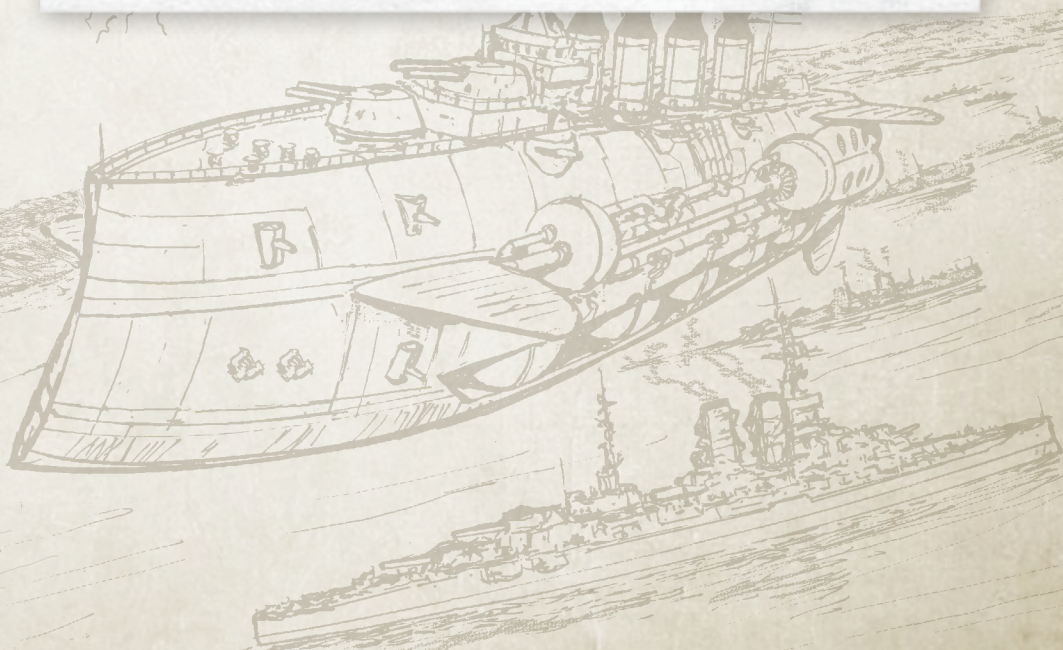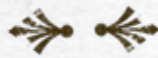# LEVIATHANS™

DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL

AN ALTERNATE HISTORY GAME OF AIR FLEET BATTLES
DEVELOPMENT JOURNAL

The following is a first compilation PDF of development blogs written by Randall N. Bills and posted to www.monstersinthesky.com across roughly six months. It covers the development of the game mechanics as presented in the *Lieutenant's Manual*, providing a detailed, behind-the-scenes view of the creation of a new game and the universe to go with it.

❧ ❧

IT ALL BEGAN WITH AN IMAGE

So begins my developer blogs on *Leviathans*; not gonna promise a schedule as I've far too many plates for that but I will make regular posts

I'm hoping to keep these more reasonable in scope, as opposed to my legendary BattleTech blogs more akin to electronic tomes. But it's been a long road and we're finally getting some serious headway and that means excitment. And when I'm excited I tend to type…and when you type as fast as I do, the words pile up pretty fast.

> While often game designers feel like alchemists, hiding in caves and crafting their masterpiece brew to unleash on the world, it's far from the truth.

I'll be at this for months to come, I imagine, as the game isn't scheduled for release until the end of this year. But I've found over the years that a community, even a potential community, appreciates the behind-the-scenes look such blogs bring. However, there's more to it than that. While often game designers feel like alchemists, hiding in caves and crafting their masterpiece brew to unleash on the world, it's far from the truth. Especially on something so complex as a new game line (as opposed to a one-off game). Authors, artists, fact checkers, playtesters…they all work together to help me bring out a game that'll make Catalyst, and myself, proud. And if there's one thing I've learned over the years, the community can be a very important part of that equation, even during development.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. And in our industry that couldn't be more true.

Two years or so ago (in my sick-encrusted brain–been sick for several days but can't seem to stop working–I can't much remember a few days ago much less two years) Catalyst Game Labs received a game proposal from John Haward. Now Catalyst receives game proposals on a regular basis and we take a look at every one of them. However, John Haward is one of those volunteers that greases the wheels of Catalyst and so we made sure to take the time and look at his proposal.

While the opening paragraphs of the description of the universe were compelling, it was the image he'd attached that sold us on the concept. It's not something we could use as it was done for another game. But it was done so well and had such a great, epic feel to it we knew we'd be doing this game. Now the game mechanics that John proposed we took a hard look at and decided to set aside to completely craft a new game from the ground up. But that image and the Harry Turtledove-style alternate history universe concept we fell in love with and off I went.

Course that was near two years ago and the games gone through several complete iterations since then, not to mention the endless round and round on the art…but those are a host of blogs for the future.

SCOPE AND BEYOND…

First, let me start this blog post by saying that even this early, the amount of comments and excitement I'm seeing is incredibly gratifying. That said, however, while I'm trying to peek in now and then and respond to some specific comments made about these posts, I can't possibly answer every question that comes up. Perhaps if *Leviathans* was the only thing I was working on I might have that time. As it is, I'm feeling pretty good that I'm able to make these blog posts once or twice a week in the midst of my work load.

