

Secret Sails

The Rules of Play

A game of hidden fleets, fog and false flags



The rules of play, more ways to play, and Pirates! · playsecretsails.com

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A game of hidden fleets, fog and false flags, for 2 to 4 captains, ages 8 and up

OBJECT OF THE GAME

The Story

Fog has settled over the archipelago, and every fleet sails under false colors. A ship's true rating is a secret until she runs out her guns. You command a fleet of 14 ships. Hold the harbors and the Capital, capture enemy Admirals, and keep your own Admiral afloat. After 24 rounds the side with the most points wins, unless one side captures every enemy Admiral first. Losing your Admiral costs points; unless her capture ends the game, you sail on to the end.

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What You Need

One 12 x 12 chart with four anchorages, one in the middle of each edge, 12 islands, 4 harbors and the Capital at the center. One fleet of 14 ships per captain, each fleet a different rig. A round marker. Pencil and paper for orders.

Your fleet. The number on a ship is her rating. Bigger beats smaller. Three ships break that rule.

Ship	No.	Move	Note
7 First Rate	1	1	A Privateer that attacks her sinks her
6 Ship of the Line	1	1	
5 Frigate	1	1	
4 Sloop	2	1	
3 Boarding Party	2	1	Sinks a Fireship she attacks instead of burning
2 Cutter	3	1 to 3	Moves in a straight line; may Spyglass
1 Privateer	1	1	Sinks a First Rate when she attacks her
X Fireship	2	0	Never moves. Burns any attacker except a 3
A Admiral	1	1	Never attacks. Any attacker captures her: 8 points

Four fleets, told apart by their sails: **Square-Riggers**, **Lateens**, **Junks** and **Gaffs**. All four fleets are identical in play.

BEFORE THE FIRST ROUND

Setting Up

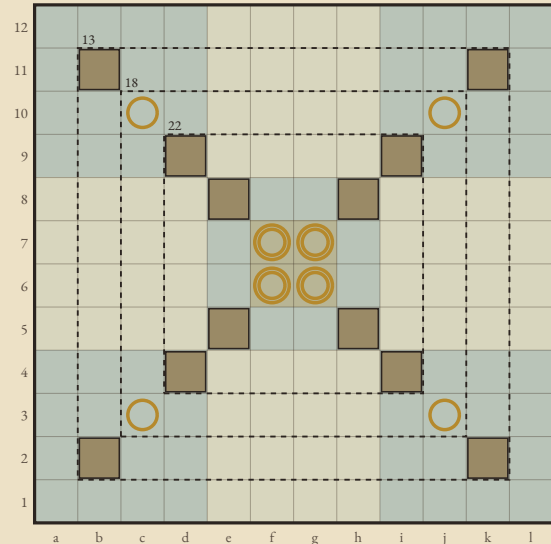
1. Each captain takes the shaded 4 x 4 anchorage in the middle of one edge. Two captains take opposite edges; in Allied Fleets, partners take neighbouring edges, side by side. Three captains take the top, right and bottom edges and leave the left one empty (see Ways to Play), or play the hex chart.

2. Stand all 14 ships anywhere in your anchorage, their faces toward you; two squares stay empty. Fireships and the Admiral may stand in the front row if you dare. **Wings** (agree before setup): you may also use the 2 x 2 of open water on each side of your anchorage, against the edge.

3. Placements are then final. Set the round marker to 1.

READING THE BOARD

The Chart



Open water	Ships move one square along a row or column. Never diagonally.
Anchorage	Your 4 x 4 on an edge. Set up here; then it is open water.
Island	Hatched squares. No ship may enter.
Harbor	Gold ring. 1 point to the captain whose ship stands on it at the end of a round.
Capital	The four gilt center squares. 2 points at the end of a round to the side with the most ships there; a tie scores nothing.
Storm	Dashed lines. After rounds 13, 18 and 22, the next ring of squares is lost to the storm. Any ship still there is struck.

