

GENERAL

These rules aim to present gamers with a touch of the uncertainty, risk, and/or fear associated with sitting at the controls of a fragile, flammable collection of sticks and cloth a mile or more above the trenches while someone in a similar contraption tries to put bullet holes in you. This game has a mood-based objective that tries to put players in the heads of their warrior alter-egos, concerned with and deciding *what* to do, rather than in the bodies concerned with and deciding *how* to do it.

Instead of choosing which specific move / maneuver to use to position one's aircraft model on the tabletop (as is common in most aircombat games), players in this game choose amongst tactical objectives (such as "attack that guy" or "be over there") and then decide on the risk level undertaken to achieve that goal. The success of an effort (attack, movement, observation, etc...) is determined in a manner like most/all RPGs, i.e.: by dice rolls that are influenced by pilot / aircraft quality and the level of risk chosen. It is on the same gaming level as other games (i.e.: One aircraft = One unit) but differs in the questions / decisions presented to players.

In addition to the difference in decisions made, the level of control held by players regarding the positioning of their models (and the degree of detail of the action displayed on the tabletop) is very different from -and significantly less than- that found in the dominant, traditional, flight-sim games common to the genre in which a player's chief (if not only) concern / input involves the movement and positioning of the aircraft model on the playing surface.

The point-of-view of this game is similar to that of many / most hand-to-hand skirmish games: Players control the general movement and actions of their character-warriors, but once in the "heat of battle" of combat their concern (and control / input) lies not in the specific details of each cut and thrust but instead with the overall tactical intent that I believe occupies the mind of the warrior being represented on the tabletop much more than the technical motions and actions of hand-to-hand combat —or, in the case of aerial combat: the movement and positioning (i.e.: flying) of the aircraft. I believe that pilots don't think much about flying (I didn't) —any more so than martial artists think much about hand / arm positioning or footwork (I didn't). I therefore believe that players shouldn't have to think much about flying either.

I recognize the oddity of this premise (which is, in a sense: Flying -ie: the manipulation of an aircraft's controls to achieve a desired position- isn't a required facet of gaming aircombat) and have received quite a few doses of vitriol from aircombat devotees who bristle at the thought that they let go of the control stick. I only ask that a deep breath be taken, the premise accepted that the training and experience of the little fellow in the model (not the player) can handle the nuts and bolts of flying the aircraft, and that the question be asked: What are the essential decisions made by a pilot in a dogfight?

I don't think they're anything like those asked of players to make in moving a model in most games, the answers to which are things like "I'll do a wingover" or "Maneuver 27 is the thing to do" — which relate to the specific movement and positioning of the aircraft model. I think they're more along the lines of "I want to shoot at that guy" or "I may break the plane but I'm going to pull HARD!" As stated earlier: decisions on *what* to do, not *how* to do it —the details are left to the model's pilot (and the player's imagination). The issue concerning the progress of the game is answering tactical-level questions such as: Can I shoot? (-or be shot at)...if so, how good a shot is it? or: What's my position —good? ...bad? ...dangerous? That's all that really matters. The rest is just window-dressing -fun to imagine and great to flesh out the story (I'm all for both), but not something that is necessary, IMO, to game the genre.

MOVEMENT

"Always in motion is the tabletop". In keeping with the idea that the game aims to be as far from 'Aerial Chess' as can be, both the placement and movement of the models on the tabletop contain a fair amount of approximation / randomization. There is a purposeful 'Fog of Movement' built into the game. The goal is to create in players a sense of uncertainty in an arena where everything – themselves, their allies and opponents, and even the terrain itself- is constantly moving.

To this end, there is no representation made on the tabletop of an aircraft's specific position at a particular point in time. While general movement on the table is hex-based and is handled as with similar miniatures games (with the addition of a randomization factor), the hexes used represent large, amorphous areas (approximately 1000' across and 500' high –meant to be interpreted as combat / engagement range) within which any number of aircraft can exist.

The larger hexes make the position / display of the models on the table more abstract than in other games – the only things that can be said of any two models are whether they are in effective combat range of each other, or a rough idea of their separation. Because the movement allowance between hexes is randomized, and some models have no specific facing or pitch and can be moved randomly to an adjacent hex during the course of a move, players cannot tell by surveying the tabletop exactly where anything is or how long it will take to move a particular distance – this is intentional.

Models will not move on the table as predictable chess pieces. When one considers the quality of the machines of the time being handled by fallible (though skilled) men, such precision-controlled movement seems unlikely, if not outright impossible. Total chaos and unpredictability, however, is not the objective of the concept. The odds for the success of many/most moves are very good (or, in the case of simple turns and such: guaranteed). But the gremlins are always out there, and maneuver difficulty (e.g.: tight turns or aerobatics), poor pilot skill (either initial or modified by wounds), and/or aircraft quality (as with pilot skill: either initial or the result of damage) can combine to lessen the odds of success –which also increases the risks / dangers involved in failure- making it harder for a player to calmly plot future moves with a great deal of certainty.

The intent of this is to communicate to players a particular mood of a WW1 dogfight stemming from the unreliability of the machines involved and the inability of the pilots to control these aircraft (and themselves) in a predictable, calculated fashion. Risk and uncertainty yielding peril and opportunity: that is the mood that these rules attempt to create for players. Whether that can be the source of enjoyment / fun in the play of a game depends entirely on personal taste / preference.

COMBAT

Firing and damage is handled as in most other games. Dice are rolled (modified by both pilot skill and aircraft quality / status) to determine the number of hits, critical hits (affecting vital parts of the target), and possible jamming. An oddity of the rules is that a target may suffer an infinite number of hits: Barring a catastrophic critical hit, any number of rifle-caliber holes can be accumulated, and an aircraft will still be in the game —albeit restricted in maneuver. Sure kills are hard to come by and require persistence (most likely in the face of other enemy aircraft) or a lucky shot.

Specific (and singular) targeting is a key part of combat. A pilot must have a valid target spotted / logged in order to fire and may only fire on that particular target. In a crowded sky this can leave one vulnerable to other enemies and makes having a mate (wingman) around to cover your back essential.

The main difference in how combat is treated relates to the physical positioning of the models on the tabletop during the course of play. Firing opportunities are indicated not by model position (which, since specific movements are not shown, is not representative of an aircraft's place in the sky), but are instead represented by an abstract, numerical rating (see 'Combat Value' in glossary) that shows which of any two aircraft hold the upper hand as far as position goes.

Players wishing to shoot at an enemy must —instead of choosing and executing movements to point their model at the intended target model—succeed in skill rolls representing efforts to maneuver / move into a position that will gain them a numerical advantage over their opponent. The amount of gain in position obtained in any turn is determined by the size of risk taken (from the pool of available options) and the success of the dice roll.

I readily concede that rolling dice and tracking numbers is not nearly as visually dramatic as placing one's model on the tail of another after completing a tricky High Yo-Yo maneuver...but I feel that relying on imagination to fill in that gap is not only possible but can be a part of a successful / satisfying game (as is demonstrated regularly in other 1:1 gaming systems).