

# OF SMOKE AND SPLINTERS

**EXPANDED MARITIME COMBAT RULES  
FOR GHOSTS OF SALTMARSH**

**BY KOR-ARTIFICER**



# OF SMOKE AND SPLINTERS

This guide expands upon the ships and sailing rules presented in *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*, that were originally introduced as *Unearthed Arcana: Of Ships and the Sea*. With the contents of this guide, you can turn your ship battles into far more hectic affairs, where damage to different parts of the ship has different effects, giving a more realistic experience of the falling masts and blasts of splinters that characterise frantic battles at sea. In addition, it includes guides to arming a ship and its crew, including with black powder weapons, should you be that way inclined. The appendices further expand on the rules presented in this guide: Appendix A covers how to engage in large-scale ship battles while ensuring that the rules don't become bogged down by the hundreds of different creatures involved when two fleets clash. Appendix B includes a guide to new weapons with which you can arm your ship, such as the highly accurate scorpion light ballista, or the deadly close-range carronade.

With these new rules and options for your ships, gather your fleet, raise the colors, and sail into battle!

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### CREDITS

Created by Kor-Artificer (Frederic B.E. Walker)

- [Tumblr: @Kor-Artificer](#)
- [Twitter: @KorArtificer](#)

- [Wordpress: Kor-Artificer.com](#)

Created using [The Homebrewery](#)

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# ARMING A SHIP AND CREW

## ARMING THE SHIP

Gargantuan ships are typically armed with a combination of large weapons presented in Appendix B. These mounted weapons usually follow the layout of weapons presented in the ship maps of Appendix A of *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*. More heavily armed ships, particularly those using cannons, mount their weapons as chase and broadside weapons.

### CHASE WEAPONS

Up to 1/5 of a ship's large weapons may be mounted as chase weapons, split between being mounted on the front and back of a ship.

### BROADSIDES

The remaining 4/5 of a ship's large weapons must be separated equally between the broadsides on the ship's port and starboard to prevent the ship becoming unstable or capsizing.

### SMALLER MOUNTED WEAPONS

Smaller stationary weapons such as the scorpion or swivel gun are standard in arming a ship, as they can be quickly used to shoot at priority targets, often enemy officers or weakened parts of a hostile ship. These weapons are usually mounted on the bulwark of a ship's main deck, forecastle or quarterdeck.

## ARMING THE CREW

A ship's crew can be armed with the same variety as a land-based army, or group of raiders, depending on whether they are an organised naval crew, or rabble of pirates. However, certain weapons have stuck as the go-to for use on board ships, for reasons including utility, portability, and effectiveness.

### MELEE WEAPONS

Typically, the most common melee weapon seen on board ship is the cutlass, which can be best represented by a **shortsword**, which is equally useful in the hands of both brawny and more nimble crew members. Other weapons used for ship-to-ship combat include the boarding pike (which can be represented with any melee weapon that has the *reach* rule, such as a **glaive** or **halberd**), which is used primarily to repel enemy boarders, as its long reach is ideal for striking foes as they cross from one ship to another. The boarding axe (a **handaxe** or **battleaxe**) is useful both in melee with enemy sailors, and in cutting ropes - either in preventing boarding of a sailor's own ship by severing tethers, or to cut apart vital parts of an enemy ship.

### RANGED WEAPONS - BLACK POWDER

In settings where black powder weapons are present, the main ranged weapons used by the crew are the ship's large ranged weapons. While not weapons that an individual can wield in the traditional sense, these weapons are crewed at all times during combat, and continue to hammer at the enemy ship's hull as two ships are locked side-by-side in a boarding action.

For individually carried weapons, crew members are most likely to use flintlock **pistols**. These weapons can range from scratched dark metal to polished brass, and are wielded by common sailors and officers alike.

A few crew members may also carry rifle-length **muskets**. In naval crews, these weapons are usually reserved for use by marines on board the ship, who serve as an elite fighting force alongside the common sailors. These weapons are utilised both from the deck and rigging, to hit priority targets among the enemy crew.

