

Death on the seas

Ancient Era Naval Skirmish Rules

By Tom Hinshelwood

1.0 Introduction

This game is designed to provide simple and easy to use rules for fighting small scale naval battles featuring around half a dozen ships per side. The rules are written with 1/600th scale ships in mind, but it would be possible to use other sized miniatures by adjusting the movement and range distances accordingly to fit a different scale. Death on the Seas is historically set in the 5th Century BC, during the Persian Wars, but the rules feature statistics for ship from both earlier and later periods.

Several of the core mechanics for this game have their origins in the **5.56mm** game and will therefore be familiar to anyone who has read those rules.

2.0 The Turn

Death on the Seas is designed for two opposing sides, whether that consists of two players fighting one another or one or more players allied together with a referee on other opposing side.

To determine the sequence of play each ship on either side is assigned a card from a pack of standard playing cards. For simplicity it is suggested that each side has all its ships of the same suit. Then those cards are shuffled together and a card is drawn. Whichever ship the drawn card corresponds to is then allowed to have its go. Once the ship has used up its action

allowance or if the player decides the ship's go is over and the card put to one side. Then, the next card is drawn allowing another ship to have its go and so on until all the cards have been dealt and the pack is reshuffled ready for the next turn. Ships that have been destroyed should not have their cards reshuffled into the pack and if a card is drawn for a ship that has been destroyed before their go that turn remove their card from the turn deck and immediately draw another.

3.0 Actions

When a ship's card is drawn that ship is then allowed to perform one or more actions from those described in this section. The ship may only perform each action once during its go, and the ship may not be able to perform all actions listed.

Many of the actions listed are resolved by the player attempting to equal or beat a Target Number or TN to determine success or failure and possible degrees thereof. When rolling to beat a TN the player rolls a D6 and adds the appropriate Characteristic and modifiers and if the TN is equalled the task has been completed. The better the number beats the TN by the greater the success.

3.1 Move

All ships have a Speed characteristic which is the number of inches it is able to move during its go. This represents the maximum cruising speed of the ship, though it is possible for a ship to travel faster, and thus further. Before a ship moves the player may declare an attempt to attempt Full Speed. In such circumstances the oarsmen row as fast as possible but in doing so risk over-exerting them. Roll a D6 and add the ships Crew Quality modifier in an attempt to reach TN 4 and consult the below table (3.11) for the result.

3.11 Crew Quality Result

-2	The ship fails to achieve Full Speed despite the oarsmen's best efforts. Move as normal, and oarsmen suffer the affects of over-exertion for the rest of this turn and the next one.
-1	The ship fails to achieve Full Speed despite the oarsmen's best efforts. Move as normal, and oarsmen suffer the affects of over-exertion for the rest of this turn.
0	The ship achieves Full Speed but the oarsmen suffer the affects of over-exertion for the rest of this turn.
+1 or more	The ship achieves Full Speed without any negative effects on the oarsmen. The jump is successful.

If the ship achieves Full Speed then it may move an additional number of inches equal to a D6 plus the ships Crew Quality characteristic.

If the crew suffers over-exertion in the attempt the defence characteristic of the oarsmen is reduced by 1 (usually from Def 4 to Def 3) and the ship's Speed characteristic is reduced by 2 inches.

Ancient ships when expecting battle did not carry sails and relied solely on the oarsmen for speed and manoeuvrability and they turned by pivoting, very much like tanks. A ship is able to pivot as many times as the controlling player wishes during its go, but each turn costs a fixed amount of inches from the ship's Speed characteristic. When a ship is about to turn use the Turning Template to determine how many inches the desired turn will cost. A ship cannot turn if it does not have enough inches of movement left to complete the turn.

During the ship's Move action it may attempt to Ram an enemy ship. This was the main naval tactic of the period, and if executed correctly the ram of the attacking ship would ruptured the hull of the enemy ship enough to sink it. To do so the player declares the Ram before the ship moves.

Historically warships had to achieve around 10 knots for an optimum ram otherwise they risked doing more damage to themselves than to the enemy ship. To represent this a ship that Rams another ship without moving at Full Speed risks damaging itself by not achieving enough momentum to pierce the hull.

