

Dread Pirate: The Black Spot Rules

First Edition Draft – January 11th, 2007

“The difficulty I found with choosing between raiding and trading was that I was no good at working out, before I rolled, whether I was going to roll higher or lower than the other guy.”

—David Cox' sarcastic comment on the standard Dread Pirates game play

These rules aim to introduce some room for actual strategy , through the use of some (extremely simplified) concepts of character attributes and dice combat commonly found in role-playing games. Because the only additional items needed are a set of chess pieces and a chess board, commonly found in the homes of most board game players, means that the rich “old-world” feel of the game is not sacrificed (provided your chess set is not of the chintzy plastic variety).

To play Dread Pirate with these rules, you will need a standard chess board and a set of chess pieces. I don't yet know of an elegant way to keep track of crew points – suggestions are welcome.

For the most recent version of this document, see :

<http://jdueck.net/article/154/black-spot-rules>

Starting the Game

In addition to the normal setup procedures, each player receives, as a “Battle Marker,” a pawn of either color. Each player's battle marker represents the type of ship they sail:



Sloop of war

Gun Decks: 1 (10 guns)
Crew Points: 8



Frigate

Gun Decks: 2 (20 guns)
Crew Points: 10
+2 Treasure in raids/battles



Ship of the Line

Gun Decks: 3 (30 guns)
Crew Points: 12



Dread Pirate

2p Firing Advantage
d6 Sailing Advantage
+1 Surprise Advantage

Each player starts out with a sloop of war. The chess board serves as the battle map, and is set up on an orientation parallel to the normal board (to allow corresponding use of the wind direction). Players use the normal ship markers for moving, and the battle markers during battles.

The Wind die is always used under these rules.

Play continues according to standard Dread Pirate rules except for skirmishes and raids.

Ships

Each level of ship has a number of improvements that give it increased advantages over lower levels.

Treasure advantage: Frigates and Ships of the line have a +2 and +3 advantage, respectively. This advantage kicks in whenever treasure is won from another ship, in a raid, or from Dread Island. They are allowed to take an additional two or three treasures beyond the amount to which they would normally be entitled.

Gun Decks: This is an index of the number of guns on board. The more guns you have, the more damage you do when you score a hit.

Crew Points: This characteristic is an approximation of the size and health of your crew. Larger ships have bigger crews that are harder to kill off.

Upgrading your ship

Upgrading to a Frigate must be performed at a foreign port and costs three jewels of different colors. The upgrade to a Ship of the Line costs eight doubloons and may be obtained at any port. The three-jewel payment for the upgrade will remain in the port, while the doubloon payment for the second upgrade goes to Dread Island.

Skirmishes

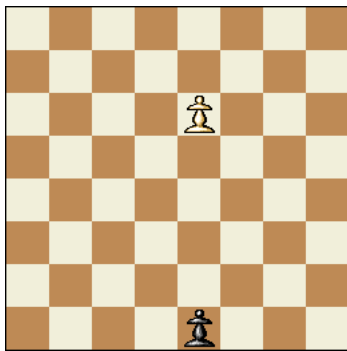
Skirmishes are changed in Black Spot rules, and are carried out according to the following sequence:

1. The battle scenario is set up on the chess board using the battle markers, and starting distance is determined.
2. Players roll to determine whether the attacker has the advantage of surprise – if so, the attacker receives extra initial rounds.

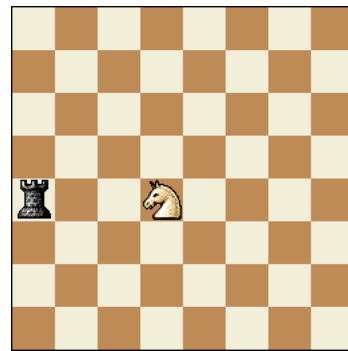
3. For each round of battle play, each player takes a turn either firing or moving. The attacker goes first, since he has the initiative.
4. The battle ends in one of the three conditions:
 - (a) Either player reduces the other ship to zero crew points
 - (b) One ship boards the other by landing next to it while having a greater number of crew points
 - (c) Either player flees the other ship by moving off the board

Setting up the battle

The chess board, or battle map, serves as a “zoomed in” view of the skirmish taking place on the normal board, with each square representing a unit of distance. One die is rolled to determine the number of empty squares between the ships at the start of the battle. The players' battle markers are then placed in one of the two “center” columns on the board at the specified distance, in the same orientation as they appear on the normal board, with the attacker on the edge.



Example: Two Sloops in a skirmish. Attacker is attacking from the south, with a starting distance of four.



Example: A Ship of the line attacking a frigate. Attacker is attacking from the west with a starting distance of two.

The Dread Pirate may use the black king as his battle marker if he so wishes, but his essential characteristics remain as those of his current level of ship.

Surprise

The attacker then rolls the die once to determine whether he has the advantage of surprise. If he rolls a 1 or a 2, then he is able to take an extra initial turn either firing or moving before the normal rounds begin. The Dread Pirate is better at surprising other ships, and can therefore gain this advantage on a roll of 1, 2, or 3.

