PART I
INTRODUCTION

This rules supplement for the Rolemaster™ (RM) Fantasy Role Playing system addresses naval combat and ocean-going adventures. It provides rules for ship-to-ship combat, battling sea monsters, storm damage, and a variety of systems for weather generation and adventures at sea. In addition, Sea Law includes a ship construction system and a number of pre-designed ships and other campaign data. Most of the information in this supplement concerning national navies, weather patterns, and specific ship types is geared towards ICE's Shadow World gaming environment as a sample setting, but it can be used in any setting by following the modification guidelines provided. As always, any rules that do not fit within an individual GM's world framework should be discarded or modified as necessary.

Sea Law is intended to be a supplement to the Rolemaster system. References will be made to various RM sub-systems such as Armor Type and spell resolution. Obviously, players should have access to, and be familiar with the RM role playing game.

Note: For readability purposes, Sea Law uses standard masculine pronouns when referring to persons of uncertain gender. In such cases, these pronouns are intended to convey the meanings: he/she, her/his, etc.

HOW TO USE SEA LAW

Sea Law is best used when combined with an existing campaign, although it can be used as a stand-alone naval combat simulations game. Any naval combat up to and including the Age of Sail can be recreated using these rules. Naval actions with and without boarding can be gamed out using these rules, as can assaults by ships on defended ports and the like. Truly ambitious gamemasters could also play out a campaign game, limiting themselves to a starting fleet and fighting until one side or the other is exhausted and out of ships.

As has been mentioned, however, Sea Law comes into its own when combined with an on-going Rolemaster campaign and a group of ambitious players. Only in this setting can the rules for ship combat and construction be combined with the various monsters and adventure settings to capture the full unique flavor and drama of this product. Using these rules players can build their own ships, recruit their own crews, and carry out their plans for exploration, conquest, piracy, or simply flight from a difficult situation. It also provides the GM with the tools to allow this course of action, and suggestions and rules systems for creating their own nautical-oriented game.

THE PARTS OF WAR LAW

This book is broken into seven parts.

Part I — Introduction: the introduction (which you are currently reading).

Part II — Environment & Ships: discussion of the water-borne environment, standard ship terms and sailing techniques.

Part III — Combat: a battle system detailing ship to ship and ship to shore combat, boarding, and ramming.

Part IV — Strategic Activity: rules for movement and navigation.

Part V — Ship Construction: options and guidelines for designing ships, including a large number of sample ships.

Part VI — Sea Creatures: rules for handling encounters with non-human NPCs while on board ship, with a number of sample sea creatures and races presented.

Part VII — Sea Law Campaigns: a set of guidelines for using Sea Law as part of a Rolemaster campaign.

Part VIII — Tables & Forms: all the combat tables, stat tables, miscellaneous tables, and record sheets.

AUTHOR NOTES—WHY SEA LAW?

Why Sea Law? Good question. I was hoping you'd ask. After knocking around in a number of role playing game systems for many years, I realized that I was getting bored. After all, there are only so many sieges a guy can handle before attacking a pile of rocks on a hill loses its glamour. Besides, you usually had to be about tenth level or so before you could afford the necessary troops and/or magic. And then there was always the chance that the owner of the castle would take your visit the wrong way and come looking for your pile of rocks with his own army. No, it was time for a change. What was left? Then it hit me: the Sea!

Most game systems have ignored the sea for one reason or another. Those that do attempt to cover nautical adventuring usually give it a brief once-over and leave the GM to come up with reasons for the PCs to go to sea, and often ignore the systems needed to deal with such adventures to boot. The few combat and ship-building rules systems that do exist are usually spotty, and there is rarely any guidance included concerning these systems. The GMs I've talked to while writing this supplement all complained that, even when their players wanted to sail off into the sunset, they (the GMs) were reluctant to allow this simply because the necessary rules didn't exist. And most of the players I spoke with weren't even aware that they could go to sea in the first place!
Sea Law attempts to address both problems. Here you will find a reasonably complete, playable combat system along with rules for building your own ships and taking them to sea. A lengthy section has also been included concerning how Sea Law can be fitted into any GM's existing campaign. Rules and suggestions for creating nautical societies, reasons for PCs to go to sea, things they can find there, and other surprises are all to be found in this book. In some ways these rules should be considered the core of Sea Law; the bones that carry and support the muscle and skin of the combat and ship construction rules.