Far rarer than their more conventional musket cousins, **nock guns** can unleash a devastating amount of firepower onto the foes of the few who choose to risk wielding them. A nock gun consists of a musket with 7 barrels, instead of the vastly safer single barrel. As a result, they deal considerably more damage than a musket and can hit several enemies in one shot, but the wielder experiences seven barrels' worth of recoil each time the weapon is fired, and igniting seven barrels' worth of gunpowder can produce a gout of flame large enough to set the wielder's own ship on fire.

### FIREARMS

*Rules for pistols and muskets can be found on page 286 of the Dungeon Master's Guide, but are also presented here for ease of access.*

#### PISTOL

*Martial Ranged Weapon*

| Cost   | Damage           | Weight | Properties                           |
|--------|------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|
| 250 gp | 1d10<br>piercing | 3lbs   | Ammunition (range 30/90),<br>loading |

#### MUSKET

*Martial Ranged Weapon*

| Cost   | Damage           | Weight | Properties                                        |
|--------|------------------|--------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 500 gp | 1d12<br>piercing | 10lbs  | Ammunition (range 40/120),<br>loading, two-handed |

#### NOCK GUN

*Martial Ranged Weapon*

| Cost    | Damage | Weight | Properties                                        |
|---------|--------|--------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1000 gp | *      | 13lbs  | Ammunition (range 40/120),<br>loading, two-handed |

When the nock gun is fired, all creatures within a 15-foot cone must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. Unattended items within the cone catch fire. The weapon's target, and all creatures within 5 feet of that creature must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, or take 13 (2d12) piercing damage. The weapon's wielder must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw, or take 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

# SHIP DAMAGE TABLE

## HITTING AND DAMAGING A SHIP

When attacking a ship using a weapon such as a cannon or ballista, an attack roll is made with each weapon. Before attacking, the crew of a weapon can choose to take a -5 penalty to the attack roll to target a specific part of the ship, hitting the chosen target on a successful hit. Otherwise, on a successful hit, the attack hits a random part of the ship, determined using the damage locations table. Spells that target a point within range may target any location on the ship that is within the spell's effect, such as a mast and the main deck, or the upper hull and a number of the ship's weapons mounted there. When a damage location is selected on this table, the damage is removed from the hull's hit points, unless specified otherwise.

When the ship is affected by a weapon attack, spell, or ship damage (such as a falling mast) that covers an area, you can alternatively roll 1d6, and, for spells, 1d6 per level of a spell. The total of the dice is the number of crew members caught in the affected area.

