Blockade Strategy Guide
for Battle Navigators

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The Navigator's Bushido

If another player makes me mad,
then I respect him
because I am not quick to anger.
If another player proves me
wrong, then I respect him
because I am usually right.
If another player defeats me, then
I respect him
because I usually win.
When I defeat another player, I
put a notch in my belt;
I go through a lot of belts.

Note: The information here is poorly organized, but all parts are equally important and required reading from beginning to end. This guide has mostly been written with the blockade navigator in mind, but it should prove equally useful to blockade organizers and serve as an educational discourse for curious jobbers. This guide is not *meant for novice navigators and assumes that the reader has an extensive understanding of the physics of sea battle (ramming, whirlpools, wind, damage accruement, qualities of the different ships) and a basic understanding of the components of a blockade (flags, most notably).*

General information on running a ship:

1. If a commanding officer (CO) has not been selected to preside over your ship, select one yourself. This person should order pirates to stations, ensure that everyone is paid (if applicable), and answer everyone's questions while aboard the vessel (like, "when is the swordfight?" — poor bastards). The CO should not be expected to puzzle if it gets in the way of maintaining order aboard the ship. The navigator should *never* puzzle.
2. Unsubscribed players should not be allowed on vessels or jobbed within the crew. They do not add to a ship's influence and occupy valuable space (which they contribute nothing for in return). Unsubscribed accounts are also the most prolifically used spies (Do not accept information from spies such as moves placed by enemy navigators or what otherwise might be considered contrary to the "spirit of the game." Report players who offer such information). Note that I make a distinction between unsubscribed *players* (true greenies) and the unsubscribed *accounts* of veteran players. An expert puzzler using an unsubscribed account will make up for their lack of influence.
3. Communication between the battle navigators is an important factor in success. Suitable communication channels include: Roger Wilco (i.e. *voice channels*), IRC (i.e. *external channels*), or /crew or /jcrew (i.e. *internal channels*).
4. Communicating other intelligence, usually in the hands of the CO, is also important. Gathering intelligence includes /vwho'ing enemy vessels to get a good idea of how well manned they are, and finding out who is navigating them. This information is important to you, the navigator.

Various roles in and outside of the blockade:

- *CIA*: someone who gathers intelligence, like the manpower and navigators of enemy vessels. This is usually done by the CO for their navigator, though other players, like the Sniper or his associates, can also play the role of CIA.
- *Strategist*: someone, usually a monarch or trusted royal, who devises, or tries to dictate, a strategy or navigators' movements for the blockade round.
- *(Battle) Navigator*: the navigator of a manned ship (not Sniping or observing).
- *Supply*: someone who restocks ships, keeps track of which ships can no longer enter the blockade, and usually distributes the pay among jobbers.
- *Sniper*: someone who stays mostly in the safe-zone on an unmanned vessel and performs hit-and-run operations against incoming and outgoing vessels.
- *Contact*: someone who hires jobbers. Snipers, CIAs, and Strategists can double as Contacts.

How to succeed as a strategist:

The strategist who is not actually navigating a ship should almost never disrupt or order about his navigators once the blockade round has begun. I consider this of the utmost importance. Unless it's coming from another navigator, tactical advice (usually from politicians or, worse, ship owners) is anathema to the expert navigator's ears. Unfortunately, all navigators owe it to their ship's deed-holder and seniors-in-command to at least give audience to their suggestions (and sometimes commands); but it's up to every navigator to choose whether or not to follow them. I would urge every politician and ship-owner to not put a navigator in the position of choosing between their better tactical judgment and your orders. Once the blockade round has begun, allow the navigator to do his job.

Historically, wars have suffered when politicians tried to do the job of their generals.

Running a war brig:

The war brig is the base unit of the blockade. Having 20 pirates aboard will allow things to run smoothly while having less than 16 is considered undermanned. Always fill sails first (9) and if not fully manned, keep a minimum number of workers on carpentry and bilge. Sails are most important because if an expert navigator is able to maneuver, then chances are he won't suffer regular or significant damage. Have your CO reserve sailing stations for reliable players who are best at the puzzle and for those who don't have compromised attentions (the CO, and pirates who are known to idle).