What does all that mean? Please have patience. You've got some great questions and instead of jumping in every time to immediately answer them, with a few exceptions I'm going to hold off. Instead, through continued blog posts heading forward, not only will you see the development of this project, but you'll hopefully get all of your questions answered. And answered in a way that is far more complete than any quick responses I might make to any given comments. Thanks!

Okay, now to the meat of this post. Right at the beginning I knew there were certain aspects of a "flying game" that I simply had to leave at the door. As with any game design you've got to figure what can you include and what should wait for a rules expansion or advanced rules.

With BattleTech I've had the joy (pain) of working on the advanced rulebooks of late, which has allowed me to delve into "rules expansions" to my heart's content. Especially with Tactical Operations, I liked to joke "You can battle with your 'Mechs, inside an aircraft carrier, while it's sinking, and pick up some battle armor and throw it at the enemy while you're at it." Then again, it's 25 years into BattleTech's life and a very advanced rulebook, so I can get away with that.

For *Leviathans* we're right at the beginning. So while the universe screams for fighter squadrons, aircraft carriers and full 3-dimensional rules, all of those are simply beyond the scope of the level of 'difficulty' we want the game to encompass at the beginning. However, unlike say BattleTech (which Jordan will tell you right out was a one-off game and its success surprised them, so every rules edition beyond that has been a plugin to a system never designed for expansion) I'm designing *Leviathans* from the get-go to be expandable into numerous different areas if it proves a success. Hopefully this will lesson the impact that rules expansions can often have on game balance and play.

Now I can hear the screams now. "No up and down?! But you're flying?!" The problem is that either the inclusion of 3-dimensional rules are either too light so they hardly provide any feeling of that aspect (so why include them?) or they're so complex that it takes the difficulty of the game to a higher level than every other aspect of the game.

Furthermore, for *Leviathans*, it's not a game of dog fighting planes, but instead massive ships with giant guns, so they're more "ponderous" than "agile." So both the feel of the game and the need to ensure that the added complexity doesn't make the game too difficult for a "out of the box, intro game play" aesthetic, made the decision easy.

Does that mean we're ignoring the fact that they're in the air? Of course not. Both fiction and art touch upon that aspect: the first story fiction piece we hope to have on the site in the near future deals directly with that concept, while the art for the ships shows that most of the side guns are tall and thin, with vertical slots that allow for raising and lowering the guns.

At the end of the day, of course, the true test of whether or not excluding the 3-dimensional element directly in the first box set worked or not is when its picked up and played. The game is very fun and enjoyable and still very much conveys a 'flying' feel without going that route. But of course, as noted above, I'm also designing the game from the ground up to have such expansions, so I've copious notes floating around on how to add that rules expansion down the road, in a way that's very cool and will only take a fun game and make it even better.

TO RECORD SHEET OR NOT?

When you look at miniatures games as a whole they fall into several categories (there are other categories, but for my purposes the vast majority fall into one of these three).

1. Record Sheets for everything. BattleTech is likely the best example of this, with an in-depth record sheet for about every unit you can field… last count, with all the advanced rules options, we're pushing 50. Now this provides a great sense of how cool and big and kick-butt units are, as they don't die quickly and you can feel the damage as it occurs. The downside, of course, is that things don't die quickly, so the games can be long and of course it can be incredibly intimidating for a new player to look at a pile of confusing record sheets.

2. Hit points; semi record sheets. Games like Warhammer, Warmachine and so on usually have a very small record sheet with fixed stats for their heroes, while the bulk of the units are simply a single hit point figure, and many of those are a hit and kill situation. Now those style of table-top miniatures games work like that because you're fielding dozens and dozens of figures and as I can attest, if you're fielding that many units and they all have in-depth record sheets, you're looking at months of play time. So while it works to quickly speed up games, I think the downside is that you lose a sense of connection to most of the figures when they pop like candy.

3. Combat dial. Pioneered by Mage Knight, MechWarrior: Dark Age and HeroClix, variations of it exist across numerous games. Basically taking all the stats and moving them to a dial on the miniature's base to speed up game play. While it solved a lot of the issues of "too many RS and they're too complex" and "too few details on the miniature," it had its own issues for game play, such as the dreaded "did you put the miniature back exactly where it was?"

So there's a long, storied history of successful games that fall into those categories and those that spin off variations of those above to make cool, fun games. After looking at all the various options I kept coming back to the record sheet. Especially when you're talking multi-thousand ton vessels, I felt that neither simply "hit points" or a combat dial could really do it justice.

At the same time I didn't just want to do a standard paper record sheet. There's been a lot of cool innovations made in gaming over the last 5 to 10 years, as well as unique and new ways of tracking information and the materials used for such tracking. So after kicking around the concept some we had some jotted notes on some paper and we got in some very early and quick tossing of some dice to see how it was feeling; not sure I'd even call it "game playtesting" as the rules were so loose at that point, but instead it was more about "aesthetic playtesting" if you will.

