

# VOC

## FOUNDING THE DUTCH EAST INDIES COMPANY

*Corrected rules of the basic game, v 1.1 BE*

It's 1602... Merchants from the rich provinces of Holland and neighboring Zeeland gather in stately rooms to discuss the foundation of a mighty consortium: a company that will hold the monopoly of the very profitable East Indies trade. One question occupies their minds more than anything: who will control the new company? Amsterdam is puffing up its might, but a small group of merchants from the wealthy Zeeland town Middelburg have gathered almost as much experience, wealth and power in the East Indies. One of them in particular is seen as being exceptionally powerful. You could be him!

Each player takes the role of a merchant living at the end of the sixteenth century. These merchants sent out ships to explore and expand the profitable trade in the east, where they traded cloves, nutmeg, silk and tea in such remote areas as India, Indonesia, China and Japan. These goods were then sold at great profit in the West. The journey, however, was a dangerous one and fitting out a ship was prohibitively expensive. Merchants therefore cooperated in small groups, called 'compagnie' in Dutch, to fit out ships together.

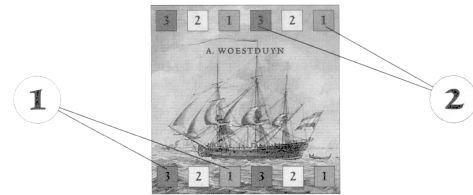
At the same time, competition was cut-throat, not only at home, where Amsterdam was the most fearsome rival, but also abroad. Therefore, a united company was founded in 1602: the 'Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie', or VOC for short. The company was governed by a board known as the 'Seventeen Lords'. Historically, Amsterdam got about half of the 17 seats in this mighty body, with Middelburg getting only 4 and the rest going to smaller towns. Your objective is to improve upon Zeeland's historical fate if you succeed, Middelburg will rival Amsterdam as the capital of the United Dutch Provinces!

This sheet contains the rules for the basic game, which can be played by 4 or 5 players. The rules for the advanced game, which can be played by 3 to 5 players, can be downloaded from <http://www.splotter.com/english/voc.html>.

### GAME MATERIAL

This game contains:

Wooden cubes, representing men; depending on their placement, these can have different functions depending on where they are played on the board:



1. Men which are placed here are called merchants. They can carry goods from the East
2. Men which are placed here are called sailors. They can navigate the ship



Nutmeg



Cinnamon



Tea



Coffee



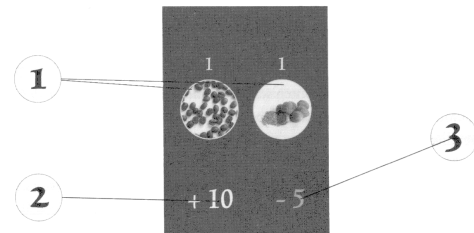
Textiles



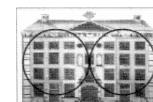
Cloves



Pepper (placed in the harbor printed)

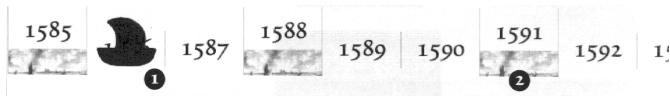


1. The goods needed to fulfill this contract. The numbers above the goods indicate how many are needed to fulfill the contract<sup>1</sup>.
2. The maximum amount you can earn fulfilling this contract.
3. This number has no meaning in the basic game.

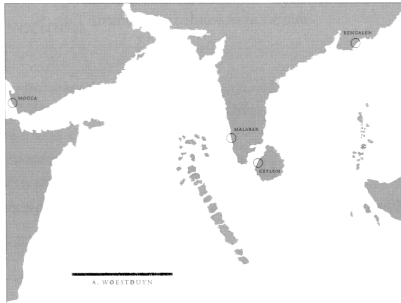


Warehouses for each player. You can put your men and up to two goods in your warehouse.

1. The contract with on the left side two cinnamon, two nutmeg and two cloves and on the right side one pepper is wrong; it should be understood as a contract for one cinnamon, one nutmeg and one clove, or two pepper.



1. Ship indicates the current year
2. In the years marked by a ships convoi, scurvy occurs.



Four navigation cards; these can be written on using the marker provided (always use an erasable marker to do so!). The line at the bottom of each navigation card shows the starting area of each ship.



The year markers and the “Burgemeester” card are not used in the basic game.

### PREPARATION

Put the board on the table. Sort the goods and place them in the matching harbors. Most harbors get four goods. Only the harbors selling pepper get one pepper each.

Put the four navigation cards next to the board. Take the card marked ‘VOC’ out of the pile of contracts. Shuffle the remaining cards. Take 6 of them without looking. Shuffle these 6 together with the VOC card. Put this pile face-down on the table. Put the remaining contracts, face-down, on top of this pile.