After the surprise roll and the extra turn, the parties take turns **firing** or **moving**, beginning with the attacker.

Firing

To fire, first roll all three die to determine whether you have hit the other ship. If the ships are only one square apart, there is an automatic hit, and you skip directly to the damage roll.

Otherwise, the ships of the attacker and defender are cross-referenced on the table below to find a “to hit” number. Your roll must be equal to or greater than that number in order to score a hit:

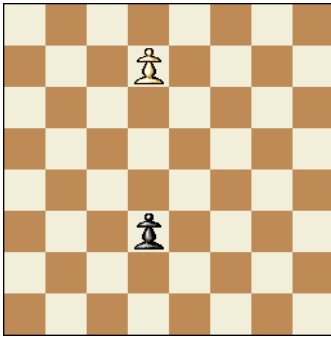
		<i>Defender</i>		
		<i>Sloop-of-war</i>	<i>Frigate</i>	<i>Ship of the line</i>
<i>Attacker</i>	<i>Sloop-of-war</i>	9	8	7
	<i>Frigate</i>	11	9	8
	<i>Ship of the line</i>	11	10	9

The rationale behind these numbers is that it is easier for smaller ships to maneuver and avoid the shots of the larger, less agile ships. A larger ship will have a slightly harder time hitting a smaller ship, but inflicts more damage when a hit is scored.

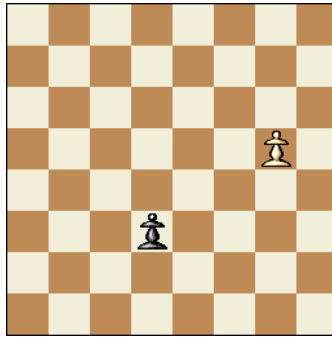
If you score a hit, you then roll a single die one more time to determine the damage inflicted by your hit. The damage calculation is as follows:

$$\text{Damage: } 1d \text{ Roll} + (N^{\circ} \text{ of gun decks}) - (1 \times \text{units of separation} > 3)$$

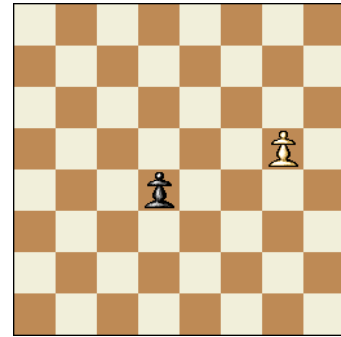
The last term above is the “distance penalty,” which kicks in when there are four or more empty squares between two ships. To determine how much separation exists when ships are not in the same row or column, take the greater of two distances along one axis, as in the examples below:



Example 1: Both ships are in the same row or column, so the distance is simply the number of empty squares between them (3).



Example 2: The ships are only one row apart, but are two columns apart, so the distance is the greater of these (2).



Example 3: Same as previous example, but the Sloop has moved one square north. The distance is still 2!

If you have any Dread Pirate cards that are supposed to affect your skirmish rolls, add or subtract them now (the card is in effect for the duration of this skirmish). The Dread Pirate also adds two onto this amount.

The resulting “damage number” is subtracted from the opponent's Crew Points. If the opponent falls to zero Crew Points or less, they must run up the white flag. The winning ship rolls to determine the number of treasures they will take. Frigates add +2 to the treasure roll, Ships of the line add +3.

Moving

A pirate may opt to use his turn to move, either to try and run away from the other pirate, or to close the distance and put himself in a better position to attack or board his foe. Closing in eliminates the “distance penalty” of your shots – but also of your opponent's shots.

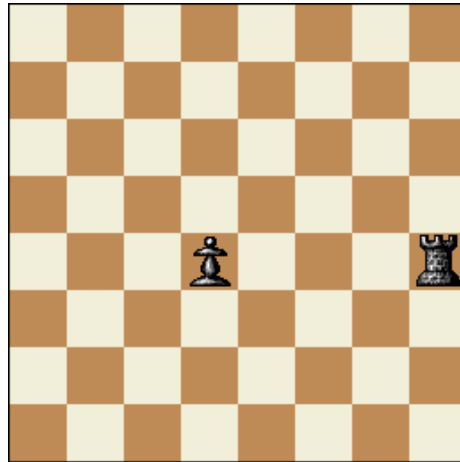
Moving: (1d Roll) - 3 + (wind modifier)

Sailing with the wind: +1

Sailing into the wind: - 1

Across the wind: +0

If the result is less than zero, you cannot move. You're probably coming about or luffing in the wind or something.



Example: The wind is blowing from the east and the Frigate (attacker) rolls a 4 to try and close in. Subtract 3 and add 1 (sailing with the wind) for a final distance of 2. The sloop then rolls a 5, which would allow him to move either 3 squares to the west (5-3+1wind), 2 squares to the north or south (5-3+0wind), or one square into the wind (5-3-1wind).