What resulted was a solid concept that we could and should use a record sheet to provide enough details to really convey the sense of the size of the vessels and the wear and tear damage they take. And so far, through a lot of playtesting that's proven itself out thoroughly.

At the same time we're not going the normal paper route (as mentioned above), but instead we're going down what I hope is a different, cool and fun path. But I'll touch on that down the line.

FIRST GAME DESIGN CONCEPTS

So I knew what type of game we wanted and we had rough concepts down for how to track damage on ships, so now I needed to put fingers to keyboard and generate rules.
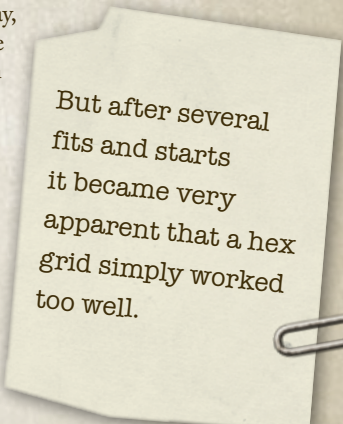
One of the very first decisions to make was whether this would be a true table-top miniatures game (using rulers and such to measure movement) or whether I'd use some type of grid system. After doing a lot of research and looking at a host of games on the market (along with erring on the side of the type of game I was trying to produce) I decided against the gridless system.

So if I'm going with a grid, what type of grid should it be? Plenty of popular games use square grids, but that didn't feel right, especially in a game where all miniatures are going to fill more than one space. The thought of these warships moving forward and then turning 90 degrees instantly for a turn made me laugh out loud.

The answer, of course, was sitting in front of me the whole time…I just tried ignoring it because I didn't want my own many years of development of that game to bleed over into *Leviathans*. But after several fits and starts it became very apparent that a hex grid simply worked too well. What's more, due the rough scale of the miniatures we wanted to produce (1:1200), the BattleTech hex-size simply worked perfectly (i.e. 1.5" corner to corner). [As an added bonus it made playtesting easier as I could just tell people "go get a BT map."]

With the style of board defined it was time to dive into the game design full on. As I've previously mentioned, I wanted to be very sure to keep the game on the simple end of the spectrum. And that meant keeping the number of modifiers to a minimum. Now you can't dump them all, of course, or there's no possibility for tactics in game play, which makes the game not very fun to play, which kills off re-playability. So as my fingers began banging out initial rules for playtesting I had a rough figure of no more than 8 total situational modifiers for the core of the game (enhanced scenario play rules don't count… ;-) . As it turned out, the first draft left me with 7.

> But after several fits and starts it became very apparent that a hex grid simply worked too well.

LEVIATHANS PRIMER DEVELOPMENT

As part of the box set for *Leviathans* we're including the *Leviathans Primer*; i.e. the universe book. It's been an interesting exercise in trying to determine what info should and shouldn't be covered when we only have so many pages.

For example, in addition to the traditional "history/technology" section, where we discuss what makes a *Leviathans* 'go', we also touch on the eight primary empires of the world. Obviously there's a "Minor Powers" section as well, but for our purposes there are eight empires that get more than a paragraph of coverage in the book.

Since this is a military game, ranks are important. So we're pouring over history books to discover the appropriate ranks to use (difficult in some cases, as the Russians changed there's a lot during the decades leading up to our time period) and then tweaking them to reflect the move to air ships and so on.

But I'm about 90% done with developing the book and it's likely to head to edit this week and suddenly I realize that even outside of those tweaks to naval ranks for the move to air ranks, if someone doesn't have a lot of grounding in naval military, then most of the ranks won't have any appropriate context when they're used for notable crews, in the story fiction and so on. So that meant quickly getting short descriptions for what each of the British ranks represent insofar as responsibilities; it's a British text, so it's most appropriate that they'd more fully covering their own ranks. The players, then, can extrapolate appropriately for the other seven empires, but it provides that important context I'm looking for..

Another interesting last minute addition has been the 'movers and shakers' sidebars. There's notable captains and ships for each faction, of course, but I realized that while much of the fiction will focus at that level, if you want the scope of larger geopolitical fiction to have solid relevance to a reader, you need to provide some write-ups for at least one "mover and shaker" in each faction. Getting that generated and folded in literally as I speak; Word document open. And in fact, just finished up an IM with the editor to solidify when I'll turn it over to her and when it'll be back to me…LOVE progress!

CORE MECHANICS

So looking back to the Playtest_1 version of the *Leviathans* rulebook (dated April 10th, 2008), it's fascinating to see how somethings remained relatively unchanged through 5 iterations of the rules (the 5th is in one final playtest, so what will publish will be the 6th), while others have radically changed.

As I began the core work on these rules I really wanted to try and eliminate as many dice rolls as possible, while also providing an "ironsides" aesthetic. By that I mean a banging away at each others armor with no results visible through one or two or perhaps even three hits and then you suddenly find the weak spot and you penetrate and do damage (this would also have the added benefit of not needing to track the wearing away of armor).

So as of the first iteration the entire game was based upon D10s.

For example, the 3" Gun Battery looked like this: 8 hexes (Maximum Range), 0 hexes (Minimum Range), 1D10 (Damage Dice), 1D6 (Location Dice), Fire AT Will or Fire For Support (Types of Attack).

