

Traders

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1. Diary of the process

Week 1: Creating a group and getting started

21.-27.1.2008

For the first week, we had to first of all form a group which took a couple of days and then we had to come up with some idea about what we should do for game. I, Johan, had an idea about a board game with an environmental theme that I thought would be nice to work on and I presented the idea first to Robert and then to Rickard. Both of them thought it could work with some changes but we would still keep the environmental theme.

At Thursday we went to school and discussed some ideas around the game like what the goal should be, how to play it and different game board designs. I wanted it to be like Talisman with a track that goes around the board and you throw a dice and decide where to go but Robert thought of a more strategic game like Risk with no dices. We didn't get anything decided but we got a lot of ideas how it could be done.

So it's only the first week and it can be a little early to decide things for good but it is good to have ideas that we can choose from. We did decide to use the environmental theme but not how it should work or what the goals should be.

This week we saw that even if one person has a clear idea about a game the rest of the group might not share all of it which leads to discussions on how to solve it.

Next week we plan to decide a little more of what the game should be about and how to play it and also try to create an early prototype to try it out.

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Week 2: Changing Direction

28.1.-3.2.2008

We got a new member this week, Edmond Baer. Our main goal for this week was to gain good ideas and discuss playability, also we brought up the question "who wants to play this game" and we had in mind that it would be a game either for family or for casual gamers.

We had several meetings with the group this week and three of them were not in school time. So on Tuesday we had a meeting after school at the local board game club "FUSK" where we had the target of getting more ideas both for the game and for usual procedures. We came up with a list which we later on would use as more of a check list of what can be used as player actions. We also had meetings during lessons where we came up with ideas, which we then worked on to suit the style of the game. On Thursday we came up with another idea, it was about mercenaries in space which then later became Traders. The thought behind this idea was the German-style board games, that there shouldn't be any player elimination and that a theme would inspire all the actions of the game. So we chose this idea to make a prototype but we still had the other one in mind.

This trading game idea is about creating a great trading company and to do that you need to explore and build new trading posts, nothing is decided yet but it will be something similar.

For our last meeting this week I (Robert) decided to give all members homework, to go through the economical systems of two to three games and then present the analyse of them. This worked out quite promising giving a good insight on how we should use our economy in the game to make it interesting and creative to play. This meeting was on Saturday and Edmond Baer came up with an interesting idea, that every player chose a race/company to play and gained bonuses and handicaps and maybe later on also winning condition. We also tried to create a prototype which didn't go so well, we didn't have enough actions for the player to support any kind of gameplay but it was giving some insight on what we might need to make a game playable.

Different ideas on how the map should look like were brought up and we decided on a hexagonal-map, also we thought about creating a map that would be changing from game to game.

I think we did a good job this week but I also know that we would have done a much more greater job if we had spared more time for the group, but all that we wanted to do had been done and for the next week we are looking forward for creating some player actions and try to create a playable prototype.

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Week 3: First Game test done

4.2.-10.2.2008

This week we set up as goals to do our first play-testing of the game and thus having a working core. We wanted to do this because when we have a solid ground to stand on we can built on it and if the ground is bad we can still change it. Without the rest of the game coming crumbling down and all falls to pieces. On the first meeting we had this week we went through the notes from the last week and started to specify exactly what we needed to have a playable game with a good player experience. After we had came up with all that, Johan, and all of us was set to think of anything more that we could come up with to get the core finished.

When we got together after a day of to work with school we started to look more into the design of planets and possible game-pieces could look like.

This day was cut short because most of us were tired. And until the weekend meeting Robert came up with the plan that each of us should make three game-cards that we could have for our play-test. Under the play-testing we found a couple of bugs and problems but that Robert will go more detailed in to, on the play test report.

Personally I thought that this week was very hard to concentrate, cause of all the work we did on the days, painting 6 hours a day is fairly demanding on the brain. But we pulled trough and got our goals done for this week to. Sure we could have laid down even more time on this week's work. But I don't think the results would have been as good.

Our plans for next week are to get some new cards and try to get more fun and more things to do into the game. So the player doesn't have to feel that all he does is to hamster resources and have nothing to do with them.