Running a war frigate:

The war frigate is the most formidable unit of the blockade. It is just as maneuverable as the war brig and has substantially higher defense while dealing significantly more damage.

From U.S. Grant's personal memoirs: "*While commanding in West Tennessee, [the Secretary of War, General Halleck and I] had occasionally held conversations over the wires, at night, when they were not being otherwise used. He and General Halleck both cautioned me against giving the President [Lincoln] my plans of campaign, saying that he was so kind-hearted, so averse to refusing anything asked of him, that some friend would be sure to get from him all he knew. I should have said that in our interview the President told me he did not want to know what I proposed to do. But he submitted a plan of campaign of his own which he wanted me to hear and then do as I pleased about. He brought out a map of Virginia on which he had evidently marked every position occupied by the Federal and Confederate armies up to that time. He pointed out on the map two streams which empty into the Potomac, and suggested that the army might be moved on boats and landed between the mouths of these streams. We would then have the Potomac to bring our supplies, and the tributaries would protect our flanks while we moved out. I listened respectfully, but did not suggest that the same streams would protect Lee's flanks while he was shutting us up. I did not communicate my plans to the President, nor did I to the Secretary of War or to General Halleck.*"

Having 45 pirates aboard will allow things to run smoothly, but 50 is optimal; anything less than 40 is considered undermanned. Carpentry and bilge are more important than they are on the war brig because the main purpose of the war frigate is to make and take damage.

A navigator's best friend:

…is his team. He should respect their tactical decisions and advice. As navigators, they are all the ultimate mouthpieces for their team's strategy, only able to win through cooperation and sacrifice. If one navigator is in a better position to sit idly on flags, then he should graciously accept the job without being asked. He can not hope for constant engagement on the front-lines.

If a teammate is in trouble and one navigator is near enough to assist, then he should do so. Ultimately it is the navigator on a sinking ship who suffers the shame, but the whole team bears the guilt and responsibility if they did not do everything to help. Heavily damaged allied ships should be aided in their retreat and guarded while repairs are made.

Real-life inspiration:

Historically, I find the dogfights of the early 20th century most similar to blockade navigation. Many strategies, techniques, and invaluable maxims are shared between the two. For example, one can find great tactical inspiration in the life and methods of German flying ace Baron Manfred von Richthofen, better known as the Red Baron. The most important of these maxims would be to **never focus on a single target** (tunnel vision). This is one of the most prolific and criminal of all navigation mistakes, frequently committed by veteran sea battlers who aren't used to facing more than a single opponent. Unfortunately, the Baron didn't follow his own advice on the last day of his life (some believe his judgment was impaired by a previously suffered concussion), and pursued a plane haphazardly over enemy territory, resulting in his death (either by a ground turret or another enemy plane from his right). Don't be the Baron! Never focus on a single target.

How to navigate in multi-ship combat:

This section is on how to navigate for *multi-ship combat*, which does not take into account flags and flag control (which comes later). The following advice is best for veteran sea battlers who are wanting to make the transition from pillaging or PVP to blockade navigating.

The one most important maxim for navigators has already been stated. In chaotic melees especially, it is of the utmost importance that the navigator never develops tunnel vision; all opponents close enough to fire on you must be taken into account when planning your moves.

You can use your knowledge of tunnel vision to your advantage, because most non-expert navigators will suffer from it from time to time. When evaluating the style and abilities of your opponents on screen, it is symptomatic of a *sea battler* (someone who only sees one opponent, or someone with tunnel vision) to not fire on you if you come into range. If both you and a companion are facing different opponents, and one is apparently suffering from tunnel vision, the best tactic is to abandon your opponent and go after your ally's. With his cooperation, the sea battler can be set up by your ally into a vulnerable position for your side-swipe.

