5e: Simplified Guide to Naval Combat

Introduction: This guide presents an easy-to-understand ruleset for more exciting naval combat without requiring lots of additional learning. Many of the rules are simplified from *Nautical Adventures: a Supplement Providing Ship-to-Ship Combat Rules.*

by Grobfoot

NAUTICAL ADVENTURES

This book is based off of the *Nautical Adventures: a Supplement Providing Ship-to-Ship Combat Rules* by Ronny Hart. There are many pages of those rules that apply to this book as well. Information below can be found as to what portions of his rule-set are kept and what portions are removed.

Ship Information: 3-9

The information that provides the different types of ships and tables with their information is all the same used here. There are a few alterations to the speed of the ships, but otherwise the numbers are the same. To see the speed alterations, visit the "Ship Movement" portion of this book.

Crew Loyalty and Morale: 28

This section is entirely unchanged from Nautical Adventures.
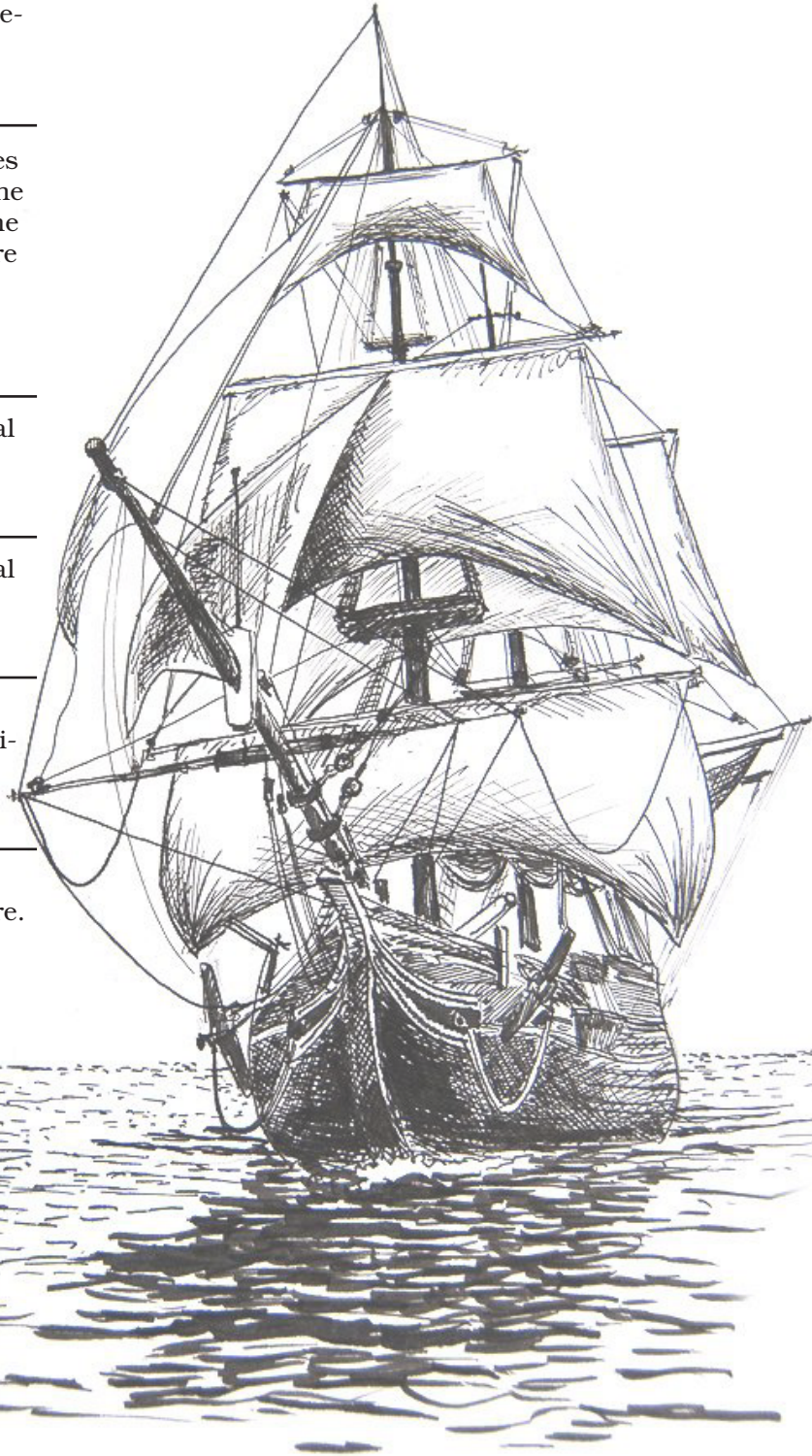
Falling off the Ship: 29

This section is entirely unchanged from Nautical Adventures.

Ship Images and Grids: 33-43

These are the images and grids for each of the ship types. This section is unchanged from Nautical Adventures.