We also have had allot of discussions and issues that we don't always have been all on the same page about but in the end we have compromised to the best. It's hard to be four individuals with different thoughts and visions and make them to one. But were taking one step at a time and we are making it. We are a mature group and see to it that all gets to say what they have to say and listens to each-others opinions

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Week 4: Second play test, refining

11.2.-17.2.2008

This week we started out with a meeting in school on Tuesday, where we talked about where, when and how to have our second play test, we also talked about what we need for that play test. The meeting was quite giving as we went through some things to change in the game.

It was also decided that Johan would buy small paper notes, which he did, he also got some magnetic "bricks" which we were going to use to represent the players ships on the board. Unfortunately the bricks had a problem; they could not be next to each other without pushing away from each other. We did however find good use of them as indicators to show what resources the planets provide

We decided to have the second play test on Friday. We met up at school and found a good group room to be in. We started out with going through what kind of cards we wanted and how many. We ended up with 50 Event cards which I (Edmond) wrote them, we had 30 Action cards which Rickard wrote; we also had 10 Planet cards which were calculated by Robert and written by Johan. What the cards do will be covered in the play test section. After this we were all set to play test.

During and after the play test we discussed problems. The main problem that we found was the economical system. The problem was that despite the Planet cards (which regulate the income) we got too many resources. Other problems and issues were that we need to balance some cards. We also want to implement the possibility to somehow get better ships at some point, however we deemed that a minor issue that we will look at when we have the major game play set. Overall I think this was a good week, we got closer to a working game, and we had a successful play test and it feels like we got a better understanding of where we need focus our attention for the next play test.

We are at this point unsure about next week, as it again is a week with 6 hours painting Monday through Friday.

*Author: Edmond Baer
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Week 5: Easy week

18.2.-24.2.2008

This week we didn't get that much done, due to the other course we have in school, but here comes a small sum up of what we did.

We met at Wednesday after our lesson, only three of us being there thou Richard went home earlier, but we discussed what to do about the economy problem that we have with the players getting a lot of resources. Richard came up with the idea at last week's play test that we could draw one planet card each round and not one for each player which would hold down the production of resources. So we decided that we should try it at the next play test which will be held next week.

If it isn't brought up at either the play test report, then here comes a short summary of our economical problem within the game.

Original setting after last iteration: draw one planet card at each turn and collect resources that are appropriate. The planet card contains two to five numbers which represent the different planets. If you draw a planet card and it says 1 and 3 you have to check where you have your stations and if you do have a station on any of those planets you can pick a resource and that is for all players. This setting leads to a massive amount of resources with you gaining nearly one resource each turn and when the goal of the game is to collect two of each resource and ten gold it doesn't take too much time to get there.

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Week 6: New economic system

25.2.-2.3.2008

So this week we planned to test a new way of handling the planet cards we have due to our economical problems within the game. The problem is that we get too much resources and money which isn't appropriate to the goal of the game. Rickard came up with an idea last week that instead of drawing one planet card each turn we should only draw one each round with the player who starts the game. The point where the next card is drawn. So at this week's play test we are going to test and see how it works.

This is a good example on why you shouldn't fall in love with your design, at some point you iterate your game in some way and have to throw away something dear to you. It shows that iteration is good for a game.

I am not going to go in on all the details on how the play test went but the results were positive and the new way we handled the planet cards was successful. We got the resources down to a better level and it made the game more balanced. The play time stayed the same pretty much, last play test we finished up in around 90 minutes and we might have played for 100 minutes this time so it is around the same time. The big difference is that this time you finish the game with a lot less resources, I <won> this week's play test and I had one extra resource and a couple of gold more than I needed. Previous weeks the winner has had a lot of resources at each station and more gold than needed.

As usual it has been a week where we have done most of the stuff together, our goal for next week is to start writing what is needed for the presentation and for the hand in.