True, there are things you won't find in Sea Law. The combat system was designed to be as detailed as possible, but the accent was on playability. Sea Law was designed as a role playing aid first and a tactical simulation second. Some generalizations (such as rigging types, technological levels, and weaponry, for starters) were made to keep the rules simple, and some ships (such as those common to the Orient and Middle East) were left out. But, like all of Rolemaster, these rules exist to be used and modified as the players and GM see fit. Running a campaign with an Oriental flavor? You can use the ship construction rules and the examples found in Sea Law to build junks and other ship types common to that environment. Gunpowder exists in your campaign? The rules concerning gunpowder weapons were included for just this reason, and to allow players seeking to duplicate their favorite historical situation free reign.

If you, as a GM, have purchased Sea Law with an eye towards using it to enrich your current campaign, I strongly suggest that you read the section concerning campaigns first and the combat rules second. This will give you a better idea of what Sea Law is all about, and help you to decide what systems would be most appropriate to your campaign. Where else but at sea can a fifth level fighter find and claim his own kingdom? Ghost ships, mermaids, sea monsters and water elementals all await the PCs bold enough to take to the waves. Sunken treasures, pirates, voyages of discovery, and even shipwreck all await. Read on and enjoy!

A brief note is also in order concerning some of the systems in Sea Law. The most important is the concept of Opportunity Fire. Some may feel that this allows a ship to fire whenever it pleases, while others may complain because a ship that selects Opportunity Fire loses all actions in the normal Fire Phase. The concept of Opportunity Fire was created in response to a facet of the Movement System; certain ships have enough movement points to sail right through an opponent's Line of Battle and never get shot at! As most gamers with any knowledge of war during the Age of Sail will recognize, this is not only historically inaccurate, but it gives such ships a tremendous advantage that their real-life counterparts never enjoyed. Ship's officers were always watching for an opportunity to fire along the stem or stern (front or rear) of an opponent, called a 'rake' in the terminology of the times, and would fire at the first such opening. Captains realized that this happened, and often encouraged such behavior. Also, a Captain with a ready gun crew might spot such an opening through the 'fog of war' and open fire. These twin concepts gave birth to Opportunity Fire. Although Opportunity Fire is listed as an Optional Rule, the designer feels strongly that it should be included with the core rules whenever Sea Law is used.
1.0 CONVENTIONS & NOTATIONS

This section presents some of the conventions, definitions, and abbreviations unique to Sea Law. For the standard Rolemaster conventions and notations refer to ChL 1.2, SL 2.0, and AL 1.3 and 2.0.

1.1 ROLEMASTER PRODUCTS

Rolemaster (RM) is ICE’s complete fantasy role playing system, combining Arms Law & Claw Law® (AL&CL), Spell Law® (SL), and Character Law & Campaign Law™ (ChL&CaL). The rules in Sea Law are designed to be in conjunction with the standard RM system.

RM is supported by a variety of play aids. Such products can decrease the time and effort required for the creation of an exciting game, and increase the amount of realism and detail obtained during play. These play aids include:

War Law™ (WL) — War Law is the mass combat system for ICE’s Rolemaster system. With War Law a GM can make numerous detailed decisions for every aspect of battles that can have anywhere from 2 to 1000’s of participants. However, War Law also includes a very specific, simplified version of this battle system that makes standard decisions for many of the key battle system aspects (e.g., scale, unit size, abstracted losses, unit integrity, morale, etc.).