Every player chooses a color. If four players join, each player gets 10 men (wooden cubes) of his color. In this case, do not use the blue men. With 5 players, each player gets 8. These men are put on the ships on the board in such a way that the colors of the cubes match those on the slots on the ships. Some slots have two colors: blue and one other. With four players, put red, yellow, black or green men in these slots, as the color indicates. With five players, put in blue men.

Each player gets a warehouse.

Take the top three contract cards and put these face-up next to the board, all facing the same way so that all players agree which side is left and which is right.

A game of VOC starts in 1585. Put the wooden ship on this year.

### OUTLINE OF PLAY

VOC is played in a number of rounds, each symbolizing a year in the history of the VOC. Each year consists of 5 or 6 phases. In some phases, all players get a turn. In others, they do not.

Phase 2 (scurvy) is played only in years marked with a ships’ convoy. In the first round (1585), skip phase 1 and 2 and start with phase 3 immediately. We will now describe the phases in more detail.

### PHASE 1: NEW ORDERS

Take the top contract card from the pile. If it is the VOC card, the game ends immediately (see the last page). Otherwise, put the card on the table, face-up, to the right of the cards already lying there.

If there are now 6 cards present, take the oldest (leftmost) card and give it to the city of Amsterdam (put it on the board on the area marked Amsterdam). This represents a contract fulfilled by Amsterdam. At the end of the game, it will yield points for Amsterdam.

This phase is not played in the first year (1585)!

### PHASE 2: SCURVY!

This phase is played only in years marked with a ships’ convoy. Each ship which is not in the harbor of Middelburg loses one sailor to the effects of malnutrition on board. Take the leftmost sailor from each ship and hand it back to the owner of that color.

If a ship has no more sailors, it sinks. Put back all goods into the harbors they came from. Give all men to the respective players. The ship can be refitted later in the same year.

Note that ships in harbors in the east still suffer from scurvy. Only those in Middelburg are exempt.

### PHASE 3: INVESTMENTS

All ships that have sunk, or that have returned home, have to be fitted out anew. All players replace their men on the slots indicated on the ship. The ship’s navigation card is wiped clean with a piece of moist cloth. The refitted ships cannot sail in the next phase: they have to wait for one turn.

### PHASE 4: TO THE EAST, AND BACK

In this phase, the ships A, B, C and D sail one after the other. Typically, a ship will try to move a certain distance. Ships are controlled by their skipper, that is, the player owning the leftmost sailor on the ship.

In the sixteenth century, navigating was no small task. The available maps were often imprecise. Moreover, it was impossible to determine the exact position of the ship in east-west direction. North-south position could be easily determined looking at the stars.

In the game, ships sail by means of a navigation card. Each ship has its own card. The skipper takes the pen provided with the

game and puts it on the navigation card at the exact spot which marks the location of his ship. Ships sailing from Zeeland start anywhere on the line at the bottom of the navigation card.

Then, the skipper closes his eyes and draws the route he wants the ship to sail. The other players look on and can provide limited assistance. For each sailor a player has on the ship, he may call out once. Calls are limited to the words ‘North’, ‘South’, ‘East’, ‘West’ or ‘Stop’. Each word counts as one complete call. If a player calls another word, or calls more often than allowed, he has to pay 5 daalders to the bank. The skipper, meanwhile, is free at any time to follow or ignore the instructions given.

When the skipper decides he has sailed far enough, he stops, takes the pen off the card and opens his eyes. Then, he puts a little cross on the card to mark the new location of his ship.

If a skipper crosses a coast while drawing, other players call out: ‘Land ho!’. The ship has run aground. Sometimes it is unclear whether a ship has crossed the coast, or if it is a near miss. It is advisable to let the skipper draw on, and judge afterwards if he has run ashore. This is the case if the line drawn crosses the coast, i.e., part of the line drawn is visible on the inside of the coastline. Running off the map is treated in the same way.

If a ship runs aground, the skipper cannot sail any further that year. Any drawing after the hit is ignored. Moreover, the leftmost sailor falls overboard and is given back to the player of that color. If there are any sailors left on the ship, this means that there will be a new skipper, who can assume his position one year later, starting from the spot where the ship has run aground.

If there are no more sailors on the ship, it sinks (see below).

If the skipper succeeds in reaching a harbor (that is, he draws his line into one of the encircled areas on the navigation card), players may buy goods. All merchants on the ship get a chance to do so, starting with the leftmost merchant. If goods in the harbor run out, trading ends.

Each merchant can only carry one item. He is not obliged to do so, but may also pass in the hope of procuring more valuable goods in a later harbor. Merchants do not pay for the goods they procure. Each item is placed on the ship, under the merchant who carries it. Goods taken up cannot be discarded until the ship reaches Zeeland. Thus, a merchant taking up a good can not take up any other goods until the ship has been to Zeeland and back.