In melees, where there is a high concentration of ships in a small area, this advice is most valuable, because there is no worse time to develop tunnel vision than in a melee. One should not only avoid focusing on a single target, but purposely avoid consecutive or over-zealous attacks against the same enemy vessel. Instead, attack one opponent, then turn about and attack another. Since most non-expert navigators will try to reciprocate aggressive attacks, there's a good chance that they will turn their attentions upon you, giving your ally the perfect opportunity to perform a side-swipe of his own; average navigators, who get incredibly frustrated by the non-committal hit-and-run tactics of expert navigators, will be destroyed mentally and fall like a house of cards.

The second best advice for multi-ship combat is to **fire liberally**. This means that if it is possible for an enemy to ship to be in range on any particular move, you should fire. Anyone with knowledge of sea battling should already have a good understanding of this concept; the only difference is that since there are more ships in a blockade to take into account than in a sea battle, one must fire more often. Stating anything further on the subject will prove redundant to an experienced sea battler, so I will go no further. Just remember that it is an important lesson.

An experienced sea battler should already have an understanding of the physics of the game – this mostly means that one should have a firm grasp of ramming, a central part of blockade combat; – if not, then review other precursory documents.

The back door:

In larger blockades, a brig or two entering from the ocean is invaluable. This, at best, allows your team to capture early points and the coveted defensive position; at worst, it benefits your team with an early spread of the board or dilutes your forces. War frigates should not be used in this capacity, as they are much too powerful to be wasted on non-combative maneuvers. Ocean-side entry is best done on the first round of the blockade. If your team is defending an isle, then simply deport your vessel a minute or two before the start of the blockade (you will accumulate bilge unless you sail, but the ship is easily repaired upon entry). When the round begins, port, and you will see your vessel appear on the opposite end of the blockade board. — If you are attacking an isle, then wait for the start of the blockade before deporting, then click 'disengage' and port.

Making use of this tactic in the middle of a blockade is more difficult for the defenders of an island. They will have to sail to the other side of the board during the break and wait for the next round. Since they will most likely have to port at the island first to restock,

it's not always possible to make it back to the ocean before the start of the next round, except during the long break(s).

The art of Sniping:

Sniping is an invaluable tactic best employed by less able but nagging navigators. Be sure to leave rum off the vessel and only stock enough cannons to get by each round (16-30 on a war brig). This tactic used en masse (three or four Snipers) and combined with expert communication between the snipers and the battle navigators can be like forcing your opponent between two hard places. On many blockade maps, this use of manpower is far more rewarding than using the same amount of men to field a sloop.

- If necessary, bring a gunner along to help you fill cannons and concentrate on navigating.
- Snipers can double as CIA. Since they will not always be busy (especially if they have a gunner with them), they can gather intelligence for the battle navigators.
- Remember that vulnerable enemy ships can be rammed out of the safe zone, another rewarding activity for snipers.
- Sniping in sinking blockades might not be worth the potential cost. Nothing larger than a war brig should be employed for sniping in a sinking blockade.
- Sniping is significantly more difficult for the attacker of an island, especially because they can only snipe on the ocean side. If the attacking sniper tries to snipe on the port-side, he will find himself trapped, unmanned, on the first row of tiles outside the safe zone, and he has just made himself a sitting duck and lost a ship. (I can think of very few things more humiliating than this).

System shock, or the crucial moments:

Any good strategy can be turned on its head within the first few seconds or minutes of a blockade. Much like a lane-less race, the opening moments will dictate the pecking order for most of the blockade round. Making headway after the initial placement can be difficult. In short, the first team out of the gate will have a significant advantage.

The cruciality of the opening moments of the blockade are difficult to summarize, but because all the ships in a well-organized force will be concentrated into the first few rows of the board, the situation can be seemingly based more on sheer randomness than on the skill of the navigators. If both sides are equally fast in deporting, then essentially the entire armies of both teams will meet with limited mobility (being at one and possibly two extremes of the board) in a tight space. The more ships involved, the more likely it is that a sinking will occur with little to no chance of evasion.

