

My House rules

The ideas presented here are based on extensive gameplay experience. They align with the spirit of the original design, avoiding any outlandish house rules. These suggestions can be seamlessly integrated, in whole or in parts. The house rules are organized into three tiers with tier one being the most important.

First tier house rules

1- New strategic charts have been introduced: one for bombing raids and another for sea raiders. These charts exhibit a smoother, more incremental progression, a design made possible by segregating Air into its own strategic chart. The air chart has been expanded, making division by two no longer necessary. The two charts differ in nature; the sea chart focuses on inflicting economic damage, while the air chart is geared more towards air destruction. These charts are located in a separate document you can find in the files section at BGG.

2- French and British are allowed to share the Atlantic Sea zones, which is an exception to the national stacking rules outlined on page 4. This rule ensures that the presence of a single French LS in the central Atlantic does not block the UK from deploying ships there. It has come to my attention that Germany can easily position 2 or more U-boats in that area as soon as France capitulates, typically in Spring 1940. Upon France's defeat, Germany assumes complete control of the sea zone, as the Gibraltar disk is insufficient to counteract a 2 to 1 ratio. Consequently, at the start of the UK's turn, they suffer a loss of 20PP due to the severance of the Middle East and Gibraltar. This significant economic impact likely wasn't an intended part of the game's design. It seems improbable that the designer expected the French LS to be perpetually moved out of the way. It raises the question: why must the French consistently leave the Atlantic to address this issue strategically? Historically, the two nations did share the Atlantic. There appear to be only two viable solutions: either consistently strategize by relocating France's LS to the Mediterranean or amend the stacking rules to rectify this oversight. I prefer to change the rule.

3- The USA possesses an inherent Strategic Power of 4. These can never be reduced. These SPs are not factored into the faction score for determining victory in order to avoid disrupting that calculation. The US may utilize Britain's unused SPs if necessary. Conversely, Britain cannot use the US's surplus SPs. For instance, if Britain expends 3 of its 5 SPs, the US can use the remaining 2 to augment their total to 6. The rationale for this unique provision for the USA is due to the shared SPs with Britain, which could nearly exclude the US from the war if Britain loses its Middle Eastern SPs. While the economic repercussions for the UK are reasonable, the game's mechanics link America's capacity to build and strategically move to the UK's dominion over the Middle East, leading to a predicament not observed in other games. Envision the UK reduced to 2 SPs after the Axis conquers the Middle East. How can America construct anything if the UK has utilized those points? Or how can the US transport even a single unit across the Atlantic if Britain has already made strategic movements? This problem becomes apparent only after the Middle East is lost, effectively sidelining the US when Britain's SPs plummet. The US could have

40 Production Points and be unable to act due to a lack of SPs. This outcome is peculiar for the US, as the Middle East was not as critical to them historically. The US had a surplus of oil during this era, surpassing the rest of the world combined. The Western Allies were not short on fuel. Hence, America would not have ceased sending forces to the European front if Britain lost the Middle East. The SP system in Black Swan functions adequately until it doesn't, leading to a runaway leader effect where Germany's income soars, the UK's plummets, and America is paralyzed due to Britain's low SP's. The solution is either to never lose control of the Middle East at any cost, or to decouple America's building and moving capabilities from those of the UK. My house rule ensures that America remains operational without altering the victory scoring method. Although the designer strived for simplicity and to avoid US-specific rules, in my opinion, this particular case necessitates a fixed base SP value for America. I consider this house rule to be essential.

Appendix B: Historical Daily Production (barrels), sorted by mean production (from [1])