A ship does not have to stop when it enters a harbor, provided the skipper does not open his eyes. Thus, it is possible to visit multiple harbors in one year. These harbors are then handled one after the other. The harbors are safe: as long as you stay inside the circles, you cannot run aground, not even if you draw across the coast line. Only if you draw on the land outside the circle, you run aground. But if the skipper has drawn inside of the circle first, the merchants can first take goods, before the ship runs aground and a sailor is lost.

If the skipper hits the line at the bottom of a navigation card, the other players call: ‘Home!’, and the ship automatically sails home to the harbor of Middelburg. All men and goods are

taken from the ship and given to the respective players. The ship then has to be refitted in the next year.

Note that it is possible, and even quite likely, that not all players will be skippers in a particular year. Others may even control two ships. This is normal—those who have little control now will fare better next year.

### **Sunken ships**

As soon as a ship no longer has any sailors, it sinks. Put back all goods into the harbors they came from. Give all men to the respective players. The ship has to be refitted in the next year.

### **PHASE 5: SALES**

This phase occurs only if players have brought goods to Zeeland in this or a previous year. All players may negotiate for one minute to buy or sell goods from each other. Only goods that have been brought back can be traded. Players may pay each other in daalders.

As soon as the minute has ended, each player wishing to do so may fulfill contracts that are open. He puts back the goods indicated on the contract card in the harbors they came from, and earns the amount of daalders indicated on the card. The card itself is discarded.

If a contract has a slash, you may choose to deliver either the goods shown on the left side or the goods shown on the right side.

If multiple players are able to fulfill the same contract, they can cooperate by letting one of them take the contract, paying a small sum to the other. Alternatively, they can compete by bidding a lower price than the one indicated on the card. For instance, a player may call out: ‘I will take the 2 tea contract at 8 daalders instead of the sum printed on the card’. If a player calls out a bid, it immediately becomes impossible to earn more from the deal. If the other players do not want to bid less than 8 daalders, the calling player gets the contract for 8.

At the end of the sales phase, each player may store up to two goods in his warehouse. Any excess goods are placed back in their harbors of origin. A player may freely decide which goods to keep and which to return.

### **PHASE 6: NEW YEAR**

The wooden ship is moved one year further.

### **GAME END**

The game ends as soon as the VOC card is turned open. The Company is founded, and only the richest players will get a position on the board. All players count their daalders. Whoever has earned most, wins the game.

However, all cards that have gone to Amsterdam are counted as well. If Amsterdam has gathered more daalders than any of the players, all players lose. None of the great merchants of Zeeland then makes it into the body of Seventeen Lords.

**COLOPHON** *Authors:* Joris Wiersinga & Jeroen Doumen. *Theme and setting:* Tobias van Gent, City of Middelburg. *Realization:* Splotter Spellen. *Graphic design:* Caroline de Lint, Voorburg. *Photography:* Gert Germeraad, Den Haag. *Prototyping:* Tamara Jannink. *Technical realization:* Afterpress, Arnhem. *Playtesting:* Thanks to all of you who playtested this game! Bas de Bakker, Nadja de Beer, Dorien Bernard, Lennart Boone, Gerben Dirksen, Jeroen Doumen, Nina van den Driest, Bianca van Duijl, Stefan van Duin, Mireille van Dulleman, Vincent van Exel, Tobias van Gent, Ralf Gramlich, Herman Haverkort, Lisa Huibregtse, Marc Jager, Tamara Jannink, Roel Jansen, Ronald Hoekstra, Lotte de Kam, Ragnar Krempel, Marloes Krieger, Aldo Kroese, Johan Lieven, Caroline de Lint,

Berbel Lippe, Marnix Manni, Corn van Moorsel, Levitah Numeijer, Marc Overwijk, Mathijs Pag, Davie Poortvliet, Iris de Regt, Chantal van Rijswijk, Hannah Saija, Pieter Simoons, Chantal Sterkenburg, Anahita Torabi, Willemien Troelstra, Connie Wielemaker, Joris Wiersinga, Marnix van Wijngaarden and Arthur Zonnenberg. *Front cover:* Painting by Jacob van Strij, 1785, Maritiem Museum, Rotterdam. Digital version kindly provided by The Walburg Pers, Zutphen. *Map:* Atlas Van der Hagen, Den Haag, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1049 B 13, 2. Thanks to the Koninklijke Bibliotheek for providing us with a digital copy. *Coins:* Private collection, Leiden. *Other material:* City of Middelburg and Koninklijk Zeeuwsch Genootschap der Wetenschappen. Copyright 2002 Splotter Spellen, Arnhem.