States of the blockade team:

A blockade team has three possible states, or positions: the attack, the defense, and the melee, all detailed below. Most blockades begin with a *melee* as ships are deported and chaotically leave "the gate" in a race for the flags. The first team to reach the flags will take a defensive *incline* position or more frequently, a *defensive melee* one, and sometimes see the continuation of the regular *melee* into the center of the board if both teams are equally fast in reaching the flags.

The attack:

The attack (or *offense*) consists of two stages: the *decline* and the *offensive melee* (sometimes called "fighting the Deathstar"); the eventual goal is to obtain the *incline* stage (part of the *defense*). One team usually begins by playing the attack because they were too slow in deporting their ships at the beginning of the round, or because they have a significantly smaller force.

The most important part of the attack is to move as quickly as possible from the *decline* into the *offensive melee*. Immediately the navigators should maneuver through any front-line defenses to challenge the flags. If they dilly-dally in combat away from the flags, then they will continue to accumulate a huge and unbeatable deficit. Once an *offensive melee* has been launched, the board is anyone's to take depending on who performs the more expert navigation and thus wins the melee, reversing the roles of each team. More information on how to play the attack can be found in the section on flag control.

> *He who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary. Those skilled in war bring the enemy to the field of battle and are not brought there by him.*
>
> — Sun Tzu

The defense:

The defense consists of two stages: the *incline*, and the *defensive melee*, which can lead to *defeat* or a *turn-around*, i.e. your team has been up-seated and is now forced into being the attackers.

The defense is the easiest position to play, though it never ceases to amaze me just how many navigators are capable of bungling it up. Achieving the *incline* is the most coveted opportunity in the game and often the only way of winning a blockade (games can be won without anyone ever entering an *incline*, if a *true melee* is reached). If one force is larger than the other, then they almost always have the choice to automatically take the position of defense. This is not an opportunity they should overlook; in fact, it is suicidal to not take the defensive position whenever possible. More information on how to play defense can be found in the section on flag control.

The melee:

There are few true melees in the game. Usually one side comes into the battle with an advantage over the other. Unless both sides are incredibly disorganized, lacking in skill, or manage to swamp the center of the board all at once (almost only ever possible during the first few minutes of the round), the melee will always be *offensive* or *defensive*. The only difference between the two is the method of retreat and required style of navigation: participants of an offensive melee are more likely to spread to the outer reaches of the

board while defenders will contract inward. Participants of an *offensive melee* who can break the lines of the defenders and control the center of the board have reversed the roles and made the first step towards their *incline*.

When a true melee has been reached, it will often continue for the remainder of the round; once a stalemate has been reached, it's hard for one side to get the upper hand. Usually these rounds will end with a difference of just 1-15 points. The victorious team is always the one with the best knowledge of flag control.

Controlling flags:

The most important thing to remember about flags is that **neutralizing them is *just* as beneficial as controlling them**. Any navigator who doesn't understand this, or exhibits a behavior contrary to this fact should be barred from navigating again until they've repeatedly read and understood this guide, not to mention beaten with sticks. I can't emphasize this principle enough because unfortunately, far too few navigators understand it, and yet it is the single most important tool for winning a blockade.

The best way to realize the importance of neutralizing flags is to label the movement of your team's points accordingly: an *incline* if you are consistently gaining more points than your opponent, a *hold* if you are gaining an equal amount of points, or a *decline* if your opponent is gaining more.

> *If the enemy lays siege to our fortresses we must relieve them in time, to do this we must therefore bring about the decision by positive action.*
>
> — Clausewitz

The *decline* can be thought of as a deficit, or a leak in your ship. The sooner you stop it, the better you're off, because the benefits of stopping a loss are the same as those of a gain. This is why it's important for the attacking team to move immediately onto the flags and not waste time fighting enemy ships on the front-lines. Once the flags are neutralized, always plan your moves with your influence and the flags in mind. The flags can move outside of your influence during the turn, but you or your allies should always end up landing on them in the end, so that every flag is perpetually covered and either neutralized or in your control. Whether you are challenging another vessel's flags or it's challenging yours is unimportant – who was there first has no bearing on who should be the first to give ground or where to retreat. No matter what, **do not chase an enemy vessel that retreats away from the flags**.

