



Introduction

Welcome, captain.

The seas before you are no mere waters — they are alive with memory, magic, and wrath. Ships whisper to their masters, monsters rise from the deeps, and the stars themselves bend the tides. In this world, fleets are not commanded by rote orders alone but by the character of their captains, the loyalty of their crews, and the will of the sea itself.

Seas of the Second Age is a tabletop wargame of cinematic naval battles in a mythic world. Each decision you make ripples outward into new stories: a bold charge might rally your men but risk mutiny; a whispered pact may summon leviathans at the cost of your fleet's soul. No two battles unfold the same way, and every victory — or disaster — becomes legend.

What kind of game is this?

At its heart, *Seas of the Second Age* is:

- A **tactical miniatures game** with ships maneuvering across hex-gridded waters.
- A **story-driven wargame** where events, loyalties, and hidden assets matter as much as firepower.
- A game of **bluff and command**, where your intent is declared openly but can be **negated or twisted** by the instincts of your captains.

The Core Promise

If you crave battles where fleets clash under blood-red moons, where loyalty and betrayal weigh as heavily as cannon fire, and where the ocean itself can turn against you — then you are ready to raise your sails and enter the Second Age.

Four key mechanics form the core of the game rules, in turn inspired by Admiral Horatio Nelson, the Monkey King of Chinese folklore, Hannibal of Carthage, and J. R. R. Tolkien:

1. Command by Negation (Nelson)

- **Mechanic:** At the start of each turn, the commander issues broad “standing orders”
- Ships act according to their captain's personality unless directly countermanded.
- In-game, this means movement and attack priorities may shift unexpectedly as events unfold—forcing admirals to respond in real-time.

2. Chaotic Seas & Celestial Navigation (Monkey King)

- **Mechanic:** A “Celestial Event Deck” is drawn each round, representing maddeningly unpredictable supernatural occurrences that shift the seas and circumstances

- Players may attempt to predict events by consulting oracular sea-spirits (requiring dice rolls and offerings).

3. Beast & Artifact Recruitment (Hannibal)

- **Mechanic:** Before battle, players can secretly allocate resources to recruit legendary sea-beasts or craft devastating magical artifacts.
- These assets are hidden until revealed at critical moments, enabling double-bluffs.

4. Living World Loyalty System (Tolkien)

- **Mechanic:** Each captain has a loyalty track:
 - *Orcs*: Motivated by plunder, personal grudges, and displays of brutality.
 - *Elves*: Motivated by beauty, prophecy, and preservation.
 - *Men*: Motivated by gold, honor, and survival.
 - Disregarding a faction's ethos risks mutiny or refusal to act.
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Components

Your copy of *Seas of the Second Age* contains everything you need to begin commanding fleets and weaving legends upon the waters.

Game Map

- **Hex Map Tiles** – Modular watercolor-style hex tiles represent seas, reefs, harbors, fog banks, and more. Arrange them to build a new chart every battle.
- **Nautical Chart Poster (optional)** – A full parchment-style map with an integrated hex grid for sweeping campaigns.

Fleets & Command

- **Ship Standees** – Illustrated stand-up pieces representing the vessels of Men, Elves, and Orcs, as well as legendary sea-monsters. These provide a striking presence on the board while keeping movement clear.
- **Captain Profile Cards** – Each ship is commanded by a captain archetype (Bold, Cautious, Opportunistic, etc.). Their instincts shape how orders are interpreted unless you override them.
- **Order Tokens** – Circular intent markers representing Engage, Defend, Seize, Escort, Screen, and Intercept. These declare your plan, but your captains may interpret them differently.
- **Negation Tokens** – Counters you spend to override a captain's instincts, ensuring precise control when needed.

Magic & Loyalty

- **Living World Loyalty Cards** – Track each crew’s morale and faction loyalty:
 - **Orcs** value plunder, grudges, and brutality.
 - **Elves** value prophecy, beauty, and preservation.
 - **Men** value gold, honor, and survival.Ships that lose loyalty may falter, disobey, or even defect.

Decks of Fate

- **Celestial Event Deck** – When moons shift, stars fall, or gods intervene, the seas themselves change. Draw at the start of each round to see what new wonder or disaster arrives.
- **Hidden Assets Deck** – Secret weapons and beasts you can recruit before battle. From Leviathan ambushes to false colors, these cards enable cunning double-bluffs and devastating surprises.

Markers & Accessories

- **Swarm, Fire, and Wreck Markers** – Used to represent ongoing effects such as Kraken broodlings, sea-fire damage, or scuttled decoys.
 - **Dice** – Standard six-sided dice are used for checks, combat, and event resolutions.
 - **Reference Sheets** – Quick tables summarizing captain profiles, order intents, and combat steps.
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Setup

Before the fleets clash, the seas themselves must be drawn, the stars consulted, and the captains chosen. Follow these steps to ready your game of *Seas of the Second Age*.