If after the Ram has been declared the ship is unable to make contact with the target ship, the Ramming ship is still moved the maximum distance capable but is unable to perform the Ram.

To resolve the Ram the attacking ship rolls a D6 and adds its ram characteristic, plus any additional modifiers as shown on the below table (3.12). Use the Ram Template to determine whether the ramming ship achieves the Optimum Point of Impact. This total is then the TN that the defending ship must roll against using its Size characteristic.

3.12 Modifiers to Ram

+2	Attacking ship achieved Full Speed.
+1	Optimum Point of Impact.

The affect of the Ram is determined by to what degree of success or failure the rammed ship equals the TN by, as shown on the below table (3.13)

3.13 Ram Result

-3 or less	The rammed ship suffers 4 Hull Points of damage and loses 1D6 units of men.
-2	The rammed ship suffers 2 Hull Points of damage and loses 1D3 units of men.
-1	The rammed ship suffers 1 Hull Point of damage and loses 1 unit of men.
0	The rammed ship suffers 1 Hull Point of damage as does the ramming ship.
+1	The ramming ship suffers 3 Hull Points of damage and loses 1 unit of men.
+2 or more	The ramming ship suffers 5 Hull Points of damage and loses 1D3 units of men

See section 4.0 (Damage) for more on Hull Points and section 5.0 (The Ships for more information regarding the units on board a ship.

After the Ram has been completed both ships are able to Engage one another in melee combat as though from a successful Board.

A ship does not have to Ram another vessel to get close enough to Board. If the ship comes in contact with its target it may attempt to Board. If the enemy player is willing then this attempt is automatically successful and the ships are considered to be **engaged**. Alternatively if the enemy player decides his ship may attempt to resist the action.

The defending player rolls a D6 and adds his ship's Size characteristic and Crew Quality characteristic to form the TN that the attacking ship must equal or beat by rolling a D6 with the same modifiers. Consult the below table (3.14) for the result of the action.

3.14 Boarding Result

-1 or less	The defending ship shrugs off the attacking ships attempt to board. The attacking ship may take no other action except Fire this turn.
+0	The attacking ship manages to get a hold of the defending ship and is considered to be Engaged.
+1	The attacking ship manages to Board the defending ship with great speed and skill, all Marine units may add +1 to their Attack this turn.

See section 3.3 (Engage) for how to resolve melee combat between ships.

If a ship has lost a particularly large amount of units it may no longer be wise for that ship to operate in its given state. Should a player Move two ships into contact with one another they may exchange units. Simply change the rosters for the ships, but

no ship may carry more units than it is normally allowed.

3.2 Fire

Warships would carry archers to attack their enemies at a distance, usually before melee would take place. At any point during the ships go all archers, ballistae or catapults may attack. Archers and ballistae can only be used for attacking the crew of an enemy ship whereas a catapult is able to attempt to actually damage the ship itself.

To Fire at an enemy the ship first needs to be able to see at least 25% of the enemy ship and be within the number of inches listed in the range category Long for the type of ranged weapon used. For each unit roll a D6 and add the unit's Ranged Attack characteristic. If this number is equal to or better than the Def characteristic of the enemy unit, that unit is killed. The Def characteristic is subject to a modifier depending on at which range category the enemy ship falls in, see below table (3.21)

3.21 Range Def Modifier

Close	-1
Medium	+0
Long	+1

Catapults are able to either attack a crew or the ship itself but do not receive the -1 Defence modifier for Close range. The player must declare which before making any rolls. If the player elects to attack the crew conduct the attack as per the rules. Alternatively if the catapult is attacking the enemy ship itself then you need to roll a D6+1. This becomes the TN that the enemy ship must equal by rolling a D6 and adding its Size characteristic. Refer to the below table (3.22) for the effect. If the enemy ship is at long range it receives the +1 modifier to its Size roll.

3.22 Size Roll

TN -2 or less	The ship loses 2 Hull Points.
TN -1	The ship loses 1 Hull Point.
TN +0 or more	The ship doesn't suffer any damage.

3.7 Engage

Aside from ramming, killing the crew of an enemy ship was the surest way to achieve victory. During this action every unit of men a ship has is capable of fighting, including the oarsmen. This action is unique in the sense that both ships are able to take part. The action is split into phases, where certain units get to attack before other units, and casualties on both sides are removed before the next phase begins. The below table (3.71) lists the various units and the order in which they attack. Catapults may not attack, but still count as a unit and are able to be destroyed. .