	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945	mean
US	3,327,000	3,466,000	3,697,000	3,842,000	3,799,000	4,125,000	4,584,000	4,695,000	3,941,875
USSR	571,992	605,112	608,197	663,424	634,164	563,699	765,027	424,529	604,518
Venezuela	515,545	565,671	507,022	625,836	404,589	486,660	702,311	885,359	586,624
Iran	214,718	214,112	181,194	139,115	197,961	204,416	278,811	357,605	223,492
Dutch E Indies	157,036	170,101	169,429	147,134	65,753	132,312	60,820	20,822	115,426
Rumania	132,841	125,063	117,945	111,005	115,326	107,348	71,560	95,266	109,544
Mexico	105,496	117,529	120,317	115,605	95,384	96,337	104,380	119,307	109,294
Iraq	89,432	84,359	66,189	34,658	54,044	68,351	82,090	96,197	71,915
Argentina	46,783	50,995	56,309	59,927	64,942	75,929	66,202	62,688	60,472
Trinidad	48,595	52,795	60,730	56,181	60,463	58,589	60,489	57,789	56,954
Colombia	59,129	65,362	69,926	67,268	28,732	36,332	60,904	61,504	56,145
Peru	43,395	37,008	33,131	32,699	37,340	40,148	39,314	37,655	37,586
Canada	19,085	21,474	23,472	27,764	28,540	27,540	27,593	23,241	24,839
Egypt	4,332	12,784	17,773	23,414	22,671	24,529	25,727	25,770	19,625
Bahrain	22,734	20,792	21,049	18,614	17,099	18,005	18,344	20,025	19,583
Saudi Arabia	1,356	10,778	13,866	11,808	12,411	13,337	21,295	58,386	17,905
Brunei	18,940	19,444	19,254	18,805	8,219	12,329	16,393	5,753	14,892
Germany	10,578	12,293	20,139	17,268	14,222	13,625	16,814	10,780	14,465
Burma	20,652	21,570	21,123	21,266	6,850	2,740	2,049	1,986	12,280
Austria	1,049	3,397	7,672	11,611	16,162	20,488	22,454	8,422	11,407
Hungary	789	3,022	5,139	8,721	13,800	17,390	17,150	13,748	9,970
Poland	10,310	10,680	10,631	4,912	7,655	9,589	8,197	2,055	8,004
India	6,816	6,375	6,290	7,942	7,649	6,918	7,607	6,474	7,009
Ecuador	6,153	6,337	6,418	4,266	6,241	6,342	8,107	7,299	6,395
Japan (+ Taiwan)	6,879	7,271	7,210	5,455	4,658	4,836	4,484	4,260	5,632
Albania	2,060	2,559	4,090	3,655	4,386	2,742	915	732	2,642
France	1,405	1,370	1,355	1,134	1,268	975	820	553	1,110
UK	0	0	339	611	1,658	2,299	1,920	1,458	1,036
Bolivia	619	589	787	644	844	915	858	1,047	788
China	0	11	27	238	932	1,225	1,380	1,326	642
Czechoslovakia	356	329	445	501	742	547	505	249	459
Italy	277	249	232	260	277	236	150	145	228
Yugoslavia	25	27	27	27	27	27	601	548	164
Netherlands	0	0	0	0	0	3	33	112	19

Second tier house rules

4- HS can never fire on subs. Some have even interpreted it that way to begin with, but officially HS can fire on Subs when LF or CV are present on their side. In my opinion, German U-boats already underperform as a strategic asset, so allowing HS units to target them exacerbates the issue, especially since they were almost ineffective in this role. Implementing this house rule not only aligns more with history but also enhances gameplay.

5- All nations Subs can repair 2 steps per turn. Additionally, when placed on the board at cadre level they can be repaired to the second step by paying an additional 1PP. After Z-plan kicks in, Germany's U-boats can repair up to 4 steps as usual.

6- Submarine blockade running. Subs are not required to halt when entering enemy-occupied sea zones. Instead, they may pass through, risking hits identically to strategically moving units. Hits occur on a roll of 5 or higher in enemy-controlled sea zones, 6 or higher in contested zones, and no roll is needed in friendly zones. Once snorkels are developed, this rule becomes redundant. Submarines, inherently designed for stealth, should not have to wait for snorkel development to run blockades. This rule permits submarines to traverse enemy-occupied zones with an associated risk.

New addition: To avert an early and unrealistic penalty to the British economy, German U-boats are prohibited from using this house rule to enter the Atlantic until after the fall of France.

Note: In the Vassal module I created, there's a feature to indicate a unit is a submarine without disclosing its strength. By selecting 'reveal sub' from the right-click menu, a red outline will appear around the submarine.

Sub movement through sea zones before 1942 (House Rule)

Friendly/Contested/Enemy

-- 6+ 5+

Third tier house rules

7- British fortresses must be built where their namesakes are, such as 'M' in Malta. This rule is for thematic purposes. Clearly, if 'M' is drawn and Malta is not a legal placement, it may be placed elsewhere.