EVERYONE MOVES AT ONCE

Playing a Round

Every round has the same four steps. There is no turn order: all captains act together.

1. **Write orders.** In secret, give up to **three** of your ships one order each (**four** while your Admiral is afloat): Move, Spyglass or Hold. A ship without an order holds. **Round 1 is a truce:** no ship may sail onto an enemy, and no one fights.

2. **Reveal.** All captains show their orders at the same moment.

3. **Resolve.** Spyglasses first, then every ordered ship moves one square, all together. Cutters with squares left move a second and a third step. Ships that meet fight (see When Ships Meet).

4. **Score.** Score the harbors and the Capital. After rounds 13, 18 and 22, the storm takes the next ring. Advance the round marker.

The rules on one card. Bigger number wins; same number, both sink. X burns whoever attacks it except 3. 1 sinks 7 only when 1 attacks. Any attacker captures A; A never attacks. Each round give up to three ships one order (four while your A is afloat); everyone moves at once; round 1 is a truce. Cutters move up to three and can spyglass. Hold harbors and the Capital to score; the storm closes in from the edges; 24 rounds.

ORDERS

Movement

- **Move.** One square, not diagonally, into water or onto an enemy (an attack). Onto a ship of your side only if she leaves that round, else you hold. Never onto your own Fireship, an island or the storm.
- **Cutters (2)** move one, two or three squares in a straight line through empty water, and may attack at the end of the run.
- **Spyglass.** Instead of moving, a Cutter beside an enemy may look at her. Your side alone learns her rating; hers, which Cutter looked.
- **Hold.** The ship stays, as does any ship without an order.
- **No shuffling.** After three rounds running back and forth between the same two squares, a ship may not go back again.

COLLISIONS

When Ships Meet

Order of entry: higher rating first, then lower seat (agreed before play).

- A ship entering a square another is leaving sails in behind her. Entering a square whose ship stays, she attacks her.
- Ships swapping squares fight; the winner takes the other's square.
- Ships entering one square fight one at a time in order of entry: the first fights the ship that stays there (if none, the second to enter), then the survivor fights the next.
- Of two moving ships, the first in order of entry attacks; equal ratings sink both, Admirals too. A ship that fights stops for the round.
- **An Admiral never attacks.** She may not be ordered onto an enemy, and if any ship stays in the square she sails for, she holds.
- **Friends** (your ships and your partner's) **never fight**, and in the truce, round 1, ships meet as friends do. A friend that stays blocks; two of your own ships may not be ordered into one square; of partners' ships entering a square only the stronger goes in; swapping friends pass.

RUNNING OUT THE GUNS

Combat

The two captains in a fight and their partners see both ships; the rest learn only where it was and which ships were struck (removed).

- **Bigger number wins.** Equal numbers: both ships are struck.
- **Fireship (X).** Any ship that attacks her burns, except a Boarding Party (3), which sinks her.
- **Privateer (1).** Attacking a First Rate (7), she wins; a First Rate that attacks her, or meets her under way, sinks her.
- **Admiral (A).** Any attacker captures her, for 8. Lost to the storm or in meeting an enemy Admiral, she costs her captain 8 and is revealed.

Fireships and Admirals never attack. A ship that wins a fight stays secret from all but the two captains in it and their partners.

Combat table. Attacker down the side, defender across; green wins, red loses.

Att. ↓ Def. →	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	X	A
7	both	win	win	win	win	win	win	lose	cap
6	lose	both	win	win	win	win	win	lose	cap
5	lose	lose	both	win	win	win	win	lose	cap
4	lose	lose	lose	both	win	win	win	lose	cap
3	lose	lose	lose	lose	both	win	win	win	cap
2	lose	lose	lose	lose	lose	both	win	lose	cap
1	win	lose	lose	lose	lose	lose	both	lose	cap

POINTS

Scoring

Event	Points	To
Stand on a harbor at round end	1	Your fleet
Most ships in the Capital at round end	2	Your side
Capture an enemy Admiral	8	The captor
Strike an enemy ship in combat	half her rating, rounded down	The winner
Your Admiral afloat at the end	4	Your fleet
Your Admiral lost without capture	minus 8	Your fleet

A Fireship scores nothing for the ships she burns, nor does striking one. In Allied Fleets partners add their points together.