### DAMAGE LOCATIONS (1d20)

#### Result Location Effect

|       |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-5   | <b>Lower Hull</b>   | If the lower hull takes damage from a ranged attack that exceeds 15 points of damage, 1d6 creatures below deck are hit by the spray of splinters, and must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (5d10) piercing damage from the splintering hull on a failed save, or half as much on a success. In addition, if the lower hull takes damage from an attack or spell that exceeds 20 points, add 1 to the ship's <i>sinking</i> value.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 6-9   | <b>Upper Hull</b>   | <i>(Only affects ships with one or more decks below the main deck. Otherwise, treat this as a hit to the lower hull)</i> If the upper hull takes damage from a ranged attack that exceeds 15 points of damage, 1d6 creatures below deck are hit by the spray of splinters, and must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 27 (5d10) piercing damage from the splintering hull on a failed save, or half as much on a success.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 10    | <b>Weapon</b>       | The attack hits one of the ship's weapons. Use the hit points presented later in these rules for tracking damage taken by weapons.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| (10)  | <b>Powder Store</b> | When a ship using black powder weapons is hit by an attack that scores a critical hit, if the damage location is a weapon, the attack instead hits the powder store. This instantly causes devastating damage to the ship, the ignition of black powder resulting in a devastating explosion. After rolling the damage of the attack, the ship takes 24 (5d10) damage for each black powder weapon mounted on the ship. If this destroys the ship, the ship is often split clean in two by the explosion.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 11    | <b>Rudder</b>       | When the rudder takes damage that exceeds 20 points, roll 1d4. On a 1-2, the ship begins listing to port side, on a 3-4, the ship begins listing to starboard. When the ship is listing, it may only move in the direction it is listing until the rudder is repaired.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 12-13 | <b>Main Deck</b>    | If the main deck takes damage that exceeds 20 points from a ranged weapon or ranged spell attack, creatures on the main deck in a straight line from the attack's source must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking the weapon's damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 14    | <b>Upper Decks</b>  | If the upper deck takes damage that exceeds 20 points from a ranged weapon or ranged spell attack, creatures on the upper deck in a straight line from the attack's source must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking the weapon's damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 15    | <b>Helm</b>         | The creature on the helm must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking the weapon's damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success. If the creature on the helm is incapacitated while the ship is moving, the ship begins listing in the same way as presented in the rudder section, and makes a full move in each of its turns, until a creature takes the helm.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 16-18 | <b>Sails</b>        | This damage is dealt to the sails' hit points. Halve the amount of damage dealt to the sails by bludgeoning or piercing damage, and double the amount of slashing damage dealt to sails. Each time an attack deals more than 20 damage to the sails of a ship, reduce the ship's movement speed by 5 until the sails are patched.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 19    | <b>Rigging</b>      | This damage is dealt to the sails' hit points. Halve the amount of damage dealt to the rigging by bludgeoning or piercing damage, and double the amount of slashing damage dealt to rigging. If the rigging takes damage in excess of 10 points, all checks made with navigator's tools on board are made with disadvantage until the rigging is replaced, due to the difficulty of reaching the important vantage point of the crow's nest.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 20    | <b>Mast</b>         | This damage is dealt to the sails' hit points. If a mast takes damage that exceeds 20 points, the mast falls. All creatures on deck beneath it in a straight line the height of the mast, in a random direction from the bottom of the mast, must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 5d10 bludgeoning damage. When a mast is felled, reduce the ship's movement speed by its original total movement speed divided by its original number of masts. For example, a ship with 3 masts would reduce its movement speed by $\frac{1}{3}$ when it loses a mast, whereas a ship with only one mast would reduce its movement speed to zero if that mast were to fall. This reduced movement speed remains until the fallen mast is repaired or replaced. |

# FIRES AND SINKING

## FIRES

When a ship's hull or sails take more than 20 fire damage in one turn, that part of the ship catches fire. Use the fire rules presented on pages 200-201 of *Ghosts of Saltmarsh*. The starting DC for this fire is 15, and checks to extinguish it can be made as one of the ship's actions while the ship is in combat. In the turn the ship catches alight, it takes 1d0 fire damage. For each turn that the fire is not extinguished, the damage per turn increases by a further 1d10.

## SINKING

The **sinking** value is used to track how much water a ship is taking on and how close it is to sinking. When a ship first raises its **sinking** value to 1, it begins to take on water. At the end of each of the ship's turns, increase the **sinking** value by 1. The crew can bail out water as one of the ship's actions, which prevents the ship's **sinking** value from increasing in that turn. The ship continues to sink until all holes in the hull are repaired. When repaired, the ship is no longer risk of sinking, and bailing is a less urgent task.

When a ship's sinking score exceeds the armor class of the ship's hull, the ship sinks. When a ship sinks, all creatures below deck must make a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb, break or swim out of the ship before it goes under. A character that fails this check is trapped in the ship as it goes down, and can attempt to escape from the wreck by making a DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check as an action. While in a sinking wreck, the normal rules for holding breath and suffocation apply.