8- The Vichy forts can be reinforced using a combination of German and Italian PP. While Armistice 3.3 specifically mentions only Germany bearing the costs, this house rule permits Italy to contribute to the effort as well.

9- Round up in all cases instead of round down. Take, for example, halving for weather. Under the old rule, steps 1-3 would result in a 1, but it's evident that 3 steps should be more impactful than 1, regardless of the weather. Most other games opt to round up in such scenarios, and I share this preference because equating a 3-step to a 1-step seems odd to me. It's ultimately a matter of designer preference; had a different designer created this game, the rule might have been reversed. Thus, there's no definitive justification for either method, so choose the one that feels most appropriate to you. Alternatively, a coin flip could be used to determine whether to round up or down, achieving an average over the course of the game.

10- Germany cannot operate within Italian territories until 1941. Germany cannot use Albania or Italy as a springboard to launch an attack on Greece. Only Italian units are allowed to be stationed in Albania or mainland Italy in 1940. As stated on page 4, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria are restricted to operating in certain areas to maintain historical accuracy. In my opinion, for historical accuracy an additional rule regarding when full German/Italian cooperation starts should be inserted here. Choosing the beginning of 1941 works well. This house rule can slow the conquest of Greece to the turn following the fall of Yugoslavia. Additional commentary on this rule can be found in my section on play balance suggestions.

Design comments

Certain rules, such as Subs having some stealth before snorkels are developed, and HS restriction on engaging Subs offer advantages to the Axis. However, these are offset by Allied advantages. For example, house rule 3 significantly aids the US in moving its weight around. When considered as a whole, the overall balance is solid, and the gameplay is enhanced when the house rules are implemented, creating an experience that feels truer to the events of WWII.

My revised strategic warfare tables address certain shortcomings that, in my opinion, were present in the original table. The original was a compromise to conserve map space, requiring considerable adjustments to accommodate both 1PP and 4PP units on the same chart. Two separate tables are preferable because the disparity in costs between submarines and aircraft resulted in irregular jumps on the original chart. My updated tables progress in a more incremental manner, smoothing out the damage-to-damage ratio. The table below represents the raw PP damage ratio I developed for the air campaign. In the final table, this is translated into air step losses and PP losses, adhering to the predetermined damage ratio. For instance, a 20 vs 5 scenario leads to the attacker inflicting 8PP of damage. This is represented as 1-4-2 on the completed chart. In another case, 20 vs 6 results in the attacker causing 7PP of damage, one less than previously. This is depicted as 1+1-3 on the final chart, effectively returning 1PP to the defender. Since air steps are valued at 4PP each, the gradual loss of aircraft can be accounted for by reimbursing some PP to the defender, indicating that only a fraction of a step was lost. For the Sea table, no PP reimbursement was needed because the steps involved generally cost only 1 or 2PP, allowing for easy adjustment with the middle value. However, this approach is

not feasible for air steps costing 4PP. Attempts to create tables with the middle value always zero or negative, as in the original chart, were unsatisfactory. It might initially seem odd to add PP back to the defender's bank, but this rebate essentially means that the next air step the defender rebuilds will not be at full price. For example, the next air step the defender reconstructs effectively costs only 3PP, considering they received a 1PP refund.

