Tales on the Weird Seas

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Magical Oceanic Adventures

INTRODUCTION

The PCs play living boats. No one knows how or why the experience the world as a boat… They just do. Some are happy to live as boats and go about boat-life with great enthusiasm. Others are saddened by this strange existence, forever drifting with the whims of the sea.

There are no humans on the boats, except on the mystic boat (and there, humans are treated as traits or tools, not as characters with rich personalities). The boats are propelled either by engines, sails, or oars. PCs are free to imagine their boats **from any era**; for example, there may be a longboat, a steam-powered paddleboat, and a jet ski in the same party. There is no need for any realistic approach to creating and operating the boat: a Viking drakkar might ram a modern cruiser warship, and still win the battle.

In other words, follow your taste and inspiration and child-like sense of wonder while building your boat. **Follow this rule above all others**.

There is land in this world. The fleet of player-boats spends most of the time at sea, but comes in for repairs, upgrades, etc. When coming back to land, they can encounter environmental hazards such as icebergs, reefs, or submerged rocks.

Other than the boat thing, magic is somewhat limited in this world. Boats can develop magical powers through certain traits and upgrades.

ABOUT THE WORLD

The ocean has become overrun with sea monsters. The PCs must find ways to return balance to the water, such as killing cruel and savage monsters, or, at the very least, driving them away from the coast.

The best missions, though, will be also about stopping whatever is causing the ocean to vomit up foul beasts. Some options are pollution, industrial fishing, and drilling for oil.

Boats may encounter such monsters as squid, sirens, whirlpools, creatures not unlike the Loch Ness monster, pirates, etc. There are also ancient treasures to be found or prizes to be collected, other boats in danger to be rescued, ancient boats at the bottom of the sea… but the most valuable prize is to return the ocean to its natural, balanced state.

Don't concern yourself with technicalities such as *"How do you load the dead giant squid on the deck to bring it to port?"* or *"How do you get to the treasure in the cave of the sea dragon?"* You're a boat, you have no human crew, but when the camera fades to the next scene, such trivial matters have (somehow) been dealt with. The best approach is never to mention this sort of stuff. The tale-spinner will not interrupt you when you say things like *"And then we head back to the port, the three of us, with the deck covered in gold and silver from the treasure trove."*

CHARACTER CREATION

Boats start at 10 feet in length and have 110 HP, resulting in a speed of 90 feet per round. If you have the possibility, play with miniatures: you can build your boats with Lego, use miniature boats that you buy as souvenirs while traveling, build small boats of cardboard and paper or indeed using any and every material you can think of.

When I was a child, I often used erasers to build airplanes: I would color them with a pen, stick plastic into the soft rubber of the eraser as wings, or tape something like a small ruler to it… You can perform similar experiments when building your boats.

The purpose is not to present a precise picture of the battle field, but rather, to give players the possibility of putting their hands on something, and to allow them to build… and this is especially true if you play this game with kids.

Ten-foot boats (Level 1 boats) select **four starting traits** from the available lists to create a boat. Boats can be randomly generated by assigning numbers to the traits and rolling a die until four different traits have been picked.

If a PC chooses **three traits from the same class**, they get the class bonus, which is listed at the top of each list.

As a character sheet, a simple sheet of blank, lined, or graph paper will do. Write the name of the boat and a short description – keep it short and centered on the boat concept, because your boat will evolve and improve. Additionally, write "Level 1" near the top. "power: 110 HP" and "speed: 90 feet per round" should also be on the sheet somewhere.

The rest of the sheet is for traits and upgrades. My favorite arrangement is to draw the boat in the center of the paper. Draw accessories and implements, when acquired, and write the text of the various traits next to it.

Describe your boat in detail or draw it. Show it to the other players to see if they have any ideas to add. Don't worry you don't have to accept all of them.

If you want, draw your boat's flag. Give the boat a cool boat name.

Pick your boat traits from the four lists below.

BALLISTA BOAT TRAITS

Regular traits:

Ranged attack: You have two ballistae, at port and starboard. It takes one round to fire them and one round to reload. They can fire independently on alternate rounds. Damage (each): 1D6+Level.

Alchemist fire (requires Ranged attack): You may load the ballista with fireballs that burn even when underwater. Damage: 1D4+Level for 3 rounds.