WEATHER

The Storm

After rounds 13, 18 and 22 the next ring of squares from the edge is lost to the storm, the harbors with the last, and any ship still there is struck. Only the front row of each anchorage never closes: an Admiral set up behind it must sail out and be defended on open water (the storm taking her costs her captain 8), and a Fireship there goes down with her ring.

No stalling. Six quiet rounds running (no fight, no harbor or Capital changing hands) bring rings three or more rounds off a round early.

WINNING

Ending the Game

The game ends after round 24, or after any round in which one side has captured every enemy Admiral: that side wins, whatever the points. With two captains it also ends, on points, once neither can capture the other's Admiral (she is gone, or no ship that can attack is left).

Otherwise most points wins. On a tie, more harbors held in the last round wins, then more enemy rating struck, else the result is shared. A captain whose Admiral is captured sails on and keeps every point won.

More ways to play (other endings, options such as the harbor master's die, and Pirates!) are on the companion sheet, rules-more.pdf.

TWO TO FOUR CAPTAINS ON ONE CHART

Ways to Play

Duel (2)	The 10 x 10 duel chart, or opposite edges of this one. Capturing the Admiral wins at once. Best for learning.
Allied Fleets (2v2)	The standard four-captain game. Partners sit side by side, see each other's ships and orders, and share one score. Capturing both enemy Admirals wins at once.
Open Water (3 or 4)	Every captain for themselves. Until the end you see only your own score, and whether each other captain is leading, close (within 5 points) or trailing. Three: the left coast is neutral; its two harbors pay only after even rounds and give no shelter. Classic ending.
Sealed Orders	Partners do not see each other's ships or orders, only what each learns in fights and by spyglass.

FOR NEW CAPTAINS

A Few Words of Advice

Move a Cutter as if she were a First Rate and the enemy will believe you. Count the ships you have seen struck: what is left is what you face. Spend a Boarding Party where you think a Fireship hides. Leave home early: the harbors pay every round, and the storm forgives nobody who waits.

More Ways to Play

Four endings, and the options a table may agree before play

AGREE ONE BEFORE SETUP

The Four Endings

Each ending plays by the classic rules except where it says otherwise. Points are kept in all four: at a round limit the most points wins among the sides still on the board, with the classic tiebreaks.

Classic. Most points after 24 rounds wins. The game ends at once when one side has captured every enemy Admiral, and that side wins whatever the points. With two captains it also ends, on points, once neither can capture the other's Admiral: she is gone, or no ship that can attack is left.

Last Admiral afloat. A captain whose Admiral is gone, captured or lost, leaves the board at the end of that round with the whole fleet. The last side with an Admiral afloat wins. If the last sides all go out in the same round, the one with the most points among them wins. At the round limit (24 rounds, unless the table plays without one), the most points wins among the sides still on the board.

Capture the flag. The first side to capture an enemy Admiral wins at once; if two sides do it in the same round, the one with more points. A captain whose Admiral is lost any other way leaves the board with the fleet. There are no harbor or Capital points, and the storm holds off: no ring closes until after round 30, then one every four rounds until only the Capital is left, so a chase cannot run forever. The game also ends when no captain left on the board can capture; then, as at the limit of 60 rounds, the most points wins among the sides still on the board. A table may keep the classic storm and harbor points instead.

Hold the Capital. A side whose ships hold most of the Capital at the end of two rounds running wins: three of its four squares on the square chart, four of its seven hexes on hex. With only two sides (two captains, or two teams) it must hold all of it. A side that captures every enemy Admiral still wins at once. At the round limit the most points wins.

