

Man O' War

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WARHAMMER COMBAT AT SEA

GAME'S WORKSHOP

£24.99

When you purchase a *Games Workshop* boxed game you can be sure that you are going to get a product that is filled with bright, colourful, detailed quality pieces. You can also be sure that the rules have been trimmed for maximum logical and action effect but minimum strategy and tactical play, and *Man O' War* follows this trend to the letter!

In the basic set you are given no board (generally a beautifully designed board is a trademark of a *Games Workshop* game), a set of crew counters (which are all the same for Imperial or Pirate fleets), several other counters (including Wizards, Admirals, Damage and Fire Counters), a dozen ship cards, a few assorted other cards, and twelve galleys, six in red plastic and six in blue, which are designed for head-on cannon firing and ramming. These have a very limited crew capacity (only two crew counters per ship), paper sails (coloured on one side only), very limited weaponry (unless otherwise directed by a lucky random draw from the *Man O' War* card deck) and (after a few decent hits) very limited movement capabilities, yet without doubt this game is one of the best *Games Workshop* have designed in recent years and is liable to go on to be a classic in years to come.

The rules do need a little tidying up, but most games require house rules, and this needs no more than most others, and I asked *John-Paul Brisigotti* if he could clarify a few areas for me that had cropped up during play. He was extremely helpful, and I'm pleased to be able to reprint his replies here as I'm sure they will cover the majority of rules interpretations and hopefully prevent any heated discussions between opposing players.

RULES ADJUSTMENTS

Ships that hit other ships, islands, rocks or obstacles when blown off course by magical or other means are deemed to have been rammed and the usual ram rules apply.

When the Command Ship sinks, the owner player can designate another ship in his fleet to take over the role. This new ship does not get an admiral and has to wait until the following turn until the command takes effect.

Ships that cannot attack or be attacked as a result of a spell CAN be affected by magic (spells cast on them) unless the original spell states that magic does not effect them.

Ships cannot move, fire and then ram, but they can move, ram, then fire, and then, if necessary, board.

Finally, when an area on a ship catches fire it also takes damage. A damage marker and a fire marker should be placed on it. The damage cannot be repaired until the fire is extinguished. The damage is not automatically repaired when the fire is put out, a repair spell has to be used on it.

There is very little preparation required before a game can be played, although painting the ships and placing masts and sails on them makes for a more visual display, for all you need is a flat surface with enough room to allow for the laying out of the island cards, with a free to one side for the other game components. A die is rolled to determine who has initiative at the beginning of each turn and then both sides alternate casting spells that will either hinder the opposition or aid one or more of their own ships. This is the only time magic is cast during a turn and the effects of each spell last only for the turn in which it was cast, with the exception of changing the direction of the wind. During a turn each fleet carries out all possible orders, moving, ramming, firing etc. and as each side has two fleets of three ships, these are moved alternatively with the initiative winning side moving first and third. If a ship sinks during an opponents phase it does not have any simultaneous or retaliatory fire, even if it has not had a go that turn. This make

initiative quite important, particularly in the latter stages of play when both sides have suffered heavily and ships are few and far between.

Movement is in inches, using a measurement "stick" (card) for forward moving and a patent template for turning, with sails being speedier than oars but not available when ramming is the chosen attack. I'm not sure that I appreciate ships being able to turn 180 degrees and then fire on a vessel that was sailing along behind them, though I do like the idea of separate islands (it reminds me of the great games of *Seastrike* I used to have) but for *Man O' War* I would have preferred to have a material map (similar to the one in *Battle Masters* but coloured in sea blue shades) with overlaid one-inch squares onto which the islands could still have been randomly placed. This would stop the fiddling around when ships are in close contact and have to be moved to allow the measuring "stick" to be accurately placed. Accuracy is really not a problem though, a leniency is more the rule than the exception, except when a ram attack is a possibility as ships must be more than three inches away, yet within their legal movement distance, to be able to facilitate a ram.

Combat, the crux of any battle game, is down to comparing modified die rolls (everything being decided by a standard D6) in almost effective manner, but the major source of amusement in *Man O' War* is the simplicity of the actual fighting in contrast to the difficulty of manoeuvring into the most advantageous position. One hint we've discovered in play is to always scuttle opposition ships when captured as the enemy have the nasty ability of turning the tables and capturing them back when you least expect it.

There are already new ships available which allow for game variations with Elves, Dark Elves, and Dwarves each having their own style of floating death-dealing machines (love the Dwarves' ironsides!) and in the coming months we shall also be seeing supplementary boxed sets beginning with *Plague Fleet* (all of the chaos and *Skaven* ships complete with battle cards and additional rules) which will quickly be followed by *Sea Of Blood* (comprising of cards for all the individual ships first described in the *Man O' War* rules book), and a collection of sea-monsters designed to make happy-day sailing a thing of the past. Sales of *Man O' War* have exceeded the companies expectations and this may cause a minor delay in the release of the accessories that are ready and waiting for the initial rush on the main game to die down before being introduced onto the market.

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