1. Prepare the Map

- **Choose a Battleground** – Either lay out the full nautical chart or build a modular sea by arranging hex tiles.
 - **Place Features** – Add reefs, shallows, harbors, fog banks, and whirlpools as dictated by your chosen scenario or agreed setup.
 - **Check Scale** – Standard battles use a 17×22 hex area (or equivalent in tiles), though smaller maps can be used for faster skirmishes.
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2. Select Factions & Fleets

- Each player chooses a faction (Orcs, Elves, or Men).

- Agree on fleet size (typically 3–5 ships per player for a standard game).
 - Place the corresponding **standees** or models for your ships at your starting harbor or map edge.
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3. Assign Captains

- For each ship, draw or choose a **Captain Profile card**.
 - You will place them face up beneath the respective **Living World Loyalty cards** with the text and icon visible so all players can see each captain's archetype.
 - If desired, add extra challenge by assigning captains randomly.
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4. Prepare Loyalty & Morale

- Give each ship its **Living World Loyalty card**, aligned to its faction.
 - Place a marker at 5 on both the Loyalty and Morale tracks (the default starting value).
 - Ships may rise to zealotry or sink to mutiny depending on player choices.
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5. Shuffle the Decks

- **Celestial Event Deck** – Shuffle and place within reach.
 - **Hidden Assets Deck** – Each player secretly draws 2 cards at the start of the battle, keeping them hidden until revealed.
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6. Ready Tokens & Markers

- Place **Order Tokens** (intent markers) near each player.
 - Give each player a starting pool of **Negation Tokens** (typically 2–3, depending on scenario).
 - Keep **damage, fire, and swarm markers** within reach for use during play.
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7. Determine First Player

- Roll a die, flip a coin, or use the scenario instructions.
 - The first player places their initial orders, and the seas come alive.
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Core Mechanics

Every round of *Seas of the Second Age* represents a surge of maneuvers, boarding actions, and the influence of magic upon the seas. The game flows in a structured sequence, but within that structure, chaos thrives.

1. Turn Structure

Each round is divided into the following steps:

1. Celestial Event Phase

- At the start of each round (after Round 2), reveal the top card of the Celestial Event Deck.
- Apply its effect immediately. Events may alter weather, morale, or even the very waters beneath the fleets.

2. Command Phase

- Players declare intent by secretly selecting an **Order Token** for each ship.
- Place the token face down near the ship's Captain Profile card.
- When all players are ready, reveal tokens simultaneously.

3. Activation Phase

- Beginning with the first player, ships activate one at a time in initiative order (determined by scenario or roll).
- When a ship activates, its captain interprets the declared order according to their archetype (see Captain Profiles).
- Players may spend **Negation Tokens** to override the captain and enforce their exact intended order.

4. Resolution Phase

- Movement, combat, and boarding are resolved.
- Loyalty and morale changes are applied if faction ethos is supported or betrayed.
- Ongoing effects (such as fires, swarm markers, or magical quirks) are updated.

5. End of Round

- Check victory conditions.
 - Pass the first player marker clockwise and begin a new round.
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2. Command by Negation

Unlike many wargames, you do not micromanage every ship's every action. Instead, you issue broad **intent orders**, and your captains act according to their personalities.

- **Intent Tokens:** Engage, Defend, Seize, Escort, Screen, and Intercept.
 - **Engage** – Close in on the nearest enemy and attack directly. Bold captains may board, while Cautious captains will fire from range.
 - **Defend** – Hold position or protect a key ship/area, prioritizing survival over aggression. Captains may circle defensively, form a line, or retreat to cover.
 - **Seize** – Move to capture and control an objective (island, harbor, wreck, or treasure). Opportunistic or Mercenary captains may drift toward softer, more rewarding targets.
 - **Escort** – Stay near and shield a designated friendly ship or convoy, absorbing threats meant for them. Captains may alter behavior depending on loyalty or reward.
 - **Screen** – Spread out to block enemy approach or delay their advance, often engaging lightly to distract or divert. Reckless captains may overextend here.
 - **Intercept** – Rush to cut off an enemy's movement, aiming to collide, board, or force a confrontation before they can achieve their goal.
- **Captain Interpretation:** A Bold captain charges recklessly into combat; a Cautious captain hangs back to fire from range.
- **Negation Tokens:** Limited counters that allow you to override a captain's instincts at critical moments. Once spent, they are gone until replenished by scenario rules or events.

This system creates tension: the sea is not a chessboard under your full control, but a living battlefield shaped by imperfect leaders and the will of their crews.