Once the flags are secured (either because the challenger has sunk or retreated), stay on them and don't move unless an ally is there to take your place. Remember that when a new enemy comes to challenge you, he is not challenging you on your home turf, and that the flags are being contended and it is again your mission to neutralize them, keeping them within your influence as you attempt to sink the challenger. In such a one-on-one confrontation, neither you nor your opponent has any special defender's advantage for having been the first on the flags. This is important because in considering the blockade as a whole, the team that first reached the flags does have a significant advantage, but both sides on battles between individual or small teams of ships are on equal footing once battle has been met: there is only a true melee. The purpose of knowing this is so that one

will never get cocky or haughty when the flags they are sitting on attracts the attentions of a new challenger; flags are only "yours" as long as they're under your sole control—when challenged, they are anybody's.

When you have achieved the *incline*, then you have opened a doorway to victory. It is the enemy's prerogative, *his* initiative, to route you, not the other way around, so don't do his job for him by moving away from the flags or chasing him across the board—such actions are inexcusable. The only possibly appropriate time to move away from the flags is to assist an ally, but this is a critical and difficult decision to make. Allies should only be helped at the expense of flag control if they themselves are in a central part of the board and the last thing standing between your opponent and a large cluster of flags. For example, if your allied frigate is challenging an enemy's frigate atop a cluster of flags worth nine points, and you're in a brig guarding four, it is worthwhile to assist your ally if he is losing his fight. If he were to lose, then you would (if those were the only flags on the board) be suffering a decline of five points every turn (because of his nine points compared to your four), which may or may not be enough to cost your team the round.

I will further expound on the uses for the two main ships of the blockade, war frigates and war brigs, in relation to flags. It is important to note that the war frigate's main purpose, as stated earlier, is to make and take damage. It has a larger influence than the war brig, but not one so large that it's worth sacrificing its immense offensive capabilities for use as a points-sponge. Even when a large flag cluster might only be completely covered by a frigate, it is better to leave a single defensive brig in its place with only partial coverage (or two brigs, or one brig and a cutter for full coverage) than to leave the frigate, which should always be challenging and neutralizing flags. If there are no challengers to be had at a particular flag cluster, then the frigate should move to another one where there are, letting a war brig serve the job of covering the uncontested flags. If the defensive brig comes under attack, then it is appropriate for the frigate to return and assist him (especially if the challenger is significantly larger than the defender – two or more brigs, or a frigate).

The navigator of a war brig should be hesitant to aggressively engage a frigate. In most cases, he should only do so when supporting an allied frigate. Though there are exceptional cases where a single war brig is capable of beating the larger ship, such instances are incredibly rare and should not be expected to occur, but instead be accepted as miraculous windfalls when they do. Fortunately, the war brig is still capable at neutralizing a war frigate's flags and should not hesitate to do so if there are no other challengers.

In a recent blockade, I watched as one navigator broke every rule of the game. With a twenty point deficit, and the board's largest flag cluster being held by an enemy frigate, the pilot of the opposing team's frigate was just a few moves away from neutralizing the flags when he became distracted by a nearby cutter. Instead of attacking the frigate, he

turned to engage the cutter and continued chasing it across the board further and further away from the flags, swearing he'd be back eventually to challenge the frigate and win the round until it was too late. Within a few turns, the twenty point deficit had climbed to eighty, a hundred, and beyond. He was too far away to return in time and the round was lost. I'm still cleaning the vomit out of my carpet.

General blockade strategy for different scenarios involving disproportionate forces:

Use the following ship deployments and strategies depending on the scenario involving disproportionate forces. Unlike meetings between equal forces, which are organic and rely heavily on the skill of the navigators, meetings between disproportionate forces benefit greatly from general strategies, or (*game*)*plays*, which are no different from the X's, O's, and zagging arrows scratched onto the chalkboard of a football locker room.