> I kept bashing my head against the wall of how to achieve all my design goals and make the game even more elegant by eliminating a lot of extraneous adding/substracting along the way.

For the modifiers to the attack there were 5 of them. Positive Modifier: Silhouette, Target Damage. Negative Modifiers: Attacker Damage, Target Movement, Armor.

What that meant for game play, based off of my design goals as I mentioned above, is you'd go through the following format to see if you hit/damaged your target.

1. Check Firing Arc for the weapon

2. Check range to the target (i.e. if I'm firing the 3" Gun BAttery mentioned above the target has to be at 8 hexes or less).

3. Select the Damage Dice (1D10 as noted above)

4. Select the Location Dice (D6 as noted above)

5. Roll both dice in what's called a Breach Roll.

6. Find the Slot (a place occupied by weapons/equipment on a ship) corresponding to the result of the Location Dice.

7. Modify the Breach Roll for all 5 applicable modifiers (as noted above) and then compare that result to the Breach Number in the Slot as indicated by the Location Dice (as noted above).

8. If the result is less than the Breach Number nothing happens (the ironsides aesthetic). If the result is equal to or greater than the Breach Number then that Slot is destroyed.

That's pretty much the basics of combat for the first iteration of the rules. Now considering the Breach Numbers on most ships are in the double digits the concept of a single 3" Gun Battery destroying a Slot is almost non-existent unless you really start stacking up some good modifiers. However, you'll note under the Types of Attack that it can Fire For Support, which means that all gun batteries of the same size that are able to target the same ship (i.e. are in range and are in the same firing arc) can bed combined to increase you're chance of hitting/damaging the target.

Then again you could just use a bigger gun, such as a 12" Gun Battery that fires 3D10 Damage Dice and 2D6 Location Dice (meaning it can potentially destroy two Slots in one salvo) or even an Aerial Torpedo that has 4D10 Damage Dice…course those aren't direct fire weapons, so I'll delve into the fun of torpedos at a future date.

Now while the initial playtest was well over a year ago at this point, I do remember that the core of what I was trying to accomplish worked very well. But at the end of the day…I just wasn't happy that there still was so much adding and subtracting and referencing charts. So while I folded in all the playtest comments over the next month or two and sent out the next iteration of the rules I kept bashing my head against the wall of how to achieve all my design goals and make the game even more elegant by eliminating a lot of extraneous adding/substracting along the way.

So I banged and banged on the core concept of how to drop away most of the modifiers in the game (making it easier to pick up and play) but to keep those modifiers within the mechanics of play or the game wouldn't be very fun on re-peat play (all the tactics would be missing).

Now I'm trying to remember where the epiphany came from…and try as I might, I can't. Strange. Regardless, during that process I realized that you could take various dice bell curves and use that to approximate modifiers.

For example, three of the previous modifiers I had were the size of the target (i.e. differences between Destroyer, Light Cruiser, Armored Cruiser and Battleship), whether you were striking the target on the starboard or port sides or on the bow/stern and the target movement.

Additionally, as I started working on that (and thanks to Mike Miller for putting together some truly sick spreadsheets to help me prove that switching to dice bell curves would result in the same situation as my original "D10 + modifiers" mechanic) I further realized you could use such bell curves for weaponry as well.

So under the original core mechanic if I was firing say a 3" Gun Battery at a target I'd roll 2D10, then potentially add several additional modifiers: did the target move, what was the target's silhouette, what was the target's size and so on.

Switching over to a "dice bell curve" mechanic, then, most of the modifiers became woven into a set of dice.

If we take the example of say the British HML *Raven* Destroyer firing a 3 IN Gun Battery at the French *Pontbriand* Light Cruiser (provided it's in the right firing arc and range, of course), I'd use a D6 (for the gun battery),

then if I was hitting the Pontbriand's Stern or Bow I'd roll a D10, while if I was hitting its Port or Starboard Location I'd roll a D12. i.e. I'd roll the D6 together with the D10 or D12 (along with a D6 Slot Dice) as a Breach Roll, totally the D6 and D10 or D12 and comparing that value against the Slot on the target as indicated by the Slot Dice.

Thanks to those sick spread sheets I was confident I was on the right track and sending it out to playtesting only re-inforced that moving most modifiers into dice curves worked perfectly.

Along the way I made another change, this time based on the graphics that would eventually appear on each Ship Card (the "record sheet" used to track each ships' game stats). While the new dice mechanic worked find, trying to come up with a host of dice icons that you could easily read and understand was proving difficult to say the least. It was also during this time I discovered it was actually cheaper to manufactur the same size dice and change the dice facing then it would be to have a full set of polyhedrals.

Those two concepts then merged in my head to color code everything. So all the dice are D12 shaped, but each color coding equals a different polyhedral (i.e. their dice facing reflects the bell curve): Green = D4, Blue = D6, Yellow = D8, Red = D10 and Black = D12. [For the math inclined, yes this means the D8 and D10 are not perfect, standardized D8 and D10 bell curves…but they're close enough to only make a difference say in every 100 games if one side was playing with "*Leviathans* Dice"
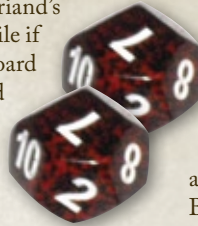
and the other side was using standard D8 and D10 polyhedrals.]