3. Movement & Combat Basics

Movement

- Each ship moves 1 hex per turn unless some game effect or card says otherwise. *Advanced players may track different speed ratings manually if desired and allow greater movement per turn.*
- Movement is in straight lines across hexes but may include one 45° turn per hex moved. *Advanced players may track different size vessels manually if desired and allow greater turns for smaller ships, limiting turns for larger ships.*
- **Obstacles:**
 - **Reefs/Shallows:** Require a Seamanship Check (roll 1d6, succeed on 4+) or the ship takes 1 Hull Damage.
 - **Whirlpools/Fog Banks:** Reduce movement to half speed for the turn.

Combat

- When a ship is in range of an enemy (adjacent or within 2 hexes), it may attack.
- **Combat Roll:** Roll 1d6; 4+ is a hit.
- **Modifiers:**
 - **Range:** Adjacent = +1 to hit; long range (2 hexes) = -1 to hit.
 - **Captain Bonus:** Certain captain profiles grant situational modifiers (e.g., Tactician gains +1 when firing from positional advantage).
- If a hit is scored, the target takes **1 Hull Damage Token**. Some attacks (ramming, magical fire, swarm markers) may inflict multiple tokens at once.

Boarding

- When two ships occupy the same hex, a boarding action may be declared.
- Both players roll 1d6 and add crew **Morale**. Higher result wins the clash.
- Winner may inflict 1 Hull Damage Token, capture cargo, or force the enemy crew to make a Loyalty Check.
- Fanatical or Orc crews may choose to press the attack even after suffering losses.

Hull Damage & Destruction

- Hull damage is tracked with **Hull Damage Tokens** stacked beside the ship's standee.
- With 1 damage token, the ship suffers penalties: -1 to all attack rolls and reduced Speed by 1.
- With 3 damage tokens, the ship sinks immediately. Replace the standee with a **Wreck Marker**.

4. Morale & Loyalty in Play

Each faction's crews are motivated differently:

- Orcs thrive on plunder and brutality.
- Elves fight for prophecy and preservation.
- Men value gold, honor, and survival.

Actions aligning with or defying these values raise or lower loyalty. A crew that loses loyalty may hesitate, disobey, or mutiny — sometimes changing sides mid-battle.

5. The Living World Loyalty System

Each ship carries not only a captain and crew, but a spirit — a will shaped by culture and history.

- **Orcs:** Gain loyalty from plunder and cruelty; lose it if mercy is shown.
- **Elves:** Gain loyalty from acts of preservation and prophecy; lose it if forced to desecrate beauty.
- **Men:** Gain loyalty from profit and honor; lose it when abandoned or forced into hopeless slaughter.

Loyalty & Morale Tracks: Every ship has a dual track recording Loyalty and Morale respectively.

- At 3 or lower, a crew begins questioning orders — Command Checks are required.
- At 0, a ship mutinies, flees, or even changes allegiance.
- Magical quirks may trigger **Will of the Ship** checks, where the vessel itself refuses or alters an order.

This system ensures every decision carries weight — cruelty, cowardice, or dishonor can ripple through a fleet.

6. Hidden Assets cards

Before battle begins, each admiral secretly recruits allies or forges weapons from the shadows.

- **Draw 2 Hidden Asset cards** at setup, keep them secret until revealed.
- Assets include:
 - **Leviathan Ambush** – A colossal beast that can capsize a ship mid-game.
 - **Storm Serpent Pact** – Call lightning down upon enemy sails.
 - **Illusory Fleet** – Phantom ships confuse the enemy until fired upon.
 - **Sea-Fire Catapults** – Flaming pitch that burns even underwater.
 - **Scuttled Decoy Fleet, Kraken Broodlings**, and more.

Assets allow for **double-bluffs and feints**, adding layers of psychological warfare beyond the board.

7. Magical Vessel Quirks

Every ship may bear a supernatural trait tied to its construction, history, or crew.

- **Orcs** – Hull drinks blood before sailing.
- **Elves** – Only speaks in verse with mortals.
- **Men** – Hates undead, defies their commands.

If a quirk is **violated**, a **Will of the Ship check** is made:

- Success: The ship complies, though strained.
 - Failure: The ship seizes control for a turn, acting in line with its ethos.
 - Critical Failure: The ship permanently changes allegiance.
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8. Interaction of Systems

- **Loyalty vs. Command by Negation:** A Bold captain may interpret “Defend” as a charge — but if loyalty is low, the crew may refuse to act.
 - **Assets vs. Events:** A player may wait for a storm event before unleashing a Serpent Pact for devastating synergy.
 - **Quirks vs. Morale:** Ignoring a ship’s magical demands may shatter loyalty even faster than combat losses.
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Scenarios & Victory

No two battles on the seas of the Second Age unfold alike. Use these scenarios to shape your campaigns, or invent your own to weave new legends.

1. Skirmish at Sea

Recommended for learning the game.