The *play* is usually based on the ships of each team, and only partly based on the players navigating them. Because your mode of strategy is based on the enemy's forces as well as yours, a play can not be established until the CIA has done his job.

If your opponent fields war brigs and no frigates and you outnumber him, then always field at least one war frigate (for example, four brigs vs. three brigs and a frigate). Keep the frigate near the front of the board while your brigs rack up the points. If your opponent fields four or five war brigs, then bring up one or two of your own to assist the war frigate. Any force larger than this is too difficult to contain in this manner, though one of this size and nature is extremely rare (it's especially unlikely for one side to field five war brigs but no war frigates).

In this situation, I have sometimes witnessed an abomination of logic that compelled strategists to place their frigate(s) on flags while the brigs duked it out on the front lines. Perhaps the belief is that with its greater influence, the frigate is better suited for the job of getting points, but the truth is it isn't. A frigate is a potent weapon that deserves — *requires* — constant use *in battle*. So long as it is assisted by a war brig or two in the event of being overrun, there is little chance in this scenario that any enemy brig is going to move more than a few tiles into the board, much less threaten its flags. If a brig does manage to scrape through, it should be heavily peppered with enough large shot to be easily dispatched by the awaiting defenders. In the hands of expert navigators, this strategy can't be beaten.

If you are up against this strategy, then the only option is to overwhelm the frigate, or spread out over the board and sneak a few brigs through. In the hands of a lesser player, a frigate should fall to expert navigating from three our four brigs (or two if the frigate's navigator is extraordinarily bad, but that is unlikely). If two brigs distract the frigate while a few others spread out and sneak by, then they will be outnumbered by the defenders and can only win through superior navigation.

Note that the above is probably the most or second most common scenario we have seen in Midnight that involved disproportionate forces, so it is especially useful. The other most common follows.

> *When you plunder the country side, divide your forces. When you conquer territory, divide the profits.*
>
> — Sun Tzu

If both forces are large, but yours is larger, and your opponent fields a mix of brigs and frigates, then always try to field at least one frigate more than him. All of your forces should cover the board to control or neutralize as many flags as possible. The frigates should aggressively engage enemy frigates, but brigs should by no means do the same unless supporting an allied frigate. The frigates should rarely if ever come within close contact to each other, much less work cooperatively against the same opponent, except under certain circumstances, such as if your opponent engages in such a tactic first (i.e., he uses his frigates cooperatively against one of your own). If you allow your frigates to cover the board, then your brigs are essentially immune to the enemy's; otherwise they are in equal contention with them and can only win through superior numbers or navigation. The other time your frigates should cooperate is after the one previously engaged with the task of defending your defensive brigs against the enemy's has dispatched the lesser opponents. Your brigs, now able to sit defensively on flags, are free from the threat of attack, allowing the frigate to team up against the larger ship, which can be quickly overwhelmed.

When faced with this strategy, the best method is to concentrate on the enemy's frigates. If you have two of your own, and he three, then the only solution is to try separating them and taking on one or two at a time. Because there are so many brigs involved, it's not hard to neutralize the board. Just remember that the mission at this point for the brigs is simply that: to neutralize and not control flags. In the hands of expert navigators, this is not a difficult task. All it requires is a little unpredictable, or what some might call playful or erratic, maneuvering. As long as the flags are not aggressively attacked, it is easy to weave in and out of the defending ships, neutralizing their flags. In this situation, damage will most likely be slowly but consistently building, so carpentry is important. Gunning is practically useless so if necessary, transfer gunners onto other stations. While the brigs are dancing in and out of peril, the hope is that the frigates will eventually catch an enemy frigate alone and sink it. This is likely to happen if the enemy frigates are overzealous and foolish. After that, the forces are about equal and it could be anyone's game.

Of course, in a battle such as this, it is very important that all navigators understand the best strategy for controlling flags. Knowledge of flag control, combined with expert navigation and a larger or equal blockade force, will guarantee victory.