Ship Statistic Printout

This page is entirely unchanged from Nautical Adventures, but many fields do not apply anymore.
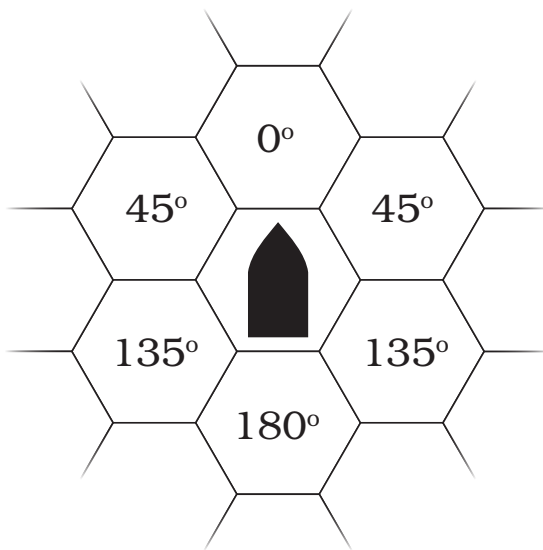
MOVING THE SHIP

Any movement of the ship requires someone to be using their turn at the wheel and piloting. The ship is allowed to move a distance as its designated speed. In the battle grid, the ship moves in a hexogonal grid. Making turning manuevers require the pilot to make a wisdom (vehicles,water) check. The general DC for this check is as follows:

DC	Manuever
1	move the ship straight
10	turn the ship 45 degrees
15	turn the ship 135 degrees
20	turn the ship 180 degrees

The ship cannot make multiple turning manuevers in the same round, but the ship can move a distance before making a turn, and then move farther afterwards.

If there is nobody piloting the ship, the ship moves forward 1/4 of its maximum speed + the weather modifier.

Failing the sailing check

If the pilot fails the DC for the manuever, use the following table to determine the outcome.

Failed by	Outcome
1-5	the pilot can still determine how far the ship travels, but it can only go straight
6-10	the ship travels straight for 1/4 its maximum speed
11 or more	the ship travels straight for 1/2 its maximum speed, but is out of control. The occupants must succeed a DC 15 strength (athletics) saving throw or be knocked prone

Speed of the Ship

Each model ship comes with its own base speed which is the minimum speed it can travel without any weather modifiers. You can find the feet-per-round number by multiplying its mph speed by 9. You can simplify this and find the amount of hexes the ship can move in one round by multiplying the miles-per-hour value by 0.3. (Round up to the nearest hex)

Speed (mph)	Speed (ft/round)	Speed (hex/round)
20	180	6
25	225	8
30	270	9

The speed of a sailing ship depends on the wind speed of the environment. Use the chart below to determine the speed modifier due to different weather conditions.

Modifier (mph)	Weather Condition
+0	gentle breeze
+5	moderate breeze
+7	fresh breeze
+10	strong breeze
+15	monsoon winds

In monsoon winds, the DC to make a sailing manuever is increased by +2. Non-piloted movement requires the occupants to make a DC 10 Strength (athletics) saving throw or be knocked prone.

DM Note:

The speed values for ship types are taken from Nautical Adventures and multiplied by 10.

Stopping the Ship

Once the ship is in motion, it must travel at least 30 feet (1 hex) per round unless the anchor is dropped. If the anchor is dropped, the ship loses all movement on the next round.

Ship Movement Onboard Effects

Sometimes the ship's movement will have impacts on the players onboard.

Getting knocked prone

Being knocked prone is somewhat similar to normal D&D rules with a slight altercation. If a player gets knocked prone at the edge of the ship, they must succeed a DC 9 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) saving throw or be throw overboard.

If the character is being knocked prone by failure of a different athletics/acrobatics saving throw, as long as the character rolls higher than 9 they will not be knocked overboard.

Example Overboard Saving Throw

The pilot fails a sailing check by 12, the players must succeed a DC 15 Strength (athletics) saving throw or be knocked prone. If the player rolls an 11 (and is on the edge of the ship), they will be knocked prone but not overboard.

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Battle Overview

Naval battles take place on two different grids. There is a hexogonal grid for the ship's movement in the water, and a square grid for the players' and crew's movements onboard. The hexogonal grid is at a scale of 30 feet per hex. The square grid is at a scale of 5 feet per square.

Each round takes 6 seconds, but all of the players' actions onboard occur at the same time.

Ocean Grid

The ocean grid describes the ship's movements in the water. This is important for identifying the location of enemies and targets as well as range and firing lines for onboard weaponry.

It is important to keep track of the ship's orientation in this grid. The ship can face any side of the hexagon it is sitting. Use the "Ship movement" pages for more information regarding this.

