Seawatch - A Hybrid Board Game

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Prototype designed at Polliwog Game Jam Klagenfurt 2019 October 4-5
Final version presented at played at Vintage Computing Carinthia $03, 2019 December 14

Overview

Seawatch[i] is a game where players are captains of small vessels cruising the Mediterranean Sea and eventually rescue people in distress, which turn out to be refugees from different backgrounds. Then players try to bring them into one of six ports (Alicante, Marseille, Thessaloniki, Crete, Malta, Lampedusa), however it is often difficult to get permission to enter when having refugees on board. Thus, players have to be persistent at a port or trying to get to another one in time. People brought safely into a port are counted as winning points for a player, people who die while being under the responsibility of a player are counted as negative points. The player who first reaches 10 or more points wins the game.

Figure 1 Design team (Photo Anna Egger)

Seawatch was conceived at Polliwog Game Jam Klagenfurt 2019 as a game concept, it is not a commercial game. All game contents are under a permissive WTFPL license unless stated otherwise for some components.

Game components

- A game map, showing the Mediterrean Sea with numbered hexagonal fields. The size of our game board was 50cm x 32cm. The map we used is under license CC-BY 4.0 from Wikimedia Commons User O H 237. The hexagons are numbered from the left upper corner. Fields 4,22,52,97,90,100 contain the ports.

Figure 2 Game board

- Several ship cards consisting of a ship drawing with space for storage and a description of the traits and perks of the ship's captain.
- Around 3 x 100 (thin) counting chips in three colors for fuel (yellow), medicine (red), and food (green)
- Around 40 (larger) counting chips each representing 10 people you save. The color doesn't matter, but we different colors to indicate that the saved people might come from different continents.
- 4 ship miniatures fitting into a hexagonal map field
- 4 small cups matching the ships' colors
- 4 small cups matching the ships' colors with a black bottom

Figure 3 Game setup

- A BASIC program that runs on a Commodore 64. If you don't have a Commodore 64 you can use an emulator program like VICE (The Versatile Commodore Emulator).

Characters to choose

Idealistic Humanitarian

Positive trait: *Break through*

Instead of asking the port master in a move you can decide to directly enter the harbour without asking. This surprise break through only works once per game.

Negative trait: *Our boat is never full*

You always accept refugees from a nearby ship without a service in return

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Old Seawolfe

Positive trait: *Stubbornness*

After being rejected by a port master you can immediately try again a second time in this round

Negative trait: *Slower restock*

Restocking starts at 8 items instead of 10 items

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Globetrotter

Positive trait: *Strong engine*

You can move 3 fields in one round and use, as the other ships, 1 fuel.

Negative trait: *A new port every day*

Cannot enter the same port again without getting into another port in between.

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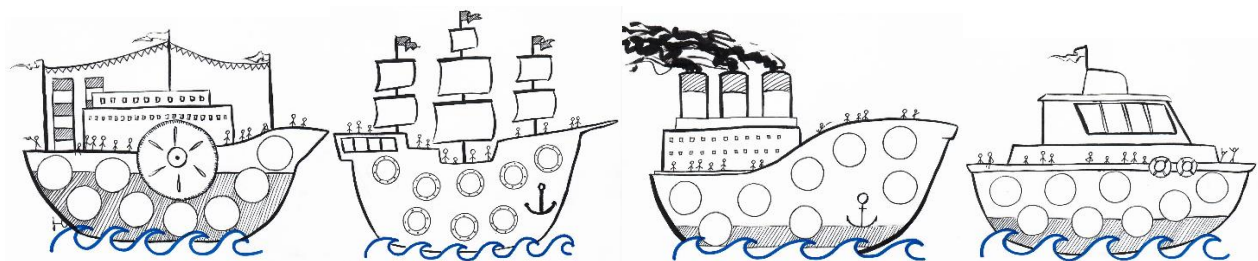## Médecins sans frontières

Positive trait: *I'm a doctor*

You only need half of the medicine (rounded up) to treat people.

Negative trait: *Not a trader*

You cannot trade with other ships.

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Each character can choose a ship with 8 slots. Each slot can hold 4 identical units (fuel, medicine, food). There is always space for people in need, so they do not require a slot.

Ship designs (don't influence gameplay, but look fun):

Gameplay

At the beginning of the game all players are in a port. Players can choose either Alicante, Marseille, Thessaloniki, or Crete. All players have to start in different ports and therefore choose a ship card and put a ship miniature into a free port. The last player chooses first, then the second-but-last player, and so on until the start player.

If you are in a **port**,

- You may stock up 10[ii] units in the first round
- 8 units in second,
- 6 units in third round,
- 4 units in fourth round, and so on.

Resources to be stocked are fuel, medicine and food. A ship has several storage places that allow to keep up to five units[ii] of the same resource.

After each stock you can decide to move or to stay another round at the port.

If you move out, the move follows immediately in the same round.

At **sea**:

At the beginning of each round you have to provide food to all the saved people on board. Put as many food units away as you have people stones.

If food is not enough

- If your people are already ill, everybody who did not get food dies on starvation – those people go into your negative Karma cup.
- Otherwise the rest of the food is gone and your people are now ill

You can stay at a spot or move (given that you have sufficient fuel). Moving costs 1 fuel and let's your ship move one or two[ii] fields.

The field you are on has then to be entered in the computer program.

- If you encounter people in distress at sea you have to take them aboard. Each 10 people require immediately one medicine, otherwise all people on your ship are ill from that moment on.
- Independent of any events, if two ships are on neighboring fields, they can trade any amount of resource or people on board if both captains agree.
- If you are on a field with a port, you are asked details about the people on board.
  - If the port master lets you in, all people on board are saved and you continue in the port next round. Saved people go into your cup with white bottom. If your account on saved minus lost people is more than 10 you **win** the game.
  - If the port master does not let you in, you stay at sea before the port. You can move or retry to enter next round[iii]

Additional Information

The hybrid aspect of the game was designed so that parts that are under your control or can be foreseen (deciding on stocks, moving to a field, usage of fuel, medicine and food) is managed by analog game components. Things beyond your knowledge or control (people being in distress, attitude of port masters) are managed by the computer program.

The attitude of port masters towards accepting ships with refugees is randomly assigned at the start of the game, but the most central ports start with a lower chance to be very tolerant. Moreover, ports that have already accommodated refugees will be less likely to do it again in the future. On the other hand, a port not being bothered with refugees becomes more tolerant over time.

When we designed the game, we were of course inspired by the work of Sea-Watch e.V. an organization which is sending out ships to help people. However, we deliberately introduced all kind of characters as ship captains, because the situation of encountering people in distress can happen to anyone who is at sea. Unfortunately, also the problems with being allowed into a port are not fictional and can happen to everyone.

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[i] This game was inspired by the work of Sea-Watch e.V. However, design and work on the game was performed independently and stands in no connection to Sea-Watch e.V.
[ii] Some players might have special trait causing a different number here.
[iii] Some players might have special trait allowing to retry or override the port master's decision.