SPANISH SHIPS OF WAR AT SEA

A Plea for

ARMADA

THE WAR WITH SPAIN
DEC. 1586–OCT. 1588

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Most of you will have seen **'Armada'** and my guess is that many of you have consigned it to the shelf after having glanced through the rules, noted the two pages of amendments, cried "SPISA!" (SPI Strikes Again!) and turned to something more comprehensible. Quite a few, doubtless, will have tried it out, struggled with the triangle of rules, amendments and game like a man with a particularly ingenious and impractical deckchair and admitted that there appears to be a game in there all right but, by gum, it will take a lot of digging and life's too short. Even Ken Newall and his myrmidions who SPUKTESTed it found themselves unable to come to the core of it, as Ken said in his letter covering the queries and comments.

At the risk of being called sycophant, black magician or just plain liar, I say now that **'Armada'** is one of the best games, certainly one of the best S&T games, to come from SPI in quite a while. The game-system is clever but straightforward, play is easy and smooth-flowing, and the game itself is of very manageable size. To these virtues it adds a choice of strategies, an exercise in pre-planning and a requirement for subtlety within a simple framework. Finally it presents a very fair simulation of the politico-military situation in the years 1587-88, highlights the various aspects of the pat-

tern and places the Armada itself in the context of events: for the 'Enterprise of England' was not an expedition in a vacuum, contrary to the impression given in English folklore. Do not consign this gem to that wilderness where bleach the bones of **'Plot to Assassinate Hitler'** and **'Seige of Constantinople'.**

The rules are a mess, no doubt of that, as SPI admit in the introduction to their two pages of errata. While a new developer may be forgiven for failing to express his intentions adequately in print in his first game there is no excuse for the playtesters who left him ignorant of his failure to communicate: if they were the same coven who playtested **'Red Sun Rising'** I would not be surprised to learn this, but **RSR** is silent as to its testers. The amendments do much to correct the vaguenesses, anomalies and ahistorical rulings of the original, sometimes replacing entire sections completely, but even so some inexplicables and 'black holes' remain; in particular the amendment of Case 13.2 adds confusions of its own as it refers to an original paragraph which it itself has ordered to be deleted! Moreover the constant switching of both eyes and attention from rules to errata-sheet and back again becomes downright confusing and irritating, leaving the first-time player foxed and frustrated. Amendments are not enough; what is needed to give **'Armada'** the rules it deserves is a complete new edition and this point has already been made out with these pages.

In the meantime, however, the game can be played once a study of rules and errata has been made; an initial game will still present difficulties but a second study of the paperwork after the tryout will suddenly seem much easier and many points, hitherto uncomprehended, will become clear. Better still, the game-system is so straightforward that much of it can be memorised by study, first playing and second study. What follows now is a series of vignettes of different parts of the game-system to highlight important points and, in some instances, to suggest temporary 'house rules' pending official clarification from SPI. Here and there I have taken it upon myself to deduce what the designer seems to intend, based upon the rules themselves, the errata and upon corroboration from the game-system itself: I may not always be right but at least I am logical. In preparing this part of the article I was much indebted to Ken Newall and his SPUKTEST group, whose lengthy comments I was able to study in conjunction with my own newly-arrived copy of the game and its rules, thus setting my mind moving in the right direction.

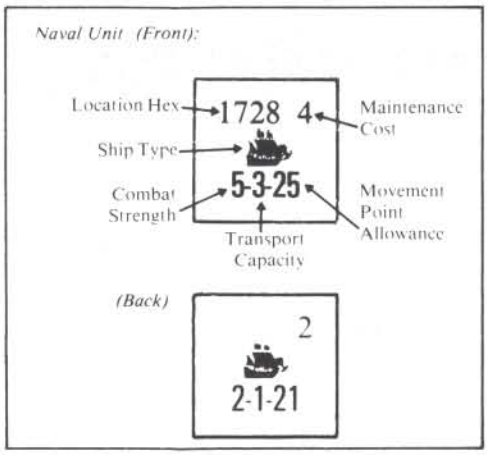
From Ushant to Scilly is Thirty-Five Leagues; the Map

1. The double number marked in most port hexes is the value in Victory Points and for Activation of naval units respectively; some of the smaller ports have no Activation value. Note that the Activation value of both Corunna and Santander is now upgraded from 5 to 10 and that Toulouse is *not* a port — its values are to be transferred to Bordeaux.