This allowed for a simple set of colored pips on the Ship Cards to then easily showcase which dice should be used under various circumstances. So taking the example above, a player would look at the 3 IN Gun Battery Slot on his HML *Raven* and note the DBlue (grabs a blue dice; i.e. the D6), then looks at the Pontbriand and either grabs a DRed or DBlack (depending upon which Location he's striking), adds in the prerequisite D6 Slot Dice, tosses all the dice in the Breach Roll, adds up the colored dice for a final value and compares that to the Slot Number indicated by the Slot Dice.

Now ultimately I further tweaked and refined this set-up, adding in additional dice combinations for various situations that enhanced tactical play (obviously I'll get into those down the line). Additionally, I didn't dump every modifier…there are still modifiers based on attacker and target damage that refused to be melded into dice…but they're so few that during play it doesn't feel encumbered like other games where a half dozen to a dozen modifiers might be applied.

However, at its core I felt I'd found the key to making *Leviathans* exactly what I wanted it to be. Relatively easy to pick up and play (due to everything being so visually based), yet retaining all the important mechanics that you need for re-playability fun (movement, range and so on are all important and you must play to the strengths of your ships and faction). And that sentiment has only been re-inforced across several large playtests…can't wait to get up a QSR so you all can try it out yourselves and see how I did.

SIMPLE SIMON TOO SIMPLE?

After finalizing the concept of moving everything to the visual-based dice icons mechanic, I found in my own playtests that I'd simplified a little too much. There wasn't enough differentiation in weapon ranges and target movement to encourage tactics. This was supported almost universally through playtest feedback.

Now there was a few other problems that arose that were relatively easy to deal with. For example because the dice are so much smaller on Destroyers (to simulate both their smaller profile, speed and agility), they can be difficult to hit. However, initially I'd given them too high of Breach Numbers, making them far too powerful.

Another silly issue is that the Stern and Bow Breach Numbers were relatively in line with the Port and Starboard values. Not only is that not accurate for wet navy ships, but it also reduced the need for maneuvering tactics.

Both of those were very easy fixes. I dropped all Destroyer Breach Numbers by 2 (regardless of Location), then I dropped ALL ship Bow Breach Numbers by 1 and ALL ship Stern Breach Numbers by 2. So yes, that meant the Sterns on the Destroyers dropped by 4. It felt huge, but once you dove in a played with multiple ship Types together the Destroyers instantly felt right where they should be.

So those type of issues were relatively easy to fix. But weapon ranges and target movement proved a much thornier proposition. I kicked this one around for weeks trying to find the most elegant solution. And at the end of the day, I believe I did. In both instances it may not reflect 'reality' as well as other games, but within the game aesthetic of *Leviathans*, I felt it worked just fine.

First was the weapons. Originally I simply had a chart of weapons: 3", 6", 9", 12". And the chart listed the dice to roll, the type of attacks it could make and the range in hexes. Pretty standard. However, with the dice/color coding option starting to open my eyes to all the possible ways I could continue to make the game easier to play, I decided to move almost all of that directly onto the Ship Card Slot for a given weapon.

As you can see by the two Ship Card excerpts above, in addition to the name, we've now got damage, range, as well as the type of attacks a given weapon can make (the triangle means it can also perform a Bracketing Fire attack in addition to a standard attack). And in doing so I was able to easily split the range into two brackets to help encourage movement. For those Gun Battery Slots above, anything up to six hexes you grab the yellow dice (D8) and add it to the Breach Roll; anything 7 to 12 hexes you grab the blue dice (D6) and add it to the Breach Roll.

Another great side benefit of dumping a chart and moving everything onto the Ship Cards is it allowed us to embrace the real world flavors of the various style and type of weapons fielded by different factions. Originally all ships mounted 5" Gun Batteries...but the French didn't use that type of terminology. So while the 'game mechanics' of those two guns are identical, one feels more French (138mm) and one more English (5 IN), which really helps to mold each factions play identity.

Another great side effect of this move is that it allows us to really play around with the dice and with ranges to simulate the different weapons available. For example, if I'd stuck with a 'chart', it would have 4 different weapons on it and any time I want to add a new weapon I'd need to try and publish a new chart. By moving to the Slots, though, you can play around with different damage/range profiles to increase game tactics with ease. After all, if you've done the homework, the range of weapons available during this time in the real world is astonishing...being able to fold that breadth into the game is cool.

If you look at the three Ship Card excerpts above, you'll see what I mean. The 3 IN and the 75mm Gun Batteries are identical; the 3 IN is off a British Ship Card and the 75mm is off a French Ship Card. You've then got the 65mm Gun Battery, which you'll notice has the same Damage Dice as the 75mm, but shaves off 2 hexes at the top end, meaning it's a gun you need to get close to use...and since the French Pontrbriand Light Cuirser mounts 4 of these on a side...don't let that ship stay too close!

Finally, I used the same concept when dealing with target movement. Again, I was hoping to completely avoid this, but playtesting showed we simply couldn't avoid creating some mechanic to help accentuate the need for tactical movement.