IN TEAM GAMES

Sides and Partners

A side is a captain, or a team of partners. Partners hold the Capital together, a capture by either counts for both, and a side stays on the board while any of its captains does. A captain who leaves the board keeps every point won.

THE FOUR ENDINGS

At a Glance

Ending	Won at once by	Out of the game	Rounds
Classic	capturing every enemy Admiral	no one	24
Last Admiral afloat	the last side with an Admiral	a captain whose Admiral is gone	24 or no limit
Capture the flag	the first capture of an Admiral	a captain whose Admiral is lost uncaptured	60
Hold the Capital	holding it two rounds running, or capturing every enemy Admiral	no one	24 or no limit

AGREED BEFORE PLAY

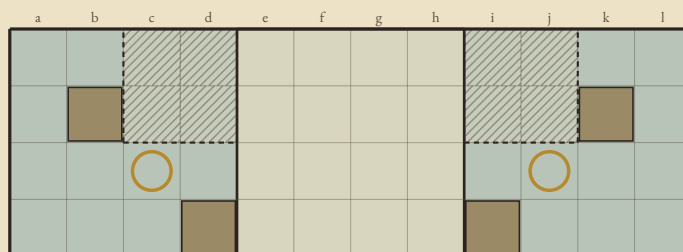
Options

Each option changes one thing, and a table may take any mix of them. Agree them before setup, with the ending.

Wings	Square chart only. A fleet may also set up in the 2 x 2 of open water each side of its anchorage, along the back two rows: 24 squares for 14 ships. The anchorage itself does not change.
Flag orders	One more order each round while your Admiral is afloat: four instead of three. This is already the classic rule; a table may play without it.
Command	Of a fight that would sink both ships, the one lying beside her own Admiral wins. If both are, or neither, both sink.
Admiral's spyglass	The Admiral may spyglass an enemy beside her instead of moving, as a Cutter does.
Random islands	The islands are dealt anew for each game: as many as the chart has, laid the same way around every anchorage, never on a starting square, a harbor, the Capital or the outer ring, and never cutting off any water.
Scaled Orders	Team games. Partners do not see each other's ships or orders, only what the team learns in fights and by spyglass.
Closing storm	Last Admiral afloat and Hold the Capital, played without a round limit (60 rounds at most). After the last scheduled ring, another closes every four rounds until only the Capital is left: after round 30 on the square chart, 38 on hex, 26 on the duel chart.
Sunk Admiral gone	Classic and Hold the Capital. For the early win, an enemy Admiral lost to the storm, or sunk any way but by capture, counts as gone. The side must still have captured at least one.
Harbor master's die	Three captains on the square chart. Roll one die each round before scoring: the neutral ports (c10 and c3) pay on a 4, 5 or 6 instead of in even rounds.
Weather die	Hex, with wind. Roll a die (1 to 6: E, SE, SW, W, NW, NE) for the opening wind and again after every round: the wind blows from the face shown, and may hold.

SQUARE CHART

The Wings



The top edge of the square chart. Inside the solid line: the anchorage, 16 squares for 14 ships, where the classic game sets up. Dashed and hatched: the wings, which make it 24.



Pirates!



The Black Flag mode: one pirate against an alliance of navies, for 3 to 6 captains

ONE AGAINST ALL

The Sides

One captain is the pirate and sails the Buccaneers, the black fleet: 14 ships, the classic roster. The other captains are navies, and the navies are one alliance: they win or lose together. On the square chart 4 captains play, 3 navies against the pirate; on hex 3 to 6 captains, 2 to 5 navies against her (read hex for square). The table agrees who is the pirate before setup, and every fleet sets up in its own anchorage.

Allies never fight: they pass and hold as partners do. Each navy sees only its own fleet, but every navy learns what any navy sees of the pirate in a fight or by spyglass. Every score is open.