Hellacious hull: While things appear normal above, there is a surprising array of spikes and spears below the water's surface. When your boat is rammed (by another boat or a monster), you inflict 1d4+Level damage to the enemy. When you ram another or a monster, you deal Damage 1d6+Level.

Silence: In the dark, the ballista boat can advance unnoticed and avoid attacks until it attacks.

Net ballista: If targeted by a ranged attack, you can use one ballista to intercept an enemy's attack. Roll 1D10: on a 6+, you intercept the attack and reduce its damage by 1D4+Level. Reloading takes 1 round. This device can also be used to grab objects.

Dead aim (requires Ranged attack or Net ballista): You can re-roll a die when making a ranged or net ballista attack.

Class bonus:

When you have at least three ballista traits on your boat, gain also:

Hazard pay: if you enter melee, you receive 50% more gold than you would have otherwise. This gold isn't from the common pool, it appears magically after distribution.

BARDIC BOAT TRAITS

Regular traits:

Boastful masthead: In a social encounter with humans or reasonable monsters or creatures, you can roll 1D10+Level. For 6+, you can ask a question and obtain a truthful answer or ask for a favor or benevolent disposition.

Perceptive crow's nest: You are less susceptible to environmental dangers. You take 1d6 less damage when damaged by environmental hazards.

Sonic attack: Once per round, a loud sonic boom resonates from the ship's hull causing 1D6+Level damage to all enemies within 1 boat length. Allies are immune but do not find the sound comforting.

Aeolian harp: When travelling, the boat seems to hum or sing soft notes. This makes stealth difficult, but the sound might calm certain monsters.

Deceptive decoys: The boat projects an illusion. It must be smaller than the boat and makes no noise. The illusion lasts until it is interacted with.

Faster: move 10' faster per round than boats of the same size.

Class bonus:

When you have at least three bard traits on your boat, gain also:

Sonar: as monsters or enemy boats approach, the Bard receives a ping to alert them of activity in the area. A bard boat cannot be attacked by surprise. At the beginning of combat, they may position themselves in a safe position or may strike first.

MYSTICAL BOAT TRAITS

Regular traits:

Fire clerics: Whenever the boat is engaged, human clerics crew throws fireballs at the enemy, dealing 1D6+Level damage

Healing touch: When rammed, the damage to this boat is reduced by the boat's Level, as the human crew collects the pieces in an effort to fix their master.

Deep helm: When your course would be altered (ramming, rogue wave, etc.), you stay true to your path.

Curse of the albatross: Anytime this boat is rammed, lots of sea birds pester the enemy for 1D6 rounds. Attacks against this enemy will deal +1D6 damage as long as the birds are around.

True stillness: Roll 1d10+Level, on 6+ reduce the effect of rogue waves and whirlpools for all boats nearby.

Call to aid: In combat, you can move 10 feet faster towards any friendly boat.

Class bonus:

When you have at least three mystic traits on your boat, gain also:

Blessing of the Sea: This class can heal 1D6+Level per round, healing either itself or other nearby boats.

BERSERKER BOAT TRAITS

Regular traits:

Eye of the storm: The boat may hold its action for one round in order to build up rage, ramming damage dealt in the next turn is 2D10 + 2xLevel.

Death blow: You gain 50% more gold for having dealt the final strike (similar to hazard pay).

Ramming speed: When ramming, you may push the target to the right or left and continue moving forward.

Overflow: When damage kills an enemy, all leftover damage may be transferred to an adjacent target.

Death spike (cannot be combined with Ramming speed): Use a large sharp spike on the end of your boat to hold an enemy in place after ramming.

Preferred enemy: In combat, you can move 10 feet faster towards an enemy.

Class bonus:

When you have at least three berserker traits on your boat, gain also:

Bull rush: In combat you're always the first in initiative order, regardless of your size and sped.

THE RULES

REGULAR ACTIONS

To deal with regular actions, use the following formula:

> The player states the objective of their action(s), and
>
> Rolls **1D10 for each desired target** – at most two or three for each single action.

Every roll of 6+ is considered a success. Every roll of 5 or less is a failure that the GM can hold against the player (i.e. to inflict damage, complications, and so on).

