gain the highest faceup valued contract, the next higher contract stack top card is also turned faceup. This will increase the options (extend the path) that the AI will be able to travel to. For example, when you complete the 5 contract you can take a 6. By doing so, the top 7 contract is turned faceup along with the next 6.
      1. If you take the 10 contract, the #14 Peace of Westphalia is turned faceup. The AI may now travel to the card causing an end game condition.
- 6) Your turn is completed: it is now the AI's turn.

#### **AI Action Sequence:**

- 1) If the AI has 15+ value in contracts/coins available in front of him, the AI will purchase one or more building(s)
- 2) Determine destination city, move Merkator token, move Contract Travel Tile, collect a contract and possibly a bonus card
- 3) Discard the cubes on the city traveled to. You may pay time to gain goods and complete contracts.
- 4) Fill all connecting or designated locations on the main board with the appropriate cubes.

#### **AI Actions Detailed:** (note the play differences depending on the level of the game you are playing)

- 1) Contract handling and purchasing buildings
  - a) Determining the value that the AI has to spend on buildings: (the AI does not buy bonus cards)
    - i) The total coin value is equal to the number of unlocked contracts the AI has acquired plus any coins it has in its possession. If the coin value totals 15+, the AI will purchase a building.
      - (1) **Locked Contracts:** The AI locks the number of contracts equal to the number of empty contract stacks keeping the highest value(s) first.
        - (a) **Example:** The AI has a 3, 4, 5, 7 and 5 contract and there is one empty contract stack (it does not matter which). The AI will retain the 7 value contract because of the empty stack. This leaves the AI with  $3+4+5+5=17$  coins to spend. If there were 2 empty stacks the AI would retain the 7 and one, 5 contract making only 12 coins available which is not enough to trigger a purchase.
      - (2) **Note:** The AI may have more than 5 contracts and is never forced to sell contracts.
    - ii) The total coin value is equal to the number of unlocked contracts the AI has acquired plus any coins it has in its possession. If the coin value totals 15+, the AI will purchase a building.
- b) Purchasing a building(s) using the following priority sequence: (after each purchase consider the value the AI has to spend before repeating the sequence. If the amount is <\$15, the AI will stop buying buildings.)
  - i) The highest cost building available that can be paid for by the exact amount, min \$10.
  - ii) 2+ buildings that each cost less than \$10 for the exact amount (three 6 cost, for example)
  - iii) The most expensive building less than \$10 for the exact amount
  - iv) Overpay for a building \$12 or more not to exceed \$2 more (Expert Game: AI gets change)
  - v) Overpay for a building <\$12 not to exceed \$2 more (Expert Game: AI gets change)
  - vi) Overpay for any building >\$8 by the smallest amount (All game levels: AI gets change)

- vii) In the extreme case that the AI does not have the coins to purchase any buildings, it will discard all available contracts and coins and take the first building in the building offer. If the only buildings are 8 or less, the AI takes the first building for no cost.
  - (1) In the case that there are multiple options, the building earlier in the building order is chosen first.
  - (2) When paying for a building(s) the lowest valued contracts must be used for payment before the higher ones and then the last gained of the same value.
  - (3) The contracts used for payment are discarded from play.
- 2) Determining the location that the AI will move the Merkator: (the AI must move the Merkator token to a different city on its turn unless it is the Peace of Westphalia card causing a game end condition after you take one more turn)
  - a) Refer to the current location of the Contract Travel Tile and the direction that it will move along the faceup contract cards. **Note:** As its first move of the game it will move up the contract track starting at 3 and proceeding up to 4, 5 and 6 in order (faceup cards).
  - b) The AI will consider the city to travel to if, the city has cubes on it **and** can pay the time or in the case of a minor city has the time tokens to pay. If this is not possible, the AI will not consider the location and look to the next in order.
    - i) Once the marker has reached the 'top'/bottom' of the travel path (faceup cards) it considers locations lower/higher in the order following a path going towards the 3/highest contract. Flip the Contract Travel Tile to indicate the change in direction.
      - (1) **Note:** The contract that the Contract Travel Tile was covering is not turned faceup until the next destination is determined.
  - c) Once the location is determined and the Merkator is moved the Contract Travel Tile is moved to the contract stack and the contract is collected for the AI (keep faceup in its area in value order and then in the order purchased).
    - i) If able, turn over the top card of the stack that the Contract Travel Tile just left.
    - ii) Any time tokens that are paid are discarded from the game.
    - iii) If the AI collects the last time marker from a row, flip the marker. You must pay the amount of cube(s) indicated by the tile in the row **+1** from the designated depot/storehouse.
    - iv) **Gaining a Bonus Card:** If there is a bonus card in the offer that matches the city that the AI traveled to, the AI gains the bonus card. If there are two for the same city, you choose.
  - d) **Early Game End Note:** If the AI cannot travel to any of the faceup cities and there are not at least 2 empty contract stacks, you have lost the game. If 3+ stacks are empty, proceed to end game scoring.
- 3) Discard the cubes in the city traveled to:
  - i) You may travel with the AI to the current city by placing **out of play** the necessary time tokens. Do not give the time tokens to the AI. You may then collect good(s) and/or complete a contract(s).
- 4) Add the appropriate cubes to the neighboring and/or designated cites:
  - i) This is done just as it is within the normal rules even in the last turn due to AI end game bonuses.