3.71 Engage Order

1 st	Archers
2 nd	Elite Marines, Ballistae
3 rd	Marines
4 th	Oarsmen

For example: *Two ships are Engaged, one Greek and the other Roman. The Greek Trireme has 8 units of Oarsmen, 2 units of Marines, 1 unit of Elite Marines and 1 unit of Archers. The Roman ship has 8 unit of Oarsmen, 1 unit of Marines, 2 units of Elite Marines and 1 Ballistae. In the first phase the Greek Archers have their go and any casualties removed before both Greek and Roman Elite Marines attack and the Roman Ballistae, followed by the Greek and Roman Marines before finally both sides Oarsmen get to attack.*

When a unit attacks roll a D6 and add the unit's Attack characteristic. If the total is equal or greater than the Defence characteristic for the enemy unit, the unit is killed and removed immediately from the list of combatants and is unable to attack.

Oarsmen must be attacked first, but once a ship Oarsmen units have been reduced to half strength, the attacking player is allowed to select which enemy unit his units attack. Elite Marines are always allowed to select which enemy unit they attack.

For example: *After the first round of combat the Greek's have lost 3 units of Oarsmen, and both their Archer and Elite Marine units, whilst the Romans have lost 6 units of Oarsmen, and 1 unit of Elite Marines. When the next round of combat occurs the Greek units are able to choose what enemy units they wish to attack as the Roman ship's Oarsmen have been reduced to 2 units, whereas the Roman units must kill a further 1 unit of Greek Oarsmen before they are able to freely select their targets.*

Few battles have to be fought until all the enemy have been killed as surrendering is a viable option for an overmatched side. After the Oarsmen have been allowed to attack a Morale roll is made to determine if the losing side surrenders. Only the side who has suffered the both casualties must make the Morale check. The TN of the roll is determined by the winning side rolling a D6 and adding the number of units still alive on his side. The losing side then rolls a D6 and adds the number of units it has remaining plus the Morale characteristic of the ship. If the losing ship fails to equal or beat the TN then the captain orders his men to lower their weapons and surrender. Catapults units are counted for the purposes of Morale check and establishing who is losing a fight.

For example: *After the first round of combat between the Greek and Roman ships the Roman's have suffered more casualties and so are forced to make a Morale check. The TN for this check is 10 (D6 roll of 3 plus 7 for the remaining Greek units). The Roman's roll a D6 getting a 4, plus their remaining units of 5, totalling 9, not enough to avoid a surrender. However the Roman ship's Morale characteristic is 2, meaning they get 11 in total and continue fighting. Whether there are enough of them to turn the fight around remains to be seen.*

4.0 Damage

Damage to ships is represented by Hull Points, more particularly, by how many Hull Points a ship has remaining. All ships begin the game with 5 Hull Points, meaning the ship is at full strength. However if a ship falls to 0 Hull Points it is considered to be sunk and may no longer take part in the game. The four Hull Points in between represent the varying degree to which a ship has been damaged.

At the end of each go a damaged ship must roll to see if the damage spreads and gets worse. At each Hull Point from 4 to 1 there is a TN that the ship must equal by rolling a D6 and adding its Crew Quality characteristic. Refer to the below table (4.01) for the results of the roll.

4.01 Crew Quality Roll

TN -1 or less	The ship loses 1 Hull Point.
TN +0	The ship's Hull Points remain constant.
TN+1	The damage is stabilised and the ship no longer needs to roll for loss of Hull Points.
TN+2	The damage is repaired. The ship gains 1 Hull Point and no longer needs to roll for loss of Hull Points.

The below table (4.02) lists the effects of how many Hull Points a ship has.

4.02 Hull Points

5	Full Strength: The ship has suffered no damage.
4	Minor Damage: The ship has suffered some damage but nothing that prevents it operating in any way. TN 3.
3	Major Damage: The ship is possibly on fire or has a breach of its hull. Its Speed is reduced by 2 inches. TN 5.
2	Severe Damage: The ship has multiple fires or has a considerable hole through its hull. Its Speed is reduced by 4 inches and Morale by 1. TN 6.