To perfectly accomplish a complex action or influence multiple targets, therefore, a player needs to roll **every D10 with a result of 6+**.

If this doesn't happen, the GM decides which part of the action succeeds and which part fails.

GM: Give precedence to **interesting developments** and do not frustrate players! Give the best results to important targets, and use the worst rolls for complications, rather than for utter failure.

Example:

"I move to the front of the line, moving fast between the other boats, and I scream at the sea dragon to let go of the prisoner!"

These are two targets: moving fast between the boats without incident and convincing the sea dragon. The player rolls 2D10, a 7 (a success), and a 2 (a failure).

The GM can narrate a fast and clean approach (7) and then the sea dragon laughing at the piteous attempt of the little boat to threaten him (2). Or (the other way around): the boat approaches fast but scratches other boats causing damage and resentment (2), but then the sea dragon is convinced to let go of the prisoner (7).

Decide the outcome based on what's interesting in the story: if this is the final boss and a fight is due, then let the dragon be unconvinced.

If this is just a minor step within a longer adventure, let the dragon give up the broken boat, and then, see how the player will deal with the resentment for the fast ride between other boats.

It's OK to say that something is impossible: there are evil monsters, for example, that will refuse to negotiate, or annoying humans that will not offer support and a place in their ports to the boats, even though the boats are there to help, etc…

Gain a bonus

When a boat attempts an action related to its class, **roll an additional D10.**

The lowest result is discarded, so the boat has a better chance of obtaining a success when dealing with class-related actions.

Class-related actions are for example:

- Fast and agile movement, for the ballista boat
- Negotiation and interaction, for the bard boat
- Healing and supernatural actions, for the mystic boat
- Strength and resistance actions, for the berserker boat

Getting help

If one boat is trying to help another, they put themselves in the path of danger by doing so.

Whatever failure the GM will apply at the end will affect both boats.

If the action is simple (one die) and fails, the GM inflicts one disadvantage. The GM for example can spend this failure to inflict a complication on the original acting boat **and** to inflict some appropriate damage to the helping boat.

When a boat receives help, it can roll **an additional D10**. If the boat offering to help is helping in a class-related action, **both bonuses** will apply.

Difficulty

The GM can state that an action is much easier than normal. Instead of asking to roll for a lower target number, just say that the action is accomplished.

If the action, on the other hand, is really much harder, instead of counting a 6+ as a success, count each 8+ as a success.

UPGRADES AND LEVELLING UP

When they return to a port, the boats can trade gold and other collected prizes into upgrades and improvements.

Every 100 gold allows you to repair the boat back to full HP.

Every 200 gold allows you to hear a tale of adventure from a wandering bard.

Every 300 gold allows you to ask a scholar to do research on a mystical beast or phenomenon.

Every 400 gold allows you to obtain a detailed map of an area. This might include dangerous shallows, monster lairs, mystical caves, or trade routes.

Every 500 gold allows you to be painted and outfitted with fine sails and rigging or a rumbling motor or something similar (as applicable).

Every 600 gold allows you to hire a scientific/naturalist team to survey the oceans for a short while. They will be able to tell you about the quality of the water, the health of plants and animals, and the likely weather.

Every 700 gold allows you to hire a team of pirates. These pirates can be used to raid treasure from enemy boats (or indeed defend your boat from other pirates). They can deal 1D6 damage to enemies. But, if they don't get 10% of your treasure, they will leave.

Every 800 gold allows you to hire a pirate hero, who will defend your ship and fight monsters. The pirate hero deals 1D10 + 2 damage, but demands 20% of your treasure.

Every 900 gold allows you to hire a scientist hero, who will tell you something about any monster, area, or event you come across on 6+ from 1D10. The scientist hero must be given a sample of any and all objects brought on board.

Every 1000 gold allows you to buy an upgrade:

- Add a new trait from your class
- Upgrade a trait (i.e. step up one die-size of damage or similar)
- Become better at whatever action (i.e. succeed with 5 or more on 1D10)
- Increase size by 5 feet (see below for further effects)
- Increase your level by 1

Every 1500 gold allows you to add a new trait from another class.