Looking at the Ship Card expert at right, if a ship has moved out of its hex, you grab a black die and add it to the Breach Roll (the dice icon is against a green background, as in 'go' to help you remember) and if the ship didn't move out of its hex you grab two red dice and add them to the Breach Roll (the dice icon is against a red background, as in 'stop' to help you remember).

As a final comment on all of this, there may be some of you wondering if this game is getting too complex and is perhaps something you wouldn't want to play...especially with me harping about how 'simple' I'm trying to keep it, relatively speaking. Ultimately that's going to be your call, obviously. But at its basic level (leaving out the fun *Captain's Manual* plug-in rules I'll talk about down the line) it's exceptionally intuitive, with everything visual based. As mentioned in my previous blog, even with the 'added' complexity of the split ranges and twin target movement dice, it's still a case of simply looking at your Ship Card and your opponents Ship Card, making sure it's in range and in the right firing/damage arcs and then grabbing up the various dice as indicated and tossing them to see if you've cracked your opponent's armor!

As you develop a brand new game with a huge, persistent universe, you always run into the question of 'how much sourcebook fiction material to include?' How much do you need to really immerse someone in the universe and how much is over-kill?

Obviously you run into the same situation with the rules. As I've mentioned previously, I've been trying very hard to keep the game play simply and yet able to stage up easily to various levels of complexity. Part of that is splitting the rules into three rulebooks: *Lieutenant's Manual* (Quick-Start), *Commander's Manual* (Core Rules), *Captain's Manual* (Enhanced Rules). Even under that system, however, I just made the decision to take several very cool rules that were in the *Captain's Manual* and hold them for the faction expansion box sets we've planned for down the line…they were just that one or two steps too far for the first release.

Like the rules, you run into the same situation with your universe book…a give and take as you zero in on just the right amount of info. However, I think at the core you need to cover the following:

1. In a miniatures game with a "star" machine (especially if that machine is tweaked from what we know in the 'real world'), you better showcase your cool machine and ensure that as a person finishes up reading that section 'they' understand how cool your machine is and buy into it (obviously in this case the leviathans).

2. Cover all your major geo-political factions. In an alternate-history setting that means showcasing where the divergence is and what makes a faction interesting. And you better make each faction different and cool, cause setting up a faction to be the "vanilla one" or the "one that kicks kicked" will haunt you for a life-time.

3. Personalities. You need to give a face to the various factions. In this case you need uber-characters (the movers-and-shakers for the large-scale political arenas). The British Empire isn't simply a monolithic geo-political entity that straddles the Earth as its most powerful nation. Instead it's composed by various people with their own agendas, such as First Sea Lord Fisher that fought against the entrenched British wet-navy traditions to help forge one of the world's best air-fleets…and made a bevy of enemies along the way.

In addition to such towering figures you also need in-the-trench characters; the captains of ships and so on. Such as Tai-sa Kusunagi Sado, who was present at the Japanese fleet's defeat at Tsushima and in place of committing seppuku remained in service, despite shame, and now commands the *Kuroraikou*-class *Kuroitsuki* (*Black Moon*)…an example of the rebirth of the Japanese Imperial Navy.

Finally, because the leviathans are also the stars of the show, clothe those stars in their own personalities. You don't want them simply reading about a French Cruiser. You want them reading about the *Dunquerque*, which after a run in with a German battleship in 1907 sports "the scar" that tracks from her deck to her electroid tanks. A badge of honor her crew refuse to allow to be fixed.

4. This is a game about conflict. Provide some hot spots around the world of where the various empires are starting to but-heads. You can then, in the rules, explain how players can take that info and wed it to a scenario to move it far beyond a simple game of flying ships fighting over a patch of sky. Instead, your scenario for the evening is a desperate scramble between a British fleet lead by the HML *Leviathan* and French fleet lead by the *Jean Bart* over the Suez Canal…and win or lose the desperate battle might just ignite into a full-fledged war. When the "*Leviathans*' world" stakes are melded to a game, a scenario is never just a scenario.

5. Make sure the very words you use accentuate the flavor of your universe. Now obviously you don't want to go wild. If you threw in every colloquialism (both for the time period and country involved) it almost might be unreadable. But you sprinkle in just enough and it can make all the difference. And you also cheat where you can. For example, we're using British spelling throughout the sourcebook… doesn't do much for those in England that will hopefully pick this up, but for the American audience it's a subtle trick that can pay big dividends in letting people feel the wind in their hair and smell the black powder and burning coal on the wind as they read through the book.

6. Never forget the power of art. As with all the fantastic full-color artwork, I've tapped Doug Chaffee to do all the black and white artwork for the interior…some wonderful scenes that really capture the flavor of this universe.

Now there's a lot more subtle things that go into this…not to mention I keep thinking there's one or two things I want to try and slide in and this is after the books already been edited and is on the verge of heading to layout…but that's how it works. Never satisfied, always pushing and always hoping the end product is as cool as you see it in your head.

'OH YEA!'