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Week 7: Design documentation

3.3.-9.3.2008

This week we started to plan our design document and divide up who should write what. I, Johan, took my free Wednesday this week to start map out how the design document should look like and presented it to the group on Thursday at our meeting. It was 5 key topics that should be in the design document as I see it with a sixth point that came up during the meeting. The key topics are

1. Vision
2. Marketing
3. Gameplay
4. Story
5. Game characters
6. Media

I wrote a background story and made some concept arts of the game cards that should be in the game on Wednesday when we were free from school. We split it up so that Rickard would write about Marketing, Robert about Gameplay, me on Story and Media and Edmond on Game characters. We decided to take vision together though it is a quite important topic. We put a deadline on Sunday so we had a couple of days to finish it on.

Sunday's deadline wasn't kept due to a board game convent at school during the holiday which Robert and Richard attended to. So we didn't reach this week's goal but then we have another week to finish up the project on so it isn't such a big crisis.

I personally got a lot of work done during the week with first the Wednesday where I took some time to read about design document and flow charts and then made some concepts on the cards that should be used in the game. On Friday I spend most of the day at the computer and organized an OneNote notepad for the project and design document and I also started to design the different cards that will be used in the game.

Edmond figured out six different factions along with logotypes for each and wrote some descriptions to each of them that fit our humorous style. Then he started to write about the game play, both an overview and an in-depth description on how the game is played. Well done Edmond (Johan's note).

It was the first time we didn't do everything together and next week will be a lot like this one with texts to be written and try to finish it up so we can start working on the presentation. Hopefully people will be done with their work at the next deadline.

I updated this document with a new index, one that is accurate, fixed so the topics are the same style and put our logo on the top.

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Week 8: TBA

10.3.-16.3.2008

(Replace the following text with your own) For every week, the group updates the report covering at least the next issues concerning the main assignment:

- What was the goal for this week?
- Why did you choose to do that?
- What did you do to reach the goal?
- Did you meet the goal?
- Who did what?
- What did you learn from this?
- What could you have done differently to improve this week result?
- What are you planning to do next week?
- Writer(s) of this week report.

2. Summary of the process

The whole project started out even earlier than this when my (Johan) dad told me it would be nice if I were to create an environmental game which show the world as it is today and what we need to do to save it from the environmental issues. This was also the idea I presented to Robert and Richard when I got the idea of making a board game of my father's idea. I choose Robert and Richard because they play a lot of board games and are more into it than me and I thought they would become handy in the project.

After the first week, we have got a group and talked about how we could do the game. Early the second week we also got a new member when Edmond joined us. The idea to Traders came first on the second week after our lesson with Anna Kaisa when we played the idea generation game, VNA where you get different words and make up things with them, and then you build up concepts with a couple of words. We didn't think of it at that moment when we wrote down the Traders idea which then was called Mercenaries but later that day when we should pick out some of the ideas to present we realised that it could work as our main project so we took the step and started over with the new idea.

Since then we have had at least one meeting every week where we discuss what to do and new ideas. In the beginning we brainstormed quite much and wrote down nearly every idea that we came up with whether or not it fitted in our game. This was our brainstorming stage of the process and we made all the work in school or at Roberts place during this phase.

The next stage came when we started to play test our game with a prototype that was made up with some papers and dices. During this time we stopped brainstorming new ideas all the time and started to plan our first prototype and what it should contain. We trashed a lot of ideas from the brainstorming stage and kept the ones that actually could work and started to build our first prototype. The idea was of course not solid at this point so we came up with some new ideas to improve the game after our first play test and we did so until our third and last play test where we started to work with the paper work that had to be done.

Much of the work was done in the group at meetings where we discussed things and tried different things out. It is the two last weeks when we actually have started to work for ourselves when we have had a lot to write and not so much idea generation and prototyping. The ones who have made the most work the last two weeks are me and Edmond who have been writing most parts of the design document and made all the pictures.

As I see it the roles have been quite the same all the way thru the process with me as an organizer who keeps track of notes and ideas and now the last couple of weeks, all the documentation for the game.

Robert and Richard are and have always been the two with the knowledge of board games and contributed with their knowledge. Robert has also been keeping notes from our meetings and has been our prototype man who has handled all the paper pieces which have been our game during the process. Edmond has been working in the

shadows but has stepped up when needed and made his part, especially now in the end when so much had to be written.