2. The Shallow coastal hexes referred to in the rules are few in number and will be found only on the Netherlands coast including the Dunkerque hex (thought; if immortal Dunkirk is to be spelt that way then why is not Moore's last resting-place La Coruna?). They are distinguished by their khaki-green tint.

3. Note that the Amsterdam hex is *meant* to be impassable to sea movement through its North and West sides, naval units having to enter and leave via the Zuider Zee. Likewise, sea entry to Antwerp is via Brill, making the latter an early objective for the Spanish forces in the Netherlands. The point has been made that the blocking-off of the Amsterdam hex interrupts coastal movement along the Dutch coast — I consider that this is intentional, reflecting the hazards of that shoal-beset coastline.

4. The Straits of Dover have been the subject of some discussion among gamers anent the status of the hexside between the Chatham and Calais hexes as regards coastal movement. Rule 6.21 says clearly that naval units employing coastal movement may never pass through an all-sea *hexside*; both hexes are certainly coastal but their common side is equally certainly all-sea (well, *look* at it!), debarring coastal movement between Chatham and Calais.



That Great Fleet Invincible; the Naval Phase

5. Naval Units by Ship-Types: this little catalogue of characteristics may be of use to puzzled mariners seeking the best way to use their respective forces, if comments from gamers are anything to go by.

a. **Deep Draught (DD) Units**
Advantages: Each side's main strength; good combat factors. reasonable trooplift capacity

Disadvantages: Require munitions (expensive!) and victuals to operate to maximum capacity; liable to adverse effects of wind; cannot attack Shallow Draught units in Shallow hexes; Spanish DDs disengage from action only on a 5 or 6 die-roll.

b. **Shallow Draught (SD) Units (Sail)**
Advantages: Always have munitions (13.13) and thus require no munitioning; expend no victual points, being kept in supply by the expenditure of ducats at each turn's end (unless in port) — these two characteristics enable them to operate on a turn-to-turn basis as well as making them cheap to fit out; can attack other SD units in Shallow hexes; (Spanish only) disengage on 4, 5 or 6 die-roll unless stacked with DDs — see also Para 9 of this article.

Disadvantages: When stacked with DDs cannot add their CF to those of the DD units — must *attack* separately and make no contribution to *defence* until all DDs in the stack are eliminated (new 7.31 and 7.32); no trooplift capacity; may not attack in any interception (new 6.58); liable to adverse effects of wind

c. **Shallow Draught (Oars) — Spanish only**
Advantages: Munitions and victualling as for SD (Sail); never affected by wind.

Disadvantages; All those of SD (Sail) less wind effects; may not go farther than two hexes from coast (6.42)

d. **Dutch Units (All SD (Sail))**
Advantages: Have good CF plus all other characteristics of SD (Sail); cost nothing to build, maintain or repair.

Extra Disadvantage: Cannot move more than four hexes from Brill (6.7)

Note: SDs make good coastal defence units because of their endurance, thus deterring enemy raids on ports: the Spanish oared units with their rapid and reliable movement rates are useful in home waters.

6. Activation and Deactivation.
Note corrected 5.13: fleets may be deactivated in *any* friendly or friendly-occupied (i.e. in possession of land units) port. This is particularly important for Spanish Naval units which have run the gauntlet and reached Netherlands waters (but see suggested House Rules) or are wintering in Ireland after a successful landing there.