Increase boat size

Every increase of the boat size by 5 feet will:

- Grant 5 additional HP
- Reduce speed by 5 feet

In other words: given length X, the boat has 100+X HP, and 100-X speed.

Speed also determines initiative in combat and how quickly other actions occur.

COMBAT

The boats base attack is to ram, but certain traits can give ranged attacks.

Basic ramming damage is: 1D6 against the target, 1D4 against the rammer itself.

When a boat reaches 0 HP, it is considered to be sinking.

The boat will sink at a rate of 5 feet per round. Other boats may come to help and either drag the boat to safety or provide healing.

If the boat is not rescued, it will sink. A sunken boat will remain in a state of deep sleep until brought up from the bottom.

Monsters and Adversaries

Antediluvian Squid

These beasts are the same size as large boats, and can deal serious damage. Their ancient race collects parts of boats, and even young squids will snap masts and drag rigging into the deep. These creatures tend to travel as a family, with one or two Old grandparents, and several Adults and their Young.

Age	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
Young	10	20	60	Flailing arms: 1D6
Adult	20	30	70	Flailing arms: 1D6 + 5
Old	25	35	60	Flailing arms: 1D6 + 10
Ancient	30	50	50	Flailing arms: 1D10 + 10 Magical cancellation: 1D10 on 6+, cancel magical or bardic abilities within 20 feet.

Mega-Shark

These creatures are known to arrive after a fight is done, because (it is said) they can smell blood and oil in the water. They circle their prey, exposing a prominent dorsal fin. They attack swiftly, biting chunks out of hulls, and then retreat to a safe distance, only to attack again later. They hunt in groups of 2-5.

Age	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
Young	5	20	80	Bite: 1D10
Adult	10	30	90	Bite: 1D10 + 2
Old	15	35	100	Bite: 1D10 + 4
Ancient	20	40	90	Bite: 1D10 + 2

The Great Sea-Serpent

These great creatures are known for their mysteriousness. They haven't been seen for many thousands of years. Their exact size and shape is not known, but they appear to be very long and have a jaw with many sharp teeth. These serpents are almost always solitary.

Age	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
Young	unknown	20	110	Bite: 1D10 Dive: 1D10 on 6+, travel to the bottom of the sea.
Adult	unknown	30	110	Bite: 1D10 + 5 Invisibility: 1D10 on 6+, become invisible for 1 round.
Old	unknown	35	110	Bite: 1D10 + 10 Invisibility: 1D10 on 6+, become invisible for 1 round.
Ancient	unknown	40	110	Bite: 1D10 + 15 Invisibility: 1D10 on 6+, become invisible for 1 round.

Shift-Island Turtle

There's an island off the coast that is known to shift and rotate and even travel over long periods of time. The Shift-Island Turtle might be able to communicate, if you can sing to it just right. Don't disturb it when it's in a deep sleep though, or it will raise its head and attack.

Age	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
Ancient	200	200	unknown	Bite: 3D10 + 15 Move: 1D10 on 6+, move at speed 10 or rotate slightly.

Eight-story Eighteen-legged Octopus

These beasts have been known to drag entire ships into the deep. They spend most of their days looking for whales to eat, but can become interested in boats and come to investigate. These creatures are almost always solitary.

Age	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
Young	10	20	50	Sucker: 1D6 Dive: 1D10 on 6+, travel to the bottom of the sea.
Adult	15	30	60	Sucker: 1D6 + 5 Grab: 1D10 on 6+, prevent its victim from attacking for 1 round.
Old	15	35	60	Sucker: 1D6 + 10 Grab: 1D10 on 6+, prevent its victim from attacking for 1 round.
Ancient	15	40	50	Sucker: 1D6 + 10 Grab: 1D10 on 6+, prevent its victim from attacking for 1 round.

Razor Fish

These large flying fish travel in large packs. Before they are close, they are often seen as a flickering light on the horizon. They jump through the air swiftly, cutting holes in sails and hulls. They typically have no ill-will towards boats; the boats just get caught in their path.

School	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
Small	50	unknown	150	Slashes: 3D10
Medium	70	unknown	150	Slashes: 4D10
Large	90	unknown	150	Slashes: 5D10

The Croc

The Croc is a monster of teeth and muscles. Some people say that you can hear his roar for a hundred miles.