### End Game Condition:

- 1) Early end game condition [AI unable to travel and there are 0-2 empty contract stacks], you lose.
- 2) Early end game condition [AI unable to travel and 3+ empty contract stacks].
- 3) The last time token has been taken from the time board. The other player gets one more turn.
- 4) AI takes or you complete the 10 contract gaining the Peace of Westphalia card ending the game immediately.
- 5) The AI gains the Peace of Westphalia card by 'traveling' to the card during its traveling phase.
  - a) You get one more turn in this case. If you are able to finish the 10 contract during this turn, you may trade for the Peace of Westphalia card giving the AI the 10 contract.

**End Game Scoring:** (note the scoring differences depending on your chosen level of play)

1) **Score contracts:**

- a) AI scores all contracts at full value (6+ score at half rate for an easy game)
- b) You score the 5 highest valued contracts at full value and any others at half value. Just as in the normal rules you may have more than 5 contracts at game end.

2) **Score buildings:**

- a) You score your buildings normally (Expert Game: Each of your buildings can score no more than 12 points)
- b) AI scores its buildings alphabetically in the following sequence: (refer to a player board as needed, potentially moving the cubes to the board to validate the bonus value) **Note**: Consider time markers left on the time board as in the AI's possession for building scoring and always consider the best possible cube placement option when scoring its buildings.
  - i) Score all cards that do not involve goods
    - (1) Note: The AI scores Wache regardless of the position of the Merkator at game end.
  - ii) Score all 5 point goods buildings, if able, considering the goods on the main board and how you could best fill a player board (do not remove the goods cubes)
  - iii) Score Brooktor considering the best score possible (do not remove the goods cubes)
  - iv) Score all other 2 points per goods buildings **removing the cubes from the main board** that can match the building requirement considering the best possible options
  - v) Score all 1 point per good buildings **removing the cubes from the main board**
  - vi) Score ½ point per good buildings **removing the cubes from the main board**
- c) Expert Game: All buildings that did not qualify for the AI score half their value.

**AI Building Scoring Example:** (There are 3 orange, 4 red, 1 blue, 2 green, 5 black and 5 purple goods cubes left on the main board. There are also 8 time tokens left on the time board and the AI has 1 in its possession. The AI has 3 bonus cards which ties the number that you have.) The AI ends with the following buildings listed in the order noted above: Hofkammer (does not score – since tie with bonus cards (2.5 points in an expert game)), Theater (scores 16 points for having 8 buildings), Rentkammer (scores 3 points for 3 bonus cards), Seeamt (score 4.5 points for the 9 time tokens in the supply and its possession), Peel Tower (there are 5 black and 2 green cubes which makes it possible to score the 5 points (do not remove goods)), Arsenal (taking 1 of each weapon/fabric appropriate cube a musket, livestock, calfskin, fish oil, copper and iron can be formed scoring the AI 12 points, remove the cubes from the main board), Alsterhaus (from the main board the 4 red can be spice/citrus fruit, the 2 remaining orange can be vegetables/calfskin, the 4 remaining purple can be ham and the 1 blue can be wine/plums scoring the AI 11 points) and Large depot (there are only 3 black cubes remaining which go to the depots and score 1.5 points. All tolled the AI scores 53 points for an easy/normal game and 55.5 points in an expert game. This is a very big score and is only used as a scoring example. You really need to limit the AI to less than 30 points in buildings, if possible.

**Determining Your Victory Rating: (if your score is ...)**

- 1) **Score less than your opponent or early end due to inability to travel and 2 or fewer empty contract stacks:** Game Loss
- 2) **Tied to +1:** Easy Game Victory
- 3) **+2-4:** Game Victory
- 4) **+5-7:** Major Victory
- 5) **+8-10:** Complete Victory
- 6) **+11-13:** Master Level Victory
- 7) **14+:** Perfect Game

**Strategy Session:**

- 1) Merkator with this variant is still very much a game of efficiency.
- 2) This variant reintegrates the travel mechanic into the solo environment. It often be important to have the time tokens available to gain some goods and save time in completing a contract(s).
- 3) It may also be important that the AI has some time markers on hand to help replenish the main board and travel to more possible locations. This can help to delay the end game.
- 4) The AI will create a constant stream of possibilities by gaining a contract each turn. This permits the AI to buy buildings and gain end game points. It will be important for you to guide the AI to limit the gains made.



### Example: Determining the AI's travel path (next location)

At the start of the game the Contract Travel Tile (CTT) is not covering (blocking) any contracts and will start at the low end of the faceup contract stacks. In this case the AI will travel to England on its first turn assuming that there is at least 1 cube there. Move the Merkator token to England, discard any cubes there and fill the connected cities using normal rules. The AI then collects the 3 value England contract and move the CTT to the 3 stack. The contract beneath its tile remains face down. On the next turn the AI will try to move to Spain but won't have the time token needed and therefore it will consider traveling to Russia. If Russia has a cube on it, the AI repeats the travel process and collects the 5 value Russia contract and moves the CTT to cover the stack. The top 3 value tile is now turned face up and is a valid possible location.

**Note:** If for some reason the AI could not travel to Russia, there are no other travel options for the AI as the 3 value stack is not turned faceup until another destination is determined. In this case the game ends in a game loss. You must be aware of this possibility and choose your moves carefully especially in the early game.



Mount these onto cardboard front to back to use as a travel marker for the contract stacks