## APPENDIX A: FLEET BATTLES

*With a blast of white smoke, a cannon slams back on its wheels inside the ship's gun deck. A pair of gnomes hastily clean the weapon's barrel, before sliding in a charge of black powder, followed by their half-orc crewmate loading an iron ball. The three strain to aim the cannon at the enemy ship, then light the fuse and cover their ears.*

*On the upper deck, the half-elf captain shouts orders to her crew over the sound of cannon fire. She ducks under a hail of splinters as a cannonball splits the rigging above her and strikes the mast. Righting herself and drawing a spyglass, she spots two things: the enemy fleet, fast approaching with colors raised, and her admiral's flagship, signalling her ship to turn to full broadside. The battle has begun.*

## CREW IN FLEET BATTLES

This framework provides rules for naval mass combat. In fleet battles, each ship involved in a battle of this scale acts as one creature, simplifying a battle from the potentially thousands of crew to the handful of ships involved, and the players' own ship.

### NEW OFFICER - ADMIRAL

An admiral is the highest ranking individual in a fleet, with the whole fleet as their responsibility, rather than any one ship. As such, the admiral's ship is usually captained by another individual. The admiral issues orders to the entire fleet, which are carried by communication officers. A skilled admiral should have high Wisdom and Charisma scores, as well as proficiency with water vehicles and the Intimidation and Persuasion skills.

### NEW OFFICER - SIGNALLER

In large-scale fleet battles, communication from the flagship is vital, thus crews include a signaller. Typically this work is done through flag signals, but sometimes winged messengers carry commands from ship to ship. A capable signaller should have a high Wisdom score and proficiency in the Perception skill.

### FLEET ROLE - FLAGSHIP

From the admiral aboard their flagship, orders are issued to the rest of the fleet. As it is the admiral's ship (though the ship itself is run by its captain, known as a flag captain), it is typically a centre of activity during fleet battles, as capturing it and the admiral is a quick way to force a fleet's surrender.

## SHIPS IN FLEET BATTLES

### DAMAGE

In fleet battles, combat can be simplified by using the damage location table only for the ship or ships the player characters are aboard. For other ships, simply record the hit points for the hull.

### WEAPONS: BROADSIDES

To simplify a ship's turn in combat during fleet battles, a ship can use the broadsides action instead of using its weapons individually, representing the firing of multiple weapons in a single attack roll.

The broadsides action is made as one attack roll using the highest attack bonus of the weapons involved, against one target which must be gargantuan or larger. Any weapon used as part of this attack that is not within range of the target does not add its damage on a hit. This attack cannot gain the bonus of the *Take Aim* special officer action, as it represents a hail of shot all being unleashed at once. Any weapon used as part of a broadsides action can't be used again in that turn.

On a hit, the target of the ship's broadside is hit by a number of shots equal to the number of weapons used, minus 1d4. The crew firing these weapons can choose which weapons miss. If a ship fires a broadside in the same turn that its crew are bailing to reduce its **sinking** condition or trying to put out a fire, reduce this by a further 1d4.

If you are using damage location table for the target ship of this attack, 1d4 shots hit random targets, the others hit random levels of the hull.

### WEAPON: BOARDING

When two ships engage at close range, rather than playing out a battle between the crews, an opposed boarding check can be made. Each ship makes a Constitution check, adding its crew quality, then compare the results. The ship with the lower result reduces its quality by 1. This action can be made in the same turn as a Broadside action.

### CREW QUALITY AND SURRENDER

Crews are far more likely to surrender in battle than fight to the bitter end and go down with their ship. When a ship is hit badly by a broadside, the significant casualties reduce the ship's crew quality. If a broadside hits with 5 or more weapons, reduce the target ship's quality by 1. If it's hit by ten or more weapons, instead reduce the target ship's quality by 2. When a ship's crew quality is reduced to -5, the vessel raises a (usually white) flag to indicate surrender.

## APPENDIX B: SHIP WEAPONS

Rules for the Ballista and Cannon are originally presented on page 255 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. This section includes those rules for ease of access, as well as additional shot for a cannon, and several other weapons appropriate for use in ship-to-ship combat.