7. **Movement.**
Naval units may pass through or enter *any* coastal hex occupied only by enemy land units (6.41). However they may *not* capture enemy ports even if these are totally unoccupied (corrected 7.55)

8. **Wind Effects.**
Note that while sailing units which start sea movement *with* the wind and then change to movement *against* in the same turn must be thrown for on both occasions, the reverse does *NOT* apply (6.11, clarification). In that case the wind table is consulted only on beginning movement. Note also that units intercepting must also consult the wind table (6.0, Procedure, last sentence)

9. **Combat.**
a. *All* English units disengage on a die-roll of 4-6 (7.44, change). Spanish DDs disengage on 5 or 6, SDs on 4-6 unless stacked with DDs.

b. See 13.33 for status of DDs out of ammunition (not logically located!)

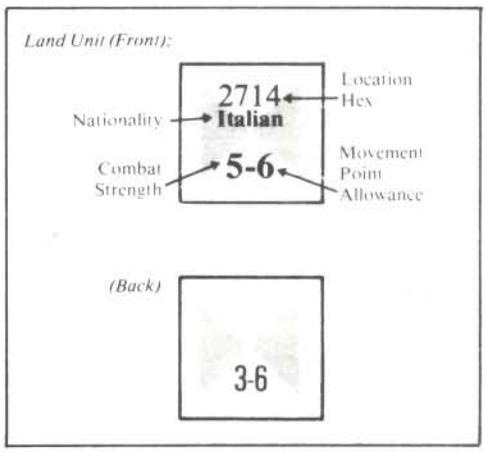
10. **Victuals and Munitions**
a. Munitions rules are clear and sufficient

b. Victualling rules are still a mess, even in their amended form. For example, the reference to a new first line in 13.22 (addition) is intended for the original 13.22 which has been completely deleted! The intention of Rule 13.2 seems to be as follows;

(1) DDs expend Victualling Points if still *at sea* at the turn's end but if in a non-port coast hex can be victualled by the expenditure of ducats in lieu; i.e. the original 13.22 still holds good.

(2) SDs are victualled by expenditure of ducats (even at sea!?!) but if in a mixed DD/SD fleet at sea their victualling is covered by the expenditure of a Victualling Point for that fleet

c. See suggested House Rules as the present rules for coastal victualling seem rather unrealistic and are the subject of a rules query at the time of writing (20 May).



March to the Siege of the City of Gaunt: the Land Phase

11. This is a very straightforward phase and is the more so for having certain queries over movement cleared up, as will be emphasised in a moment. Sieges seem to cause some head-scratching but once a couple of essential points are hoisted in there should be no further trouble with this aspect of operations

12. Movement of Units
a. **Dutch.** These may move and fight freely within

the *entire* Netherlands but never outside them (8.14, clarification).

b. **German.** While these may NOT move or attack into the Protestant Netherlands from Germany they may certainly move into the Catholic Netherlands and thence attack or march into Protestant territory (8.15, clarification)

c. **Spanish.** Note that these may be Activated in hex 3225, ready to march up the Spanish Road – or into France! This important point is rather tucked away in Case 5.24 – I think that it should receive more prominence.

13. **Sieges.**
The procedure has raised, as I said, some puzzles to those trying out the game, expecially as the siege rules have been fairly heavily amended. However the drill is simple enough once one has the hang of it.

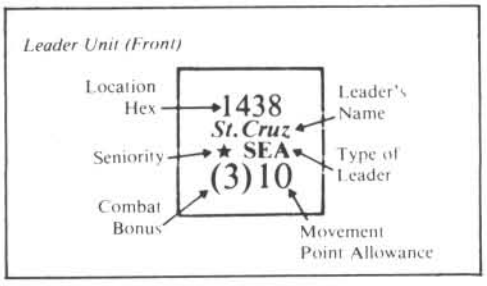
a. Siege is triggered by the defender, at his option. If attacked in *any* hex he simply refuses combat; the attacker *must* then move into the same hex, no further movement or combat taking place in that turn as far as those units are concerned (10.0, change)

b. Thereafter the *besieged* units are pinned (8.12). The besieger may then stay put and starve out the besieged without further combat – two turns of siege in a non-fortress hex, six in a fortress : note that a Winter turn counts as five (10.16). However if the hex is also a port the garrison will hold out indefinitely unless the besieger also moves in a naval unit to blockade the sea approaches (10.14, but see the addition which debars this gambit if the besieged have an Activated naval unit in a *non-fortress* port hex under siege.)

