

An Explanation of my reasons for designing "Captains Bold"

I have had innumerable conversations over the years about history and game design. I have typed uncounted thousands of characters expressing my disagreement with those who have expressed the opinion that:

- 1) in order for a historical wargame to be accurate, it must be complex, and that conversely
- 2) a simple wargame cannot be accurate.
- 3) it is acceptable for a wargame that is touted as being historically accurate to include effects which are purely cinematic or even incorrect, in the interest of "fun".
- 4) any one person's definition of "fun" can be applied across the entire spectrum of gamers.
- 5) designing wargames is an academic exercise and should be held to the same standards.

My reasons (in very basic terms) for disagreeing with these positions are that

- 1) and 2) Historical fidelity does not reside in the depth of detail explored by the designer, but in the congruence with the historical record displayed by what details he has chosen to explore.
- 3) The designers of historical wargames that seek to illuminate something about history have a duty to their audience to depict history accurately, as they perceive it; this is different than the duty of a designer who is just creating a game with a historical theme. Those of the latter type who promote their work as being re-creative of history are doing a disservice to those in their audience who are less familiar with the history.
- 4) There are many different flavors of "fun". Any activity in which one participates with people whose company one enjoys can be "fun", but within the context of the actual game design, the only thing all varieties of "fun" have in common is the frequency of the decision points presented to the players and the impact those decisions have on the outcome of the game. After that, it's all a matter of taste. What is "fun" for one gamer will often be mind-crushingly boring to another.
- 5) While there is a strong academic element to the design of historical wargames, the actual activity itself is more akin to creating a historical painting or novel. Though its value rests firmly on its congruence with the historical record, it is nevertheless more a work of art than a treatise.

These arguments could go on endlessly, and so I decided that rather than try to explain my take on historical wargame design in words and reason, I should simply create an example that would illustrate what I meant. In this case, I am hoping that a picture will be worth several thousand words.

I chose the subject matter of the game because of my familiarity with it, thus making it unnecessary to do extensive additional research. I narrowed the subject down to just a single aspect of sailing ship combat in order to make the actual mechanics of the game as compact as possible. In limiting the player's frame of reference to the role of a single historical character, it becomes possible to explore the effect of the most important dynamic factors affecting that character's decision making process without resorting to encyclopaedic rules

meant to cover every aspect of the subject at all levels.

The design criteria for this game:

- a) it should be easy to learn, even for someone not familiar with the history, avoiding unnecessary jargon and obscure acronyms.
- b) it should be simple and inexpensive to acquire, lowering the bar for entry.
- c) it should reflect the most important aspects of the historical character's decision making process and relate the various factors affecting those decisions directly to the outcome of the game.
- d) it should be playable in an hour or less.
- e) it should be suspenseful and fast-paced in order to keep the players engaged.
- f) it should be aesthetically pleasing, and evocative of the subject matter.

And so, in spare hours spread over the last several weeks, I put together "Captains Bold". I leave the judgment of how successfully I have met these criteria to others, but I am satisfied that it adequately illustrates my position on the design of historical wargames.

I am offering it for free because it is intended merely as a illustration, and because it has not been tested with the rigor one should expect of a commercial design. Nevertheless, those who try it out should find the experience both satisfying for the history buff and pleasing for the gamer.

Good gaming,

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June, 2014