### BALLISTA

*Large object*

**Armor Class:** 15

**Hit Points:** 50

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

A ballista is a massive crossbow that fires heavy bolts. Before it can be fired, it must be loaded and aimed. It takes one action to load the weapon, one action to aim it and one action to fire it.

**Bolt.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

### CANNON

*Large object*

**Armor Class:** 19

**Hit Points:** 75

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

A cannon uses gunpowder to propel heavy balls of cast iron through the air at destructive speeds. In a campaign without gunpowder, a cannon might be built by clever gnomes or wizardly engineers.

A cannon can be loaded with a variety of different shot, aside from the standard iron cannon ball. Bar shot and Chain shot are used for disabling the masts and rigging of enemy ships to slow them down, often fired from cannons mounted at a ship's prow for cutting the speed of an enemy that the ship is chasing. Grapeshot is the term for using the cannon to fire multiple smaller projectiles, ranging from specially made small-sized cannon balls to random debris. This shot covers a wide area, and is used to devastate enemy crews on deck. Heated shot is particularly rare, given the difficulty of heating an iron cannonball at sea, and is most commonly used by coastal fortifications to combat wooden ships. Heated shot is also considered one of the most dangerous, due to its ability to set enemy ships on fire.

A cannon is usually supported in a wooden frame with wheels. Before it can be fired, the cannon must be loaded and aimed. It takes two actions to load the weapon when used on a ship, one action to aim it and one action to fire it.

**Cannon Ball.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 600/2,400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage.

**Bar/Chain Shot.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 600/2,400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 33 (6d10) bludgeoning damage and 22 (4d10) slashing damage. Saving throws made by creatures on the main deck or upper decks to avoid attacks from this weapon are made at disadvantage.

**Grapeshot.** All creatures within a 50 foot cone must make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

**Heated Shot.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 600/2,400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 44 (8d10) bludgeoning damage and 16 (3d10) fire damage.

### CARRONADE

*Large object*

**Armor Class:** 19

**Hit Points:** 65

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

A carronade is a short, heavy calibre cannon capable of dealing considerably more damage than a standard cannon, but at much shorter range.

Before it can be fired, the carronade must be loaded and aimed. It takes one action to load the weapon, one action to aim it and one action to fire it.

**Carronade Shot.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 84 (8d20) bludgeoning damage.

**Grapeshot.** All creatures within a 60 foot cone must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 33 (6d10) piercing damage on a failed save, or half as much on a success.

### FIRE ARROW RACK/HWACHA

*Large object*

**Armor Class:** 15

**Hit Points:** 20

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

A fire arrow rack is a launch rail set onto the side, front or rear of a ship, capable of launching fire arrows, incendiary rockets propelled by gunpowder and wrapped with cloth doused in oil. A typical rack contains 10-30 arrows, all of which are fired simultaneously.

The fire arrow rack must be loaded with up to a full magazine of fire arrows and aimed before it can be fired. It takes one action to load each fire arrow, one action to aim the rack, and one action to fire it. When fired, make an attack roll for each fire arrow on the rack as all are fired together.

**Fire Arrow.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 40/160 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) piercing damage and 16 (3d10) fire damage.

### SCORPION

*Medium object*

**Armor Class:** 15

**Hit Points:** 25

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

The scorpion is a light ballista crewed by one person, often used for targeting enemy officers on deck due to its high accuracy. It takes one action to load the weapon, and one action to aim and fire it.

**Bolt.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d10) piercing damage.

### SWIVEL GUN

*Medium object*

**Armor Class:** 19

**Hit Points:** 25

**Damage Immunities:** poison, psychic

A swivel gun is a small light cannon, mounted on the bow or stern of a ship. These guns are used to target specific parts of enemy ships, or crew on deck.

Before it can be fired, the swivel gun must be loaded. It takes one action to load the weapon, and one action to aim and fire it.

**Swivel Gun Shot.** *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d12) bludgeoning damage.