I'm firmly in the game design concept camp that any game like *Leviathans* needs to have a "yea!" moment. Or to provide a more visceral example, it needs to have a moment like the kid on the bike at the end of *The Incredibles*: "That was totally wicked!" A moment in the game where you get a chance through a lucky die roll to suddenly change the tables and that forces players to cheer or groan outloud. Obviously it can't be too easy or it would happen too often, not only upsetting the balance of game play but also making the moment mundane through too much repetition.

For *Leviathans* this moment is the Breaking The Keel Roll. Once you make the Breach Roll and determine the Breach Roll result and are ready to compare that to the Breach Number in a slot as indicated by the Slot Dice, if you hit a slot that was previously destroyed (even in the same turn) you've a chance for doing additional damage.

Now two rules iterations ago this would immediately spark a Breaking The Keel Roll. You'd grab 2DRed (2D10) and roll. Then you'd add a +1 modifier for every destroyed slot anywhere on the target ship. You'd then add an additional +1 modifier for any destroyed slots in the location being hit (it's taking the force of the blow, so destroyed slots apply a double modifier). You add all those modifiers to the 2DRed result and if that number equal or exceeds the Structural Integrity on the target ship, the keel has been broken and the ship tears apart and cascades down in a fiery death across the landscape below.

However, while that "That was totally

wicked!" moment worked perfectly for the feel and style of *Leviathans* (and for the game balance) we actually found there was a problem. I played in several games where I was hitting a location with only a single slot destroyed (say Slot 3) and due to lucky die rolls I dropped almost half a dozen shots all into Slot 3 and due to the SI involved either the Breaking the Keel Roll was impossible, or nearly so. For example a Battleship has an SI of 30...that means you have a lot of slots to destroy before there's even a chance the keel will break (appropriate for the size and importance of the Battleship...but not very fun for the player).

Yet while it was appropriate, it still could lead to situations when far too many rolls were ineffective. Now as I mentioned many months ago, the aesthetic of *Leviathans* is an "ironsides" type of feel, where you "bang away" for a few shots without any effect but then suddenly find the weak spot in the armor and blow through to destroy something. However, even with that aesthetic we were getting too many of those.

Strangely enough, it was on the 12 hour drive a few months back for a family reunion that I struck upon the solution; with the family mostly asleep at one point and the music blaring, the hind brain to gnaws on problems endlessly and you discard a dozen concepts before the right one finally pops up.

So going back to the top, you make a Breach Roll and if the Slot Dice indicates a previously destroyed slot, then there's a chance for further damage. However, now what you do is keep all the D12s the same but re-roll the Slot Dice. If

the new result indicates an un-destroyed slot, compare the already rolled Breach Roll result against the new indicated Breach Number; if it equals or exceeds it, that new slot is destroyed (i.e. the shell tumbled around behind the armor of that location, crashing into something new and destroying it).

If the new result of the re-rolled Slot Dice indicated another previously destroyed slot again, THEN you make the Breaking The Keel roll as described above (i.e. the shot didn't tumble around but drove deeper into the bowels of the ship).

This solution worked out very well. Players didn't need to try and keep track of anything (something I've managed to almost completely avoid), Breach Rolls significantly decreased in the number of ineffective rolls that occurred once a location started to take damage, and of course we got to keep the "That was totally wicked!" moment.

And that, by the way, covers almost every aspect of the *Lieutenant's Manual: The Quick-Start Rules*. Once we release it and you start reading and getting ready to play your own games, you'll have the behind-the-scenes of the "why" behind almost the entire booklet.