I would say we learned a lot during the project with prototyping being the most important thing. If we hadn't prototyped it we wouldn't have found out our problems with the economy which would led to a game not as good as it is today. It shows the importance of testing the game in a very early stage which is something I at least will take with me to future project. I guess that we also have learned the importance of having notes and stuff organized now at the end of the project when we should put all texts together and if someone didn't have it all under control it would have been a mess and it would have taken a lot more time to get it together.

Finally, I think all of us in the group are proud of Traders and what we have produced in the short time. There were some things we discussed at the end that didn't make it into the game but the game could have become just a little more easily played with it but it's no big deal. The game is fun to play and works as it should so we couldn't be happier.

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3. Appendix

Design document

See [Trader_design_document.pdf](#)

Game prototypes



Here is our first prototype, it was very spartanic done but it worked and gave us ideas of what was needed to be done. The different colours on the dices represents different resources, red are gems, white are food, black and gray are metals and the green ones was our credits. Also the papers on the top of the game board were the first edition of our event cards.



Here is a picture of a prototype we used, the green cards represent planet cards and the red ones represent action cards. The pink ones are event cards and the white A4 paper with hexagons on are our game board

Play test results

Play test report 1

Play test number one or two depending on how you count was done the 9th February 2008. All the group members participated in the play test that we did at Roberts place.

This was our first serious play test and we wanted to see how the game was to play. For this play test we used:

- 1 A4 game board with a hexagonal grid over it.
- 4 ship cards to show what you were carrying around for resources in space.
- 3 Resources; metal, jewellery and food
- 12 event cards that gives the player positive or negative events that happens.
- 6 planets and one of them where the home planet where you start and finish.
- A lot of dices to represent all the resources, ships, stations and money in the game.

As I mentioned we wanted to see how the game was to play but we also wanted to see how the event cards was in the game, were they a good or a bad thing to have in the game, how do we move on the game board and how will the game economy be.

We were pretty sure that the event cards should be a good compliment to the game so that there is something happening at each of the players turns. We created 12 very simple cards that we used for the test with events like; move two step to the left, receive a free metal resource and you have been attacked by a pirate and loses one gold. It didn't take long until we realised that we need to have set directions on the game board when someone got the move event card. The second problem was that in a hexagonal grid you can't move in the four usual ways but in six directions which we didn't think of.

When you draw the pirate card you usually lose one gold, but what happens when you don't have any gold? That was something we encounter during the play test but we decided that if you don't have anything you don't lose anything, because there isn't anything to lose, and the game goes on.

The ships that are used in this version of the game are of only one kind, they travel 1 step + 1d3 step which means that we uses a normal dice were 1 and 2 represents one extra step, 3 and 4 two extra steps and 5 and 6 three extra steps. So the furthest you can get is four steps at your turn. The ship can carry cargo, there are two cargo holders which only can hold one resource each, and you can have one food and one metal or two metals. The get a free resource card got us to thing on where to put the free resource, do you put it on any of your stations or do you put it in your ship? We talked about it and decided that if you get a free resource card the resource should be placed in the ship because it represents the player. Then problem two pop up, what if the player already has two resources in

the ship? Discussion again and we decided that if you have a full cargo bay and receive a new resource you have to either discard it or throw away one of the other from your ship so there is enough space in your ship to pick it up.

The event card that we used during this play test was good, but too few. They add a bit of excitement to the game when you have to draw a card but you don't know what you'll end up with. So we will definitely keep them but we need a lot more of them.

The goal of the game in this play test was to collect two of each resource, get them to the home planet and together with 10 gold build a medicine that affect the home planet some way which makes you win the game. To get two of each resource wasn't so hard, you just build two or three stations on different planets and waited a couple of rounds and then they where yours, the hard thing was to get them all to the home planet with the ship only taking two resources at a time as I mentioned earlier. But what we realised was that it was much too easy to get resources and that you'll end up with tons of each resource or if you sell most of them, ending up with a lot of money. So this is the problem we encountered and that we will work on for a long time I would guess though it isn't the easiest thing to solve and still making the game fun to play.