Onboard Grid

The onboard grid is where the players reside. This is where they can use their standard movements and abilities to interact with the ship in different ways. All of the actions the players take during their turn occur simultaneously in the Ocean battle time.

Players interact with weapons and items just as they would normally. There are a few specific actions that are new to this format.

Siege Weapons

Ships may be equipped with siege weapons (cannons, catapults, etc). The rules for operation of these weapons is the same as in the Dungeon Master's Guide.

Many weapons require loading the weapon, aiming the weapon, and firing the weapon as separate actions. Players cannot load, aim, and fire the weapon in the same round even if three people use an action for it. Each round onboard happens simultaneously.

Normal PC Attacks

Players may use their action to attack normally with a ranged magic or standard attack. For these ranged attacks, you need only to count the distance of the shot on the Ocean Grid. The distance the shot travels onboard is neglibable in this scenario. However, the one attacking must still have a clear line of sight to the target.

Melee attacks are theoretically possible against threats in the water, but the range must be taken into account. If the PC's ship and the enemy are touching to the point where one could physically reach off the side of the ship and attack, they can try. Melee attacks must occur on the edges of the ship.

Piloting

To have the ship move in a controlled direction, someone must use their action to man the wheel and pilot. Information about ship movement can be found in a previous section. Piloting the ship counts as a single action.

Anchor

Every ship has an anchor that can be dropped at any time. It costs one action to drop an anchor and stop the ship in the next round.

To raise the anchor, it costs 3 actions. These 3 actions can be done by 3 different crewmates in the same round.

Initiative

There are two initiative rolls in naval combat scenarios. The ship vs the enemy ship/monster, and the players vs each other. One player rolls initiative for the ship as a whole against the monster's. Then, aboard the ship, the players roll initiative for the order in which they describe their actions. Players will always go before NPC crewmates in initiative order.

Directing the Crew

The crew will obey the orders of the captain. The players can appoint a specific member of the party as captian, or the whole party can assume the responsibility to order the crew. Making a crew order is a free action for the party and can be made in collaboration with the entire table. Crew members cannot do Extra Actions.

EXTRA ACTIONS

As leaders on the ship, the players have access to additional actions that they can take while in a naval combat scenario. These actions are mostly to help manage the crew aboard the ship. All of these actions count as a primary action. NPC crew members do not have access to these actions.

Study the situation

You take no action this round. On the following round you can add +2 to one ability check for you or any officer.

Command Decision

Direct a sailor to take a specific action. This adds +2 to the crew's ability check.

Look Alive

You drives the crew to pay close attention to their jobs making the ship sail smoothly and well. With a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check you grant the Pilot a +2 on his sailing check.

Take Cover

You order the crew protect themselves from incoming siege weapon fire, magical attacks, etc... the crew gets +8 cover bonus to AC, but the Pilot gets a -4 penalty to sailing checks, and Archers and Artillerist get -4 to their attacks.

Brace for Impact

You order the crew to hunker down for one round. This is typically in response to an expected ram attack. Until this player's next turn, the crew has resistance to all damage other than psychic, and all sailing checks have disadvantage. The ship cannot make any attacks in this time.

Spot Weakness

Make a DC 15 Wis check to spot a weakness on a target, giving one piece of artillery or attacking character advantage on one attack roll against that target this round.

Recon Target

Make a DC 10 Wis check to learn the current HP, flag, remaining crew, or other information about enemy ship. Requires a spyglass. Does not work on monsters.

Rigging Check

You make a DC 15 Constitution check. On success the Boatswain's Wisdom Modifier is added to the pilot's sailing check.

Increase Sailing Speed

Once every 10 minutes, you can attempt to increase a ship's base speed through superior seamanship. You must make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. If the roll is successful, the vessel's speed increases by 5 mph. The speed increase lasts 10 minutes.

Reef the Sails

"Reefing the sails" entails partially furling the sails to gain maneuverability in close combat at the cost of speed. It takes 3 actions to reef the sails, and the ship can only move straight at 5mph (2 hex) during this time. A ship with reefed sails loses 10 mph of its speed (to a minimum speed of 1 mph), but sailing checks receive +2 bonus. Crew members can be assigned to reef the sails, it can be done by 1 crew in 3 rounds or 3 crew in 1 round.

Weapons Check

Roll a DC 15 Dexterity check. On success, your Dexterity modifier is added to one weapon's damage. The damage is only applied if the weapon successfully attacks the enemy's ship. You must be adjacent to the siege weapon in question.

Steady...Steady

You may spend an extra round coaching your weapon crews on their aim. All siege weapons take an additional round before they can fire. With a successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check each siege weapon deals double damage on its next attack, if it hits.

Make Her Bleed

If the Master at Arms has his crews target a part of the ship that they previously damaged he may make a DC 20 Wisdom check to have each siege weapon that fires in that round deal triple damage on its next attack, if it hits. He may only attempt this action if a siege engine has previously damaged the enemy ship.