- **Setup:** Use a small map (10×10 hexes). Each player controls 2–3 ships.
 - **Objective:** Sink all enemy ships or force their retreat.
 - **Victory:** Last fleet afloat wins.
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2. Harbor Defense

- **Setup:** One side defends a harbor tile, while the attacker begins along the opposite edge of the map.
 - **Objective:**
 - **Defender:** Keep at least one harbor intact for 6 rounds.
 - **Attacker:** Capture or destroy all harbor tiles.
 - **Special Rule:** Harbor tiles may spawn militia ships at round 3 if loyalty is high enough.
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3. Leviathan Hunt

- **Setup:** Place a **Leviathan standee** in the center of the map. It begins neutral.
- **Objective:** Inflict the killing blow on the Leviathan.
- **Twist:** The Leviathan retaliates each round, attacking the closest ship.

- **Victory:** Player who lands the final strike gains glory, but weakened fleets may leave others vulnerable.
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4. Escort the Treasure Fleet

- **Setup:** A convoy of neutral merchant ships must cross the board.
 - **Objective:**
 - **Escort Player:** Safely guide the convoy across.
 - **Raiders:** Capture or sink at least half of the convoy.
 - **Victory:** Determined by convoy survival.
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5. The Prophecy of Tides

Story-driven scenario for 3–5 players.

- **Setup:** Place special tiles marked by prophecy (reefs, ruins, or isles).
 - **Objective:** Control prophetic sites for 2 consecutive rounds.
 - **Twist:** Celestial Events are drawn every round instead of after Round 2.
 - **Victory:** First to hold two sites fulfills the prophecy and wins.
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6. Campaign Mode (Optional)

- Chain scenarios together in a campaign.
 - Ships that survive may carry over loyalty, quirks, and even damage into the next battle.
 - Victories grant access to Hannibal's Assets or extra Negation Tokens.
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Victory Conditions (General)

While each scenario defines its own goals, these conditions may also end a game:

- **Fleet Destruction** – A player with no ships remaining is eliminated.
 - **Mutiny & Betrayal** – If all ships in a fleet defect, the player is eliminated.
 - **Sudden Death** – If a Celestial Event specifies, the game may end immediately (e.g., “Tide of Twin Moons” causing the map to collapse).
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Reference

Turn Summary

1. Celestial Event Phase

- Reveal the top card of the Celestial Event Deck (after Round 2).
- Apply its effects immediately.

2. Command Phase

- Place Order Tokens face down for each ship.
- Reveal simultaneously.

3. Activation Phase

- Activate ships in initiative order.
- Captains interpret orders according to archetypes.
- Players may spend Negation Tokens to override instincts.

4. Resolution Phase

- Resolve movement, combat, boarding, and ongoing effects.
- Adjust Loyalty and Morale as needed.

5. End of Round

- Check scenario victory conditions.
- Pass First Player marker clockwise.

Captain Profile Quick Table

(See Captain Reference Sheet for full detail.)

Profile	Tendency
Bold	Charges aggressively, favors boarding.
Cautious	Hangs back, avoids boarding.
Opportunistic	Strikes only when odds favor; may drift to softer targets.
Fanatical	Pursues orders relentlessly, even to destruction.
Tactician	Maneuvers for positional advantage and traps.

Profile	Tendency
Reckless	Ignores allies, hazards, or consequences.
Mercenary	Acts when reward is offered, otherwise disengages.
Visionary	Follows prophetic or long-term goals over immediate gain.

Checks & Rolls

- **Combat Roll** – Roll 1d6, apply modifiers. Success on 4+.
- **Boarding Roll** – Opposed 1d6 + crew morale. Higher result wins.
- **Command Check** – When Loyalty ≤ 3 , roll 1d6; succeed on 4+ to enforce order.
- **Will of the Ship** – When magical quirks are violated, roll 1d6:
 - 1–2: Ship refuses orders this turn.
 - 3–4: Ship chooses alternate course.
 - 5–6: Ship obeys under strain.
- **Morale Checks**
 - **When to Check Morale**
A **Morale Check** happens when a crew faces shock or stress, such as:
 - Losing a boarding action.
 - Taking multiple Hull Damage in a single attack.
 - When a Celestial Event inflicts terror or despair.
 - **How to Roll**
 - Roll **1d6** and add the ship's current **Morale score** (0–10). Compare against a **Difficulty** (usually 7, but scenarios or events may set higher/lower).
 - **Outcomes**
 - **Success (\geq Difficulty):** The crew holds firm. No further effect.
 - **Failure ($<$ Difficulty):** The ship immediately suffers a **Loyalty drop of 1** and may hesitate or act sub-optimally (e.g., skip attack this turn, drift instead of moving aggressively).
 - **Critical Failure (natural 1):** The crew panics — discard the current Order Token and the ship takes no effective action this round.