As a final aside, I happen to be looking at the site over-all to see what additional updates need to occur and I realized that Doug Chaffee did not have his biography on the page. Considering it's almost all his stunning visuals that are bringing this universe to life (not to mention his stellar career and skills set he brings to our table), I've rectified that immediately.
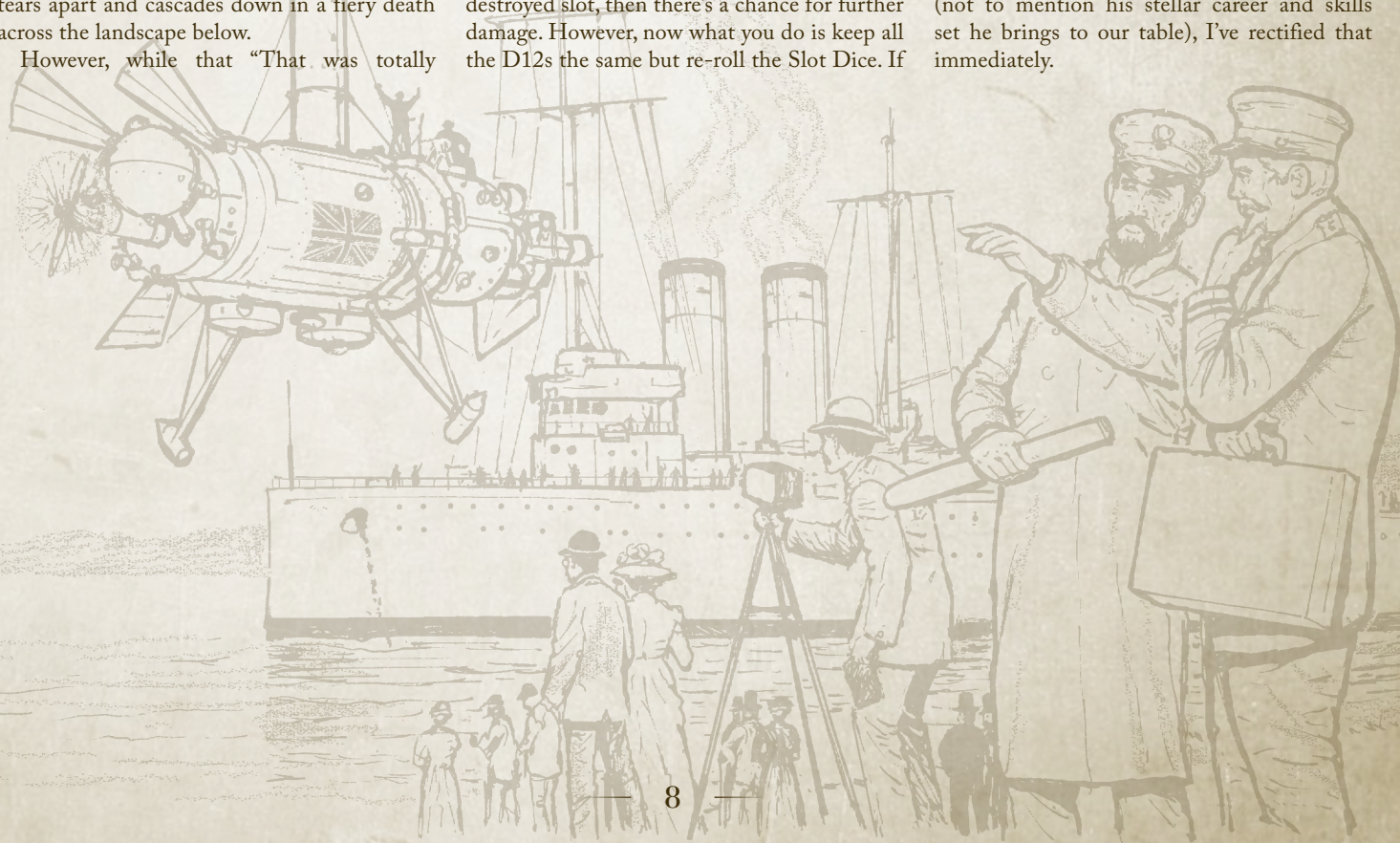
Leviathans is a steampunk game that simulates combat between warships that have taken to the air in an alternate history 1910. The king leviathans, battleships, are the largest vessels. Maneuvering in support are light cruisers, destroyers and other vessels. Will you captain your fleet for king and country, expanding your nation's power and becoming legend? Or will you fall from the sky, forgotten?

You determine the outcome!

The *Leviathans Core Box Set* will include the following:

- 3 rulebooks to ease players from the quick-start rules all the way to enhanced play for endless fun.
- 8 high-quality plastic miniatures representing ships from the British and French fleets.
- 12 Ship Cards that expand a player's fleet, including a battleship, two light cruisers and three destroyers.
- 12 full-color Recognition Cards that correspond to each Ship Card, including the ship's service history on the back.
- *Leviathans Primer* that details the alternate history of *Leviathans*, the technology behind the great ships, the eight major air powers of 1910, along with minor powers, and the growing hot spots of conflict around the world.
- 2 novellas throwing you directly into the action of the universe.
- Templates to aide game play.
- 2 18" x 22" board-game quality maps, printed on both sides.
- 12 dice

Until then, however, the *Lieutenant's Manual* is now available!

The *Leviathans' Lieutenant's Manual* is a 32-page PDF offering a complete introduction to the new, innovative *Leviathans'* game system, including playing maps, ready-to-cut-out-and-use Ship Cards and counters. All a player needs to bring to the table are a few sets of polyhedral gaming dice (D4, D6, D8, D10 and D12s) and

in minutes they'll be scouring the skies at the helm of several thousand tons of war-forged metal looking for the tail-tale sign of enemy smoke on the horizon.

Lieutenant's Manual: Quick-Start Rules PDF on Catalyst http://www.battlecorps.com/catalog/index.php?cPath=219

In August 2009 Catalyst Game Labs pushed the boundaries of publishing as the first to simultaneously release a major role-playing game publication—*Eclipse Phase*—under Creative Commons and through the traditional distributions network.

Catalyst continues to push the boundaries of publishing as the first major publisher to release a miniatures game under Creative Commons with the first roll out of *Leviathans'* books in the *Lieutenant's Manual*. Additional PDF releases will occur in the coming weeks

and months leading up the release of the box set game next spring.

While *Leviathans'* is steampunk in flavor, no single definition covers the genre anymore; instead, it is a collage of concepts and ideas, even if the core remains the same. This type of "mix it and make it yours" mentality fits flawlessly with Creative Commons, allowing anyone that loves steampunk to take *Leviathans* and make it theirs in what ever way they desire.

If you receive this PDF from a friend who shared it in accordance with the Creative Commons license, and you like it, please support the cause by buying the PDF. This is still an experiment and we hope to make it work. If it does, the success of *Leviathans*—along with the growing success of *Eclipse Phase*—may very well affect the way all game companies go about publishing games in the future. So if you like this direction, we need your support!