	Length	HP	Speed	Attack
The Croc	200	180	80	Bite: 4D10 + 20

INTERESTING AREAS

The singing islands

Hollows in the rocks on these islands whistle when it's windy. Some people say that they whisper magical secrets to those who wish to hear them. A monster might be guarding the islands to keep boats away.

The mystical cave

There is a cave on a certain island that is obscured by mist. The cave is large enough for a boat to pass through. The cave itself shines with a blue glow that brightens the deeper you travel. There is rumored to be treasure at the end, but you have to traverse the maze first.

The Mythic Spires of Kal-doom

The island of Kal-doom has a permanent whirlpool just to the east of it. Monsters from other worlds are said to use this as a portal. The tall, obsidian spires of the island can be seen from a great distance away, and are said to experience rock falls and avalanches whenever a new monster arrives in this world.

Trade route

Many boats are forced to travel the seas, despite the activity of monsters. Players can often pick up good stories, supplies, and warnings from these boats. However, the traffic can attract monsters.

Dangerous shoals

These shallow sandbars can trap boats that aren't navigating carefully. Fortunately, there is often valuable flotsam and jetsam nearby.

The disappearing port

This port appears and disappears (seemingly at random) to avoid attacks by monsters. If you are looking to find magical materials, this is the place to find them. Be careful not to be in port when it disappears, or you won't be able to get back to the sea until it reappears.

Clipper's Reef

This large reef supports a massive, diverse ecosystem. The varieties of fish, invertebrates, and algae are incredible. Don't get too close or you might damage it. Certain monsters might be attracted by the variety of food available.

Putrid factory

This industrial facility is spewing foamy red or brown liquid into the ocean. There seems to be no way to staunch its corrupting flow.

Oil rig

This installation outputs slick clouds that slow boats.

Harold's Clipper

This abandoned ship seems to float around the ocean aimlessly. No one has yet communicated with it.

Pirates' Island

This area used to be frequented by pirates in ages past. Somewhere nearby, there is bound to be treasure…

The ship graveyard

Hundreds of boats are at the bottom of the sea. There is certainly important stuff down there. But why are the ships down there? What sunk them? Is it still around?

The misty triangle

This area is known to be a navigation nightmare. Many ships have been sunk within it. One theory is that the dense mist causes boats to collide. Another theory is that there is something magical within the mist.

Rogue waves

This is not an area, more of an event. Certain circumstances beyond the knowledge of the boats can cause huge waves to rise up. They typically come crashing down near land. Boats can capsize, which can be difficult to reverse.

Tsunami

This type of rogue wave is large and wall-like. It typically is aimed at the coast, and can cause massive damage when it arrives. Sometimes the tsunami brings oil and pollution with it, making it even more devastating.

Storms

This weather event can cause boats to become lost or capsize.

HOW TO PLAY

Here are some rules and guidelines that can help you to create a fun experience for you and other players:

1) The first rule is The Rule of Fun! **Fun rules the world** in this game. If someone is having fun, that's great! If everyone is having fun, that's even better! If someone is not having fun, ask them what they don't like about the game. Maybe you can balance what different people want and come to a compromise. Maybe having a big, long story with an epic battle is the most fun. Maybe just exploring is fun. Maybe you all want to hunt monsters. Maybe you want to solve the underlying problems of greed and ignorance that result in pollution. You and the other players can decide what counts as fun.

2) The second rule is **It doesn't have to make sense to be fun**. Not everything in this set of rules makes perfect sense or has a real-world counterpart. In this game, you need to roll with it. If something another player says doesn't make sense, ask them about it. Maybe they can explain it in some way. If not, maybe it's a magical phenomenon; we are all playing boats, afterall.

3) The third rule is **Let other people have their (own kind of) fun**. Sometimes your fun might step on someone else's fun. If that happens, just say sorry, change the story a bit and keep moving. If you don't find the game fun even after that, you don't have to play: go somewhere else and make your own game about sentient boats, or robotic chefs, or swashbuckling cats, or hippopotamus gangsters, or space-faring fungi, or cactus accountants, or communist couches, or futuristic cyborg hobbits who eat raisin-studded marzipan.

4) **It's just a silly game**.