To be able to land on your station on a planet you have to land on that spot and not on any other spot on the planet, this was also something we played to get knowledge of, which means that you have to think of where you place your stations when building them. Another thing that has to do with planets and stations was whether you should be able to build more than one station on a planet and after some discussion we ended up with that yes, you should be able to build more than one station on each planet but to a much higher price than the first.

Many things of how to play and use different stuff depends on the order you do things so we tried to get that order fixed and ended up with that you start with:

1. Draw the event card.
2. Collect your resources.
3. Move your ship.

This helped us when we encounter problems like what happens if I am standing at a station, draws a event card and get a free resource but the cargo hold are full or if I have steps left when I reach a station which I was going to, can I continue moving after I am done there or is my turn over? With this order of doing things it all got solved, if you are on a planet when you start your turn and get a resource, you can choose to put it in the station and you can't move any more if you land on a station and unload stuff at them.

So what will we improve to the next play test? We will:

- Create something that regulates the production of resources.
- More event cards.
- Fixate directions.
- More things to do in the game.
- Balance the event cards.
- Maybe get another set of cards that you could buy or something.

Then what we thought was good at this play test:

- The turn based play, we thought of doing it all real time first but this was very good and not too complicated at all.
- We think that three resources plus gold is enough, we planned on having much more resources earlier but it got very balanced with only three resources so we will stick with that.
- The event cards and their actions were good.

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Play test report 2

The first thing we sat down and did this day was to make more cards. We decided to get 50 event cards so that we wouldn't have to shuffle the deck all the time. We also decided to add attack cards. We also added planet cards to get a more random production on the planets and it was an attempt to get down the huge amounts of resources we got from the first game test. Among the 50 event cards we balanced them like this:

- 10 stand still cards.
- 12 move 2 steps (in different directions).
- 10 free resources (2 gold, 1 material).
- 4 pirate cards (-1g).
- 1 super pirate (losing all on the ship).
- 8 +1d3 movement.
- 5 get action card.

The 30 action cards were balanced like this. First they cost 2 credits to buy.

- 6 mercenary cards - use: steal one resource from player of your choice. Cost 1 credit to use.
- 6 miss one turn cards – use: make player of your choice miss their turn. Cost 2 credits to use.
- 6 extra turn cards – use: you get an extra turn. Cost 4 credits to use.
- 6 trade cards – use: trade two resources of your choice against one resource. Cost free.
- 6 "steal a card" cards – use: you can steal a card from a player of your choice. Cost 1 credit.

The planet cards were made so there is production on different cards each time, with one card where there is production on every planet.

When we had done this we started the game testing and all went smoothly, the bigger amount of cards worked well and therefore we got a more fun game-play.

We still got problems with the economy, because we still got a large amount of resources that we got. So we made it a priority to change that for the next session. Another thing that we discovered regarding the cards where that we needed to re-balance the action cards to.

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Play test report 3

Before we started we decided to do the following changes to the game play:

- *Only 1 planet card per “round of turns”, meaning that I drew a planet card every time it was my turn as I started.*
- *The “Pirates” event cards now take all resources that are on your ship, they also take 1 gold*
- *There is no “super-pirate” event card anymore*
- *Planets that are close to the starting planet only have one available resource*
- *The “move 2 steps in x- direction” event cards are removed*
- *The amount of “stand still” event cards were halved, we now had only 5 of them*
- *The removal of the mentioned event cards brought the total number of event cards down to 30(from 50)*
- *The 1st station is free thereafter they cost 2 gold, having a second station on one planet costs 6 gold*
- *No player may have more than 2 station per planet*

The play test went very smoothly; all changes were good or non bad. There were slight discussions regarding the use of action cards. We decided to keep the rule that a player may use all action cards he has at hand at once, but he may only buy one action card per turn. The game took just over one and a half hour.

There were few surprises, the economical system that was the main focus in this test worked like it was supposed to and brought down the amount of gold and resources that are acquired to a balanced level. The event and action cards are well balanced now, although half the group thinks it needs a minor tweaking.

We came up with the following things to look at after the play test:

- *Light modding of action card cost*
- *Check event card quantity, if it needs to be increased*

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