If you move off the board, you have escaped the scene of battle: the skirmish is over and no treasure is surrendered.

Boarding

Whenever you land on any square adjacent to your opponent (including diagonals), then the stronger ship (the one with the most remaining Crew Points) automatically boards the weaker one, and wins the skirmish. In the event of a tie, both players' ships are considered to have battled to the death: each rolls one die to determine the winner of the fight, but both players are reduced to zero crew points. If you are able to board your opponent with a greater number of crew points, or to win in a fight to the death while boarding, you receive the standard treasure roll, plus your ship's treasure advantage if you have one, plus six (6) treasures as a bonus for forcing the victory by boarding your opponent.

Example: Towards the end of a nasty fight, Sharon and Milton each have two crew points left. Sharon, hoping for a greater take, takes a chance at boarding her opponent during her move. She is successful, and lands on a square next to Milton. Since they are tied for crew points, they roll, and Sharon wins with a roll of 5 to Milton's 1. Sharon gets her treasure from Milton's bag, but after the battle they both are left with zero crew points.

After the Skirmish: Putting Ashore

After the skirmish, the crew points of each side remain where they were at the end of the skirmish. A ship's crew points are not replenished until they "put ashore."

To do put ashore, you must end one turn while on a square adjacent to land. This does not mean that you must skip a turn.

Example: Jake has just victoriously finished a battle with Jervis, and ended the fight with six crew points. He next wishes to set his sights on attacking Miles. He can either sail directly over to attack Miles and begin the skirmish with six crew points, or he can move his ship so that it stops adjacent to land and wait until his next turn to try and attack Miles, at which point he will again have his full complement of crew points.

A ship can be attacked while putting ashore, in which case it begins the battle without having replenished any crew points.

Example: Dwight has just finished a skirmish with five crew points remaining. On his next turn he puts ashore, but while there his ship is attacked by Giles. The skirmish commences as normal, and Dwight begins the skirmish with five crew points.

After putting ashore, your crew points are restored to their maximum number as soon as your turn comes around again.

If your ship is attacked while having zero crew points (i.e., it lost its last battle), you may try to flee or fight back. The moment a hit is scored against you, however, the skirmish is over and treasure is surrendered to the winning party according to the Crustimony Proceedcake.

Desperation Gambit

When a player declares a Desperation Gambit, they are placed directly opposite each other on the battle board, with no distance between them. The surprise roll is not performed. They are allowed one round of firing each, beginning with the attacker and omitting the “to-hit” determination, and the defender does not have the option of moving during his turn. After this round, the ships board each other, and the one with the greater number of remaining crew points wins. In the event of a tie in crew points, another round of firing commences, until one side has an advantage. The treasure is then awarded according to the normal rules for a Desperation Gambit.

Raiding

A raid of a port is similar to a skirmish, with the following alterations:

- On the battle scenario, a queen is used as the battle marker for the port. The port's battle marker does not have the option of moving or fleeing, since it is a stationary entity.
- The port is considered to have the same number of guns and crew points as the attacking vessel, and the “to hit” number is always 9 for both sides.
- If the attacking vessel's crew points reach zero, he is not at risk for losing treasure; however, he must put ashore at a location *out of sight of the port* in order to replenish his crew points.
- In the event of a victory, either by attrition or by “invading” (the raid equivalent of boarding), standard treasure-gaining procedures apply.
- Desperation Gambits do not apply to raids.

As in standard rules, after completing a raid, whether he win or lose, the player must engage in action at some other port (or against another ship) before returning to this port for any purpose.

Quick Reference

Ship Types



Sloop of war

Gun Decks: 1 (10 guns)

Crew Points: 8



Frigate

Gun Decks: 2 (20 guns)

Crew Points: 10

+2 Treasure in raids/battles



Ship of the Line

Gun Decks: 3 (30 guns)

Crew Points: 12

+3 Treasure in raids/battles



Dread Pirate

2p Firing Advantage

d6 Sailing Advantage

+1 Surprise Advantage

To Hit:

Only used when distance >= 2

		Defender		
		Sloop-of-war	Frigate	Ship of the line
Attacker	Sloop-of-war	9	8	7
	Frigate	11	9	8
	Ship of the line	11	10	9

Battle Rolls

Damage: 1d Roll + (N^o: of gun decks) - (1 × units of separation >3)

Moving: (1d Roll) - 3 + (wind modifier)

Sailing with the wind: +1

Sailing into the wind: - 1

Across the wind: +0



Final Thoughts

Besides scrutiny of what I already have going, there are some areas where additional development is obviously needed:

- Trading remains very one-dimensional. Could a concept of actual cargo be introduced, with larger ships able to carry more cargo? Again, I would prefer to keep additional pieces to a minimum, as well as not to add a lot of extra parameters to keep track of.
- Special-case ship upgrades: grape shot adds damage when distance < 3? Additional sails? Spyglass prevents surprises?
- The Black Spot rules really should have a Black Spot in them, shouldn't they...