Orders. The pirate gives four orders a round, five while her Admiral is afloat; a navy three, or four, as in the classic game.

PRIZES, NOT WRECKS

Boarding

When a pirate ship attacks a navy ship and wins, she boards her instead of sinking her: the loser strikes her colors and becomes the pirate's prize. A ship attacks when she sails onto a ship that stays, or comes first in order of entry when two moving ships meet. An Admiral is captured as usual, for 8 plunder, and a Fireship burns her attacker or falls to a Boarding Party as usual. A pirate ship that is attacked and wins sinks her attacker. The Privateer's trick holds: a pirate 1 that attacks a 7 takes her as a prize.

- **The prize changes sides.** She becomes one of the pirate's ships and keeps her rank, which everyone now sees.
- **Where she goes.** The winner sails into the square as any winner does, and the prize is sailed into the square the winner came from. If another ship is there, or entering it in the same step, there is no room: the prize sinks, and no one scores.
- **Her crew.** A prize may not be given an order in the round after she is taken; then she sails as one of the pirate's ships.
- **The prize limit.** The pirate holds at most four prizes at a time. While she holds four, a ship she beats sinks instead, and no one scores.

PLUNDER

Ransom

A prize that ends a round on a harbor or a Capital square is sold: she leaves the chart, and the pirate's plunder rises by her rating. A prize sailed onto a harbor as she is taken, because the winner attacked from it, is sold that same round.

THE NAVIES' ANSWER

Retakes and the Bounty

A navy ship that attacks a prize and wins retakes her: she returns to her own fleet, rank still shown, and is sailed into the square the winner came from (or sinks, with no room). The winner scores the bounty, half her rating rounded down, as for sinking any pirate ship. The pirate scores nothing for a ship she sinks.

ONCE A GAME

The Captain's Escape

Once a game, when a navy ship captures the pirate's Admiral, she slips away in a gig to the open square beside her furthest from the square her attacker came from: never that square or the one they fought on, nor one the storm takes that round or another ship is in or entering. Ties go to the square nearer row 12, then column a (on hex, the lower q, then r). She is then known to all. With no such square she is taken.

PLUNDER AGAINST THE ALLIANCE

Scoring

	The pirate	Each navy
A harbor held at round end		1
Most ships in the Capital		2
A prize sold	her rating	
A pirate ship sunk or prize retaken		half her rating
An enemy Admiral captured	8	8
A prize still held at the end	half her rating	
Own Admiral afloat at the end	4	4
Own Admiral lost uncaptured	minus 8	minus 8

Half a rating rounds down. The pirate scores no harbor, Capital or kill points.

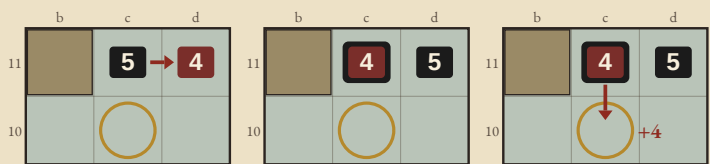
THREE WAYS

Ending the Game

- **Plunder.** The pirate wins at once when her plunder reaches 12 on the square chart, 9 on hex.
- **The captain.** The alliance wins at once when the pirate's Admiral is gone: captured with her escape spent, or lost to the storm. If both endings come in one round, the alliance wins.
- **The round limit.** After 24 rounds the higher score wins: plunder against the navies' average score, with the classic tiebreaks. In practice a long game is the alliance's: the pirate must make her target.

SQUARE CHART

A Boarding, Worked



Round 4: the Frigate attacks After round 4: a prize on c11 Round 6: sold on the harbor

In round 4 a Buccaneer Frigate (5) on c11 sails east onto a Square-Rigger Sloop (4) holding d11 and wins. She takes d11; the Sloop, now a prize shown to all as a 4, is sailed into c11, where the Frigate came from. Round 5 is her crew's round. In round 6 she sails onto the harbor at c10 and is sold: 4 plunder.