Putting ships under the command of other ships:

The frigate naturally dictates the movement on the board; smaller ships part in its wake while enemy frigates gravitate towards its call of challenge. It only makes sense that the frigate should have under its direct command a support vessel or two, not just for the sake of defense, but to incorporate a more unified and organized attack. Communications

should be brief and general – "attack from the left," "turn right and fire," "block his escape," "neutralize his flags," etc. If every brig is under a frigate's command, then the frigates can communicate their moves amongst each other as equals while the brigs, which are usually over-cautious or prone to unwittingly interfere (sometimes resulting in heavy friendly fire and sinkings), can lend better and more exacting support.

Innovative ship deployments:

Innovative ship deployments such as the almost exclusive use of smaller vessels have seen occasional use in Midnight, usually by the weaker team of a blockade as an act of desperation. Exceptional cases, such as at the beginning of Midnight's history when blockade strategy was still a subject of discovery and in the process of standardization, these tactics were more easily justified in their ability to surprise and confuse one's opponent and by the need to experiment. These days, though, there is little room for innovation, as almost all avenues have been explored in terms of the various possible ship deployments. The use of grand frigates and merchant vessels is the least trodden of these paths but for good reason, at least in the case of the latter.

On the use of grand frigates:

These are massive ships, but an oddity on the battlefield. Only one or two has ever been employed in a blockade, most notably at Papaya, where it was sunk quite wonderfully by a team of smaller vessels (if I remember correctly, war brigs). A grand frigate can place only two movement tokens per turn, and like war vessels fires two shot from either side. I would estimate that 70 pirates (equivalent to about three war brigs) are an optimal number to field one, based on the number of stations. It has a gigantic influence, but that's often seen as not being worth the trouble of manning one and transporting it across the board. I do believe, however, that the grand frigate will eventually come into its own and become an invaluable defense in large-scale blockades. When supported by smaller vessels (which is to say, any other kind of vessel), it should be able to completely dominate the center of the board, allowing allied war frigates and brigs to maneuver at will without having to take into account such things as their influence and the position of flags. If the grand frigate were given three cannons per move, instead of the usual two, it would be an attractive option.

To repair, or to abandon:

This is a difficult choice, and not one easily made. The navigator will have to use his best judgment in deciding which would be most suitable to his present situation: to avoid battle and repair his ship, or leave the board entirely by sailing to either safe zone (not the port if he is an attacker) to field an undamaged vessel. The suggestions of his teammates are *invaluable* in this situation, because his survival will often depend on their willingness and capability to defend him.

There are other reasons to leave the blockade board, but it is rude to do so after the start of the round without explanation to one's teammates. Always alert them directly after making the decision to retreat; otherwise, not knowing you're trying to escape, they may rely on you for support.

There are reasons to abandon a ship other than heavy damage, such as replenishing one's supply of cannons. But if one is sitting on uncontested flags, a lack of cannons is no reason to return to port without first finding someone to relieve your position.

Some things you just can't sail:

Even those who have achieved the acme of skill will suffer embarrassing defeats if they agree to helm poorly staffed vessels. Professional navigators (or mercenaries) should be wary of harming their reputations in this way. When asked to navigate for one team, always make sure that they understand your needs. If they don't have at least one Ultimate puzzler available for every station of your vessel, then you are better off politely refusing their request.

When you're through:

Thank the pirates aboard your vessel.

— Bifnot was the second monarch of The Jolly Company, a flag that peaked as the seventh largest in the Midnight Ocean, and the first player to ever click the 'Blockade' button. He was the first governor of the Midnight Ocean (of Emperor), and has witnessed nearly every blockade in Midnight's history (except those that occurred concurrently) and has navigated in many of them. He is presently a member of Fandango, which he believes to be a crew dedicated to Spanish dance. He won a permanent familiar in a cutter race. Now retired, Bifnot logs on infrequently just to bug Nemo. He likes cats.

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