c. But if the besieger cannot wait for starvation then he may attack in the turn after siege begins and in all subsequent turns; the besieged may no longer refuse combat but defend at DOUBLE strength (TRIPLE in a fortress) (10.33, clarification and 10.3). They may also attack the besiegers but do so at HALF strength (10.3)

d. The siege can be raised by the besieged player moving relieving units into the same hex – these are not part of the besieged garrison and are not themselves under siege although they too attack at HALF strength (10.31 and new 10.41). If at the end of a complete turn relieving units remain in the hex the siege is broken and the besieger must withdraw (new 10.42).

e. The *besieger* is NEVER pinned; he may raise the siege at will (new 10.53).



This and That

14. **Leaders' Movement.**
The MF on sea leaders' counters is another obfuscation not covered in the rules. But stay; as, once at sea (i.e. with a naval unit), they move with that unit and share its fortunes it seems fairly obvious that their MF relates to land movement if one wants to move them to a port where a fleet is assembling, without going to the expense of activating a naval unit to carry them there by sea. Call that inventing a rule if you like; *I* call it applying military sense!

15. **Spanish Landing in Britain.**
If Spanish troops land in *either* England or Scotland the English Catholic Revolt Table *and* the Scottish Intervention Table both come into effect – but only once per game (10.31). So if the Spaniards land in England Scotland reacts as well, if in Scotland then England. This is not apparent at first glance but a re-read of 10.31 makes it clear.

Some Interim House Rules

Despite the many amendments in the errata sheet there are still some unexplained anomalies and plain mysteries; these are all the subject of queries, most raised by SPUKTEST and a few more tacked on by myself. Pending the publication of fresh errata (and, eventually, (I hope) a new rules pamphlet) I offer a few house rules to paper over the cracks.

The Treasure Fleet.
Nowhere do the rules say what constitutes a safe landing of the treasure in Spain (no, Bob, 6.6 won't do). I suggest that a landfall in any port in Spain followed by the treasure fleet remaining unmolested in that port for a further turn constitutes a landing. If enemy units enter that port the landing of the treasure must be suspended until they leave or are driven off. Once the treasure is landed the fleet counter is removed from the map for its reappearance in 1588.

Victualling in Coastal Hexes.
Gentlemen, we have a right mess here, despite the virtual reconstruction of Rule 13.2. Quite how a SD unit 'buys' victuals out in the Atlantic, even given all the ducats in the world, beats me and I suspect that a movement restriction on SD (Sail) units was intended but forgotten – nor do I intend to make good so great a deficiency. However the provision whereby a DD unit can victual in a coastal hex by the expenditure of ducats is a bit suspect. In the last paragraph of Case 2.1 (How to Play the Game) it says, "If a Player is on a Friendly coastline these rations may simply be purchased on a turn-to-turn basis". Note that: *Friendly* coastline. But alas, this seems to have been overlooked when the drafter reached Rule 13.2, even when that rule was amended. So, as has already happened, one can have Drake revictualling on the Spanish coast ("Buenos dias, Senor Feelthy Heretic. You buy my fat toros, yes? Four ducats, pliz. May you burn in Hell. Come again soon, yes?"). Or how about the Armada itself, shipload of whips and thumbscrews and all, stopping to shop in Bideford? No, the mind boggles. May I suggest that we evoke that Friendly coast item as follows:

1. The British Isles and the Protestant Netherlands are always friendly to English ships. So too are Catholic Netherlands coast hexes occupied by English or allied troops.

2. Spain and Catholic Netherlands are always Friendly to Spanish ships. So too are Protestant Netherlands hexes occupied by Spanish troops.

3. France is always Friendly (in the sense of not being actively hostile) to both sides unless one side or the other intervenes in the French civil war; in this event the Protestant half of France becomes Friendly to English ships only, the Catholic half to Spanish only. Once one side or the other achieves the conditions necessary to win the civil war (17.3) all France becomes Friendly to that side only.

4. Spain is never Friendly to England and the British Isles are never Friendly to Spain. (What about Ireland, you ask? Well look what happened to the Spaniards who landed or were cast ashore there.)

Shallow Coastal Hexes
If DD cannot, as 17.3 makes clear, attack SDs in Shallow coast hexes then the indications are that they cannot enter those hexes either. I suspect that this is something else which the developer forgot to take up, otherwise why have SD units at all.? Furthermore it is an historical fact that, once East of Calais, there were no deep-water ports on the Flanders or Dutch coasts and indeed, once driven out of Calais Roads, the Armada came very close to being wrecked on the treacherous shoals, only a last-minute shift of wind saving it. This was why the plan called for Parma's barges to come out to meet the Armada and why Medina Sidonia had intended to take the Isle of Wight as a base: there was absolutely no question of the Armada putting into a Flemish or Dutch port to embark the army, because this was impossible. Therefore I suggest that DD units may not enter Shallow hexes.

The Game's Afoot!

The game itself offers various courses of action to both sides. Spain is the richer country and has the strategic initiative so that England must adopt the guard which will best parry whatever thrust the Spaniard uses – or seems to be using. On the other hand the English move first on both sea and land and thus have the tactical initiative.

If the Spanish player seeks to emulate Philip II and throw a great army into England he will soon find out why Parma advocated that first the Netherlands should be secured. He will also find out that it will be as well to concentrate the Armada at Corunna in order to set off with the prevailing wind, despite the extra time and therefore expense that this will take. If there is indeed to be a great expedition is it to be in 1587 or 1588? What about a small expedition to Ireland to divert English effort? Or even a strong raid on England in 1587 to sieze ungarrisoned ports and destroy the ships laid up there, crippling her in 1588? Lack of funds will hamper England's laying down of new ships, let alone fitting them out later, if such a raid is successful. In addition it would create such a diversion that Spain could deal with the Netherlands unhindered by English reinforcements. Alternatively Spain can decide on a vigorous land campaign in Europe to bring France and the Netherlands firmly into the Catholic orbit; victory here, coupled with the seizure of Ireland by a comparatively small force will win the war for Spain, hands down.

From the beginning the English player must man the watergates against a Spanish swoop but not so lavishly that he runs out of cash. He has an option to send an army into the Netherlands to frustrate Parma's 'pacification' and another to intervene in France while the Fleet lies in Plymouth, daring the Spaniard to come up-Channel and do something about it. What about a pre-emptive strike at Spanish ports, risking the adverse winds off Biscay?

And for both sides the need for forethought, concentration of force, economy of effort, and administration: too grandiose a plan and the money may run out; too much economy and the fleets are haltered; not enough administrative planning and money is wasted. Yes, there's quite a lot in a moderate-sized packet.

Epilogue

If you thought **'Armada'** another of S&T's turkeys then I hope that this attempt to cast light into dark corners has given you cause to think again. It *is* a good game and a 'different' one without being so arcane as to baffle the newcomer. Get out the rules, mark 'E' against those that have been amended in the errata, strike out those that have been scrubbed or totally changed and then study the pamphlet with errata sheet beside the appropriate page as you go along; you should find a lot beginning to stick in your mind if you do this. Then get out the game, blow off the dust and....

"Let us bang these dogs of Seville, the children of the Devil"

"St James for Spain! King Philip! Clear the guns!"