Additionally, observe in the raw table below that any resistance offered by the defender is always beneficial. For instance, if Britain faces 16 air attacks, they would incur 8 Production Points of damage without any resistance. However, if they deploy 4 air units in defense, the total damage drops to 6PP. This ensures that players are not put in a position where it's more cost-effective to avoid defense. The original table had several instances where resisting air raids was penalized. This anomaly was one of the first things that led me to redesign these tables. Consider an example from the original table where intercepting actually leads to greater losses: 16 vs 0 results in 0-8-0 damage, whereas 16 vs 4 results in 0-5-2 damage. Thus, by intercepting, the defender ends up with a total of 13PP in damage instead of just 8PP. With my revised tables, there's no need to metagame such scenarios. Defending to the best of your ability is always the optimal strategy, as failing to do so will only increase your losses.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
4	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4	0/5	0/5	0/6	0/6	0/7	0/7
5	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4	0/5	0/5	0/6	0/6	0/7	0/7
6	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4	0/5	0/5	0/6	0/6
7	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4	0/5	0/5	0/6	0/6
8	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4	0/5	0/5
9	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4	0/5	0/5
10	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4
11	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3	0/4	0/4
12	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/1	1/1	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3
13	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/1	1/1	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2	0/3	0/3
14	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2
15	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/2	0/2
16	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1
17	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1
18	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0
19	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0	0/0	0/0
20	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0
21	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0	1/0	1/0
22	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0
23	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0	2/0	2/0
24	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0
25	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0	3/0	3/0
26	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0
27	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0	4/0	4/0
28	14/0	14/0	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0
29	14/0	14/0	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0	5/0	5/0
30	15/0	15/0	14/0	14/0	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0
31	15/0	15/0	14/0	14/0	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0	6/0	6/0
32	16/0	16/0	15/0	15/0	14/0	14/0	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0
33	16/0	16/0	15/0	15/0	14/0	14/0	13/0	13/0	12/0	12/0	11/0	11/0	10/0	10/0	9/0	9/0	8/0	8/0	7/0	7/0

Now about them U-boats. First let me be clear, I love the naval mechanics in Black Swan, which are great except for the unusual timing of the U-boat campaign. Contrary to historical effectiveness during 1940-1942, which diminished as the Allies regained control of the seas after 1943, the game presents an opposite scenario. Late in the war, players receive a fifth U-boat and can reinforce them to four steps every turn, with the added ability to move them directly into the Atlantic due to snorkels. Yet, during the period from 1940 to 1942, when the U-boat campaign should be at its peak, it falls short.

One significant issue is the prolonged journey to the Atlantic. U-boats are taking two or three seasons to reach their positions due to the presence of enemy ships. This delay diminishes their

window of effectiveness. Additionally, they likely sustain damage before even reaching the Atlantic. If a U-boat is lost during this period, it cannot return to full strength for another year, considering one step per season. It's impractical to redeploy at one step. Thus, it takes a year and a half before a destroyed U-boat can re-enter the Atlantic, and by that time, the opportunity to significantly impact Britain is almost over, especially with the US's entry in 1942.

In my view, the Battle of the Atlantic gives the initiative to the wrong side. Germany should have it in spades in the early years, yet it seems the initiative lies with the British in this battle. The game's decision not to abstract the U-boat campaign with a traditional box for U-boat assets, opting instead for a map-based approach, resulted in delays in reaching the theater. However, I commend the use of strategic assets like submarines on the main map, as it adds an enjoyable maneuvering element to the game.

My straightforward solution is to allow submarines to strategically move into the theater using a weaker version of the snorkels rule, enhancing Germany's early naval initiative. With this house rule, U-boats are positioned quicker and start with at least two steps in strength (house rule 5). These rules synergize to convey the desperate nature of the Battle of the Atlantic in its early stages, which I believe corrects the campaign's feel. When the US enters the war and applies the house rule granting them an inherent 4SPs, it balances the early advantage enjoyed by Germany.

It's also worth noting that the British benefit from an accelerated sub repair rate too, which is particularly advantageous in the Mediterranean and allows passage through the Italian navy (house rule 6). A British Sub in the Central Med can help keep a Malta fort supplied.

These house rules are not eccentric; they could be mistaken for official rules. The rule allowing subs to move through enemy ships simply adapts the rules of unit transport via sea. If hit by opposing ships, you incur step losses. This rule is straightforward, giving subs a more favorable die roll than transports, which is appropriate. Alternatively, consider this house rule as a weaker version of the more robust snorkel development. Initially, there's a slight margin for taking hits in transit, which eventually leads to immunity from hits.

I trust you'll find Black Swan even more enjoyable with these house rules. It's generally best to combine the first and second tiers. The third tier consists of the less significant ones, and whether you include them or not, they won't affect the gameplay that much.

Play Balance Suggestions

Here are some suggestions on how to mix and match various house rules for players of varying skill levels. If you find that allowing submarines two steps per turn is overwhelming for Britain, either drop that rule or consider letting heavy ships attack submarines. For further balance, you could alter house rule 6 to increase the likelihood of hitting submarines attempting to run

In my alternate 1939 scenario (found in the Vassal module) two small adjustments have been made. Crete and Morocco each receive a