

# Lords of the Spanish Main

## What are the main game mechanisms?

If you know the other *Lords* games, there is much that is familiar. In the economics, auctions, capitalization, cooperation with competition, and, of course, comets. But the rules are shorter and simpler than in either *Lords of the Sierra Madre* or *Lords of the Renaissance*.

If you don't know the other games, the basic substructure is that each turn a card is turned up and either it's an event that's applied or it's a good thing which is sold off to the highest bidder. Most good things are not immediately usable though, oh no. They have to be "capitalized" which means that one pays one gold per turn for a few turns and only then are they available and start generating profit or fighting ability or both. So make sure you have funds to last that long.

Atop this substructure, each game has its own set of players and mechanisms. In *Lords of the Sierra Madre* it's about getting gold mines and smelters, connecting them together and taxing them or protecting them from being taxed and ultimately becoming rich enough to run for president. In *Lords of the Renaissance* it's about connecting together trade routes. In this one there are a few different things that can be done:

- Every 10 years the treasure fleet sails to Spain which represents both a great potential profit for its owner and a big target for the rest of the players acting as pirates/privateers.
- Each player can also control merchant ships which earn money by trading as well as pirates to prey on others' merchants.
- Players can also found and raid and/or besiege colonies.

## What are some of the more interesting mechanisms?

- Pirates interdict the treasure fleet by going to the pirate deck and choosing a sea region. This means they are covering this region and no other and nobody else is covering this region. Then if the fleet chooses this region, they can try to interdict.
- Naval combat is conducted by each player employing a square tactical battle card. By its orientation the player chooses a tactic and both reveal at the same time. The intersection of the two on the table that corresponds to the table bearing their respective seamanship levels and control of the weather vane gives the result.
- Land combat is a simple affair, by attrition. Players remove until only the winner remains. It seems likely that most situations will be resolved by negotiation long before that point, however.
- Anything in the game can be negotiated except for soldiers and one's personal card.
- There are wars that tend to come and go. In many ways they are opportunities because players of a nation at war can attack freely, but otherwise they have to suffer the onus of a pirate flag.
- As there were religious wars in the period, each personality is also rated for a religion. One rule in particular shows the designer has a good understanding of history and the way the world works. Most games would write the rule "A Protestant personality cannot become a Cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church." Instead the rule reads "Becoming a cardinal changes the player's religion to Catholic". That is, first someone buys a cardinal office, then

he installs his son in it and finally, tail wagging the dog, the son is a Catholic. Reminds me of some of great Japanese high tech companies which had their humble origins selling air conditioners and the like. The point is that the only constant is change.

- It's interesting too this is one of the few colonial era games I can think of where someone can a non-traditional power. Normally only the Europeans get to be portrayed (sometimes China, cf. *Viceroy*s). But here, in a variant, the escaped slaves of northeastern Brazil can participate and at the same time players learn about a forgotten bit of history.

### **What kind of background notes come with the game?**

There are two pages to describe the nine characters. One and one half pages describe a sample game. Half a page gives the designer's notes. Three pages give extensive footnotes on the history of the game.

### **How are the rules to read?**

They seem easier to grasp than earlier SMG games, but I think they may always be a bit of a challenge, just because of the very nature of the game. In many games, you have specific phases and players must do specific things. For example, let's think of a similar kind of German game, *In the Shadow of the Emperor*. There is an election phase and there are strict steps that must be followed in conducting them. But here, matters are much more wide open. There is a turn and players may perform one or several of a wide variety of activities and there are a wide variety of potential situations. This does not always lend itself to easy explanation.

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