1	Catastrophic Damage: The ship is going to sink, the only question is how long before it does. The ship may no longer Move and the its Morale is reduced by 2. TN 7.
0	Sunk.

5.0 The SHIPS

An example of a Greek Trireme

Speed:	8
Ram:	+2
Size:	+4
Crew Quality:	+1
Morale:	+1
Oarsmen:	8 units
Combat:	1 Ballista unit 1 Elite Marine unit 1 Archer unit 1 Marine unit
Hull Points:	5
Total Points:	280

Above are the characteristics for a complete ship carrying its full allowance of units. In the Appendix there is a list of several ancient ships and their characteristics.

In a ship's profile it states how many units of Oarsmen are on board the ship and how many additional combat units may be carried. A single unit of Oarsmen represents about 20 men, whereas a single combat unit represents about 10 men and one unit of artillery represents one actual war machine.

Each type of unit have their own profile which lists how effective they are in combat (see section 3.7, Engage). They have an Attack characteristic, which is the modifier to the D6 roll when they attack, and a Defence characteristic which is the number required by an enemy unit to kill them.

Oarsmen are generally very fit individuals who are paid for their services rather than forced to row because of slavery. They have limited combat effectiveness.

Attack: +0
 Defence: 4
 Cost: na

Marines are trained warriors whose only job on the ship is to kill the enemy.

Attack: +1
 Defence: 5
 Cost: 10 pts

Archers are equipped with bows or slings to kill enemies from a distance but are vulnerable in melee combat. Archers receive the -1 modifier to enemy units Defence characteristics in melee combat.

Attack: +0
 Defence: 4
 Cost: 20 pts

Range: CLS <3 MED <6 LNG <9

Elite Marines are either highly trained or heavily armed and are capable of doing severe damage to opposing units. They are unique in that they are always able to select which enemy unit they attack.

Attack: +2
 Defence: 6
 Cost: 30 pts

Ballistae are nothing more than huge crossbows fixed to the ship.

Attack: +1
 Defence: 3
 Cost: 30 pts

Range: CLS <5 MED<10 LNG <15

Catapults are large war machines fixed to the ship capable of either attacking the ship's crew or ship itself. They may not be used in melee combat.

Attack: +2
 Defence: 3
 Cost: 50 pts

Range: CLS <5 MED<10 LNG <15

Loss or Oarsmen: As mentioned previously the only way a ship is able to manoeuvre is from the actions of its oarsmen. As a ship loses Oarsmen its ability to move is diminished. Once 25% of the units of Oarsmen has been lost the ship's Speed characteristic is reduced by 2 inches, when 50% of the Oarsmen are lost the ship's Speed characteristic is reduced by 4 inches and when 75% of Oarsmen have been lose the ship's Speed characteristic is reduced by 6 inches. Should more than 75% of the Oarsmen be lost the ship is immobile.

Crew Quality: All ships begin as standard with +0 in this characteristic. The below table (5.1) lists the points costs if the player wishes to increase the Crew Quality of the ship. Refer to the Size characteristics listed in the Appendix.

5.1	Crew Quality	Cost
	+1	Size x 5
	+2	Size x10

Morale: All ships have a Morale characteristic of +0. If the players wishes to increase the Morale of the ship use the below table (5.2) to determine the cost.

5.2 Combat Units	M +1	M+2
1 to 4	20	40
5 to 8	40	80
9 to 12	60	120

The Flagship: Each player may select one ship from his side to be the flagship of his fleet. This ship receives +1 to both its Morale and Crew Quality characteristics.

6.0 Naval Battles

To create a fleet with which to fight each player should receive between 500 to 1000 points, depending on the size of the battle wishing to be fought. With these points the player is then free to build his fleet as he wishes, whether it consists of a few large and well equipped ships or several smaller vessels.

Alternatively a scenario should be worked out in advance where the makeup of each side is pre-determined to either fit historical requirements or just to make the fight interesting. It doesn't have to be fair.

Ending the Battle

Games should have requirements for ending already worked out, either after a set number of turns or when certain victory conditions are met. Alternately a winner may be determined by adding up the points values of all sunk ships and their crews for each side, with the winner being the side that has the most point's value of ships still operational.