Creatures & Treasures™ (C&T), C&T II, C&T III — ICE’s compendiums of information and statistics for three key elements of fantasy role playing: creatures, treaures, and encounters. They also includes guidelines and statistics for dozens of new races.

The Rolemaster Companions™ (RMCs) — Compendiums of spell lists, new professions, new races, new monsters, and a variety of other optional material, rules, and guidelines.

The Shadow World® Series — Modules and adventures in a rich, self-contained fantasy environment designed specifically for use with RM, but which can be used as isolated or hidden areas in any GM’s campaign world.

Space Master™ — ICE’s science fiction role playing system is compatible with Rolemaster, allowing GMs to inject sci-fi elements into their FRP games and vice versa.

Middle-earth Role Playing™ — A complete system specifically designed to introduce people to fantasy role playing in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth. It is suitable for those who have never before played a FRP game, as well as more experienced gamers who are looking for a realistic, easy to play FRP system for low-level adventures. It is compatible with Rolemaster and can serve as a great introduction to RM for novices.

ICE’s Middle-earth® Module Series — A wide variety of rules, guidelines, and modules for use with fantasy role playing in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Middle-earth. Completely compatible with both RM and Middle-earth Role Playing.

1.2 ABBREVIATIONS

AL......................................................Arms Law
AL&CL........................................Arms Law & Claw Law
AT..............................................Armor Law
C&T.............................................C&T, Creatures and Treasures
ChL.............................................Character Law
DB..............................................Defensive Bonus
DR..............................................Dice Roll Modifier
GM..............................................Gamemaster
Lvl..............................................Level
MPs.............................................Movement Points
MPT...........................................Movement Point Total
NPC...........................................Non-Player Character
OB..............................................Offensive Bonus
PC..............................................Player Character
RM..............................................Rolemaster
RMC#...............................Rolemaster Companion #
(CL# I, II, III, IV, V, VI, or VIII)
RR..............................................Resistance Roll
Sel...........................................Sea Law
SL..............................................Spell Law
WL..............................................War Law

1.3 DICE ROLLS

Each die used in Rolemaster is a 20-sided die (or a 10-sided die) which gives a result between 0 and 9. If two of these dice are used, a variety of results can be obtained. However, results between 1 and 100 are the primary basis of the Rolemaster system (i.e., RM is a “percentile” system).

Note: 20-sided dice and 10-sided dice can be obtained at your local hobby and game stores.

PERCENTILE (“1-100”) ROLLS

1-100 Roll — Most of the rolls in Rolemaster are “1-100” rolls (also called “D100” rolls). To obtain a 1-100 result roll two dice together—one die is treated as the “ten’s” die and the other as the “one’s” die (designate before rolling, please). Thus a random result between 01 and 100 (a “00” is treated as 100) is obtained.

Low Open-ended Roll — To obtain a “low open-ended roll” first make a 1-100 roll. A roll of 01-05 indicates a particularly unfortunate occurrence for the roller. The dice are rolled again and the result is subtracted from the first roll. If the second roll is 96-00, then a third roll is made and subtracted, and so on until a non 96-00 roll is made. The total sum of these rolls is the result of the low open-ended roll.

Example: The GM asks a player to make a low open-ended roll, and the initial roll is a 04 (i.e., between 01 and 05). A second roll is made with a result of 97 (i.e., between 96 and 100); so a third roll is made, resulting in a 03. Thus, the low open-ended roll that the GM requested is -96 (= 04 - 97 - 03).
High Open-ended Roll—To obtain a “high open-ended roll” first make a 1-100 roll. A roll of 96-00 indicates a particularly fortunate occurrence for the roller. The dice are rolled again and the result is added to the first roll. If the second roll is 96-00, then a third roll is made and added, and so on until a non 96-00 roll is made. The total sum of these rolls is the result of the high open-ended roll.

Example: The GM asks a player to make a high open-ended roll, and the initial roll is a 99 (i.e., between 96 and 100). A second roll is made with a result of 96; so a third roll is made with a result 04. Thus, the high open-ended roll that the GM requested is 199 (= 99 + 96 + 04).

Open-ended Roll—An open-ended roll is both high open-ended and low open-ended.

NON-"1-100" ROLLS

1-10 Roll—In instances when a result (roll) between 1 and 10 is required, only one die is rolled. This gives a result between 0 and 9, but the 0 is treated as a 10. Such a roll is referred to as “1-10” or “D10”.

1-5 Roll—Roll one die, divide by 2 and round up (“1D5”).

1-8 Roll—Roll one die; if the result is 9 or 10, re-roll until a 1 to 8 result occurs (“1D8”).

5-50 Roll—Roll 1-10 five times and sum the results.

2-10 Roll—Roll two dice, divide each result by 2 (round up), and then add the two results to obtain the “2-10” (“2D5”) result.

Other Required Rolls—Any other required rolls are variants of the above.

UNMODIFIED ROLLS (UM)

Certain results on some rolls indicate an immediate effect and no modifications are considered. These rolls are marked on the appropriate charts with a UM. For example, all weapon attacks result in a fumble if the initial unmodified 01-100 roll falls within the fumble range of the weapon.

1.4 DEFINITIONS

Before jumping into the main body of these rules, a brief glossary is in order for those who do not have a nautical or naval background. All the general nautical terms used in this supplement can be found below, along with brief definitions. Other terms and concepts unique to this module will also be defined below.

Please note that this is only a partial list of the terms used in this supplement. Others will be explained as they are introduced. GMs may wish to share this section with their players to give them some background knowledge, especially if the PCs are assumed to have a nautical background.

Aft — The rear half of a ship
Armor Type — A numeric representation of the composite armor type of a unit (see AL 4.1).
Attack Roll — A dice roll that determines the success or failure of an attack.
Attack — An attempt by one combatant/unit to damage another.
Ballista — A large crossbow-like siege engine. This is the second most common naval weapon in Kulthea, and is commonly found in the hands of pirates. It is often used because it is cheaper and easier to use than Greek Fire. The ballista has a higher rate of fire and the smaller ones can be easily moved about aboard ship. It is often used to repel boarders, and can also throw Greek Fire (see below). For those readers with a background in Nelsonian navies, the ballista in these rules takes the place of the swivel gun.

Bow — The fore part of a ship
Casualty — A combatant (soldier) who is incapacitated or killed.
Casapult — A typical land warfare engine modified for sea use. Common only on galleys (oared warships) without masts, this is one of the rarest shipboard weapons in Kulthea. It can also deliver Greek Fire.

Chance — Sometimes an event has a “chance” or a “percentage chance” of occurring, and this chance is given in the form of “#%.” To determine if the action occurs, make an unmodified, non-open-ended roll. If the result is less than or equal to the “#%,” the event occurs.

Combatant — Each individual participant in a battle is called a combatant.

Decks — The lowest deck is the hold, where all the ship’s cargo is stored. Above it is the orlop deck. Other decks are (in ascending order) the lower, middle, and upper decks. On the upper deck the aft space is roofed and called the quarter deck. Most officers (like the captain) live here. Forward of the forecastam, again on the upper deck, is the forecastle where most petty officers live and eat. The space between the two smaller decks is called the waist, and the ship’s boats are stored here. The space above the quarter deck is the poop, and the ship’s wheel is often located here. Above that, but only on the largest vessels, is the poop royal. Note that smaller ships might not have some of the decks mentioned here. Some of the ships in the Shadow World have variations of this layout, as will be detailed below.

Defensive Bonus — A measure of a combatant/unit’s ability to defend itself. The DB can be augmented with a shield bonus, a portion of the OB, and various other modifiers.

Fore-and-Aft Rigging — Like a lateen except the sails are smaller and are anchored at the bottom by booms (cross bars). This rig requires fewer sailors, but is weaker than the other two types.
Fore — The front half of a ship

Demon Fire (Greek Fire) — This is Kulthea’s (and the Ancient World’s) version of napalm. A flaming, viscous delivered either by ballista bolt canister, catapult bomb, or from its own tube, Greek Fire is one of the most feared non-magical attacks on the high seas. It is expensive to produce, and thus is fairly rare outside of the war fleets of the major powers in a GM’s campaign environment. Ships armed with Greek Fire are truly dangerous at close ranges. Note that mangonels cannot deliver Greek Fire. On Kulthea, this is most commonly called Demon Fire.

Hits (Hit Points) — Accumulated damage, pain, and bleeding, that can lead to shock, unconsciousness, and sometimes death. Each unit/combatant can take a certain number of hits before dissolving or passing out.

Lateen Rigging — A type of sail rigging that uses sails shaped like right triangles

Leader — A leader is a special combatant who can modify the morale and combat capabilities of other combatants and units.

Level — A measure of the experience a unit possesses.

Maneuver Roll — A dice roll used to determine if an attempted maneuver is successful.

Maneuver — An action that involves risk, the use of skill, unusual concentration, etc.

Mangonel — A spring-powered artillery engine. Used like an 18th century ship’s cannon, the mangonel is the major naval weapon in Kulthea. It comes in three sizes; light, medium, and heavy. The type carried depends on the size of the ship. Note that mangonels are never found on galleys; their frames and freeboards are too weak to withstand its recoil.

Mass-combat System — A game system that emphasizes rules for battles involving “units” (i.e., groups of similar individual combatants).
Masts — Names of masts depend on the number on a ship. A three-master has (from the fore); Fore, Main, and Mizzen masts. A two-master has (again from the fore); Main and Mizzen. Some of the ship building powers in the Shadow World have built larger vessels with four masts. These have Fore, Main, Third, and Mizzen masts. The larger vessels are mainly used for long voyages and are usually square rig. 

Melee Attack — An attack against a target adjacent to the attacker (e.g., hand-to-hand attacks with swords, axes, pole arms, etc.).

Missile Attack — A ranged attack against a target not adjacent to the attacker (e.g., bows, thrown weapons, slings).

Movement Point — This is an abstraction of actual velocity used to determine how many hexes a ship can move during one turn (of either type). It is effected by the Sail/Oar State, the facing of a ship in relation to the wind, and the Weather/Wind Charts. Movement Points (or MPs) are determined from the Movement Profile, which is explained in the following Movement rules. One movement point allows a vessel to move either one hex (200') during a Tactical Turn or four nautical miles (= 4.5 miles) during a Strategic Turn.

Movement — There are two types of movement used in this supplement; tactical and strategic. Each ship has two separate movement rates, one for each type of movement. A Tactical Turn lasts 2 minutes of game time, while a Strategic Turn lasts four hours of game time.

LATEEN RIGGED

SQUARE-RIGGED

Chirpwise Bonus — A measure of a unit/combatant’s proficiency with its weapons of choice when attacking. A portion of the OB may be applied to enhance the DB in the form of a parry.

Open-ended Roll — See Dice Rolls above.

Port — The left side of a ship if facing forward

Sail/Oar State — This is a factor of how much of the ship’s available oar or sail power is being used for movement. It helps determine the actual movement rate of a ship.

Ship Types — The definitions of the various ship types found in Kulthea will be given in the section detailing ship construction. These types can be used in any campaign and, where possible, historical time frames for these ships will be given for GMs basing their campaign around an equivalent period in our own history.

Spell User — A combatant who can cast spells.

Square Rigging — Uses square sails anchored to the masts at both top and bottom by spars and booms. This rig is the most powerful of the three types discussed here, but takes many sailors to operate.

Starboard — The right side of a ship if facing forward

Stern — The aft part of a ship

Target — A combatant or unit being attacked is called the “target of the attack.”

Turn Sequence — The order that activities occur in during a turn of play.