

A Comparative Analysis

Sunless Sea and Sid Meier's Pirates

The purpose of this report is to analyze the games Sid Meier's Pirates (1987) and Sunless Sea (2015) and to compare them mainly on the grounds of Gameplay, Game Structure and the Game World.

This analysis also aims to understand the similarities and differences between these games that were released 28 years apart.

Introduction

Pirates was created by Sid Meier and developed and published by Microprose in 1987. The players are given choices as to what era and conditions they want to play on in the beginning of the game. The game also offers the players the ability to choose the nationality of their character and the major skill that the player character would possess.

Meanwhile in Sunless Sea, the players are given a more detailed way of defining her character by choosing the characters roots, present and their desires for the future. The Roguelike element of the game also forces the player to create and define a new character each time the player character dies. The map also changes each time the player character dies and the player will have to re-explore everything.

Both the games present a large ocean which a player can a lot of scope for exploration.

Gameplay

Player Actions

The main Gameplay elements in **Sunless Sea** includes purchasing resources, building a crew, upgrading ships and artillery, exploring, gathering resources and knowledge and forging relationships.

Even though there are is seemingly lot of confusing interaction required, the player is able to do most of this just by clicking.

In terms of gameplay, the game can be divided into two major parts:

1. At Land/Ports

Here, the player is able to perform actions such as communicating with people, purchasing items/resources, selling, trading, upgrading ships or other machinery etc.

The player is able to do most of the tasks at land or shores via simply clicking.

2. At Sea

The players at sea are able to move around in their ships and explore different areas and perform combat (or flee) from enemies and pirates.

The player is able to do so with the movement commands and the fire command. The combat is not very different from the exploration as player is able to fire from her own ship once the crew has loaded the arms.

The player is able to 'win' by achieving their ambition that the player had decided previously. The player needs to gather resources by discovering new locations and complete certain quests in order to achieve this objective.

Pirates follows a very similar pattern in terms of gameplay and player action but the major notable difference in **Pirates** from **Sunless Sea** is its combat.

The initial phase of combat is similar to that of **Sunless Sea** but if two ships collide the player must perform melee sword combat with the captain of the other ship.

The player may choose to attack enemy ships or towns, hunt pirates, seek buried treasure and even avoid violence altogether and seek to increase their wealth through trade alone.

Player Agency

In both these games the player has the ability to make choices in such a way that these actions have consequences within the game world and that the players are aware of any possible negatives that may come out of these decisions before making them.

Player Motives

The main player motives for **Pirates** is gathering wealth. The player may go about this motive in a variety of methods but the main player motive remaining gathering resources and amassing a great amount of wealth while in **Sunless Sea** the main motive of the payer remains whatever the player had decided in the beginning such as gathering a large amount of wealth, publish literary works, retrieving dead father remains etc. but the player still needs to explore, gather resources and get wealthy enough to achieve this objective.

Game Structure

Core Mechanics

Sunless Sea starts in a port where the players are provided with basic ship, fuel, money, crew and other resources to start their journey. Once the players have purchased their resources or whatever they may need, the player is able to set sail and start exploring. Once the player starts exploring, the explored areas become visible on the map for them to see.

Ship

In **Sunless Sea**, the ship has a limited amount of health points, fuel, cargo space (for holding resources) etc. The ship also has various abilities such as engine overdrive which enables the ship to move faster but risks an event of a fire which damages the ship and an ability to detect any nearby islands or land.

Meanwhile in **Pirates**, the ship has similar properties but does not have any special abilities. It is also to be noted that the map for Pirates is completely visible and hidden like Sunless Sea.

Gathering Resources

The player, in **Sunless Sea** is able to dock on other islands or areas and gather resources, knowledge etc. These resources and the knowledge attained can then be sold for wealth or traded for other goods or services very similar to how it works in **Pirates**. Both the games also enable the players to purchase common resources from the shops with the in-game money.

Crew

The players, in **Sunless Sea** is able to unlock crew members by exploring and discovering certain areas on the map or just by progressing in the story or narratives. Meanwhile in **Pirates**, the crew is gathered by the player character from the very beginning. The crew in

Sunless Sea also provide particular and unique attributes and abilities while in Pirates they do not.

Exploration

The exploration element in both the games are pretty similar except for the fact that the map is hidden from the player in Sunless sea while in Pirates, it is not.

Combat

In both the games, the player encounters many enemies that try to destroy the ship. The player is able to pretend this by destroying the enemy with their own arms or by running away from the threat.

In Sunless Sea, the players are able to combat against the enemies by charging their weapon by having their target circle on the enemy. Once it is charged, the player may hit the button to fire and repeat until the threat is eliminated.

While in Pirates, the combat is similar until both the ships come in contact with each other. When the ships collide, the player must start melee combat with the captain of the enemy ship. The player is able to select what weapon he wants to use for this purpose.

Conforming Relationships

Relationships in Sunless Sea can be made by making certain decisions and unlocking narrative branches. The ability to propose to someone remains locked until a certain level of resources is attained or until the player reaches a certain stage in the game.

Meanwhile this is pretty blunt in Pirates as the player is able to propose to any stranger when the prompt is available but answer will depend on the amount of wealth or resources you possess.

Death Condition

In **Sunless Sea**, if the player ship's health reaches zero, the player character along with the entire crew drowns and the player must restart by creating a new character but is given the choice of getting a certain amount of items or abilities that were possessed by the

character. The entire map also becomes hidden again and the map also changes each time the player character dies.(Roguelike Elements)

Meanwhile in **Pirates**, once the ship's health reaches zero, the game ends and the players must start the game over completely.

Endgame

The endgame or victory condition for Sunless Sea is achieving the goal that was decided by the player in the beginning of the game but in order to do this, the player must gather resources, amass wealth, explore and achieve certain quests and unlock certain narratives.

In Pirates, the objective is to amass wealth. This can be done in a numerous amount of ways as the player sees fit. The player is also able to retire at any given moment in the game.

Game World

Genre

Pirates is commonly termed as an Action adventure strategy game while Sunless Sea is termed as a survival,exploration Role playing game with Roguelike elements.

Tone

The general tone of Sunless Sea seems to be grey and dire thus portraying a light sadness in the setting. Meanwhile Pirates seems to have a more brighter and war-like tone to it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that both these games have a large amount of similarities but both of them definitely cannot be considered the same game.

Sunless Sea provides a larger amount of options ,quests and tasks to perform. It also provides multiple end conditions and payer objectives and the roguelike elements also make the game quite different from Pirates.

Even though pirates has only a single objective of amassing wealth, it provides the player with a large amount of different ways of doing so. This is something that Sunless sea does not provide. Even though certain tasks can be avoided there is always some tasks that have to be performed to achieve an end condition thus Sunless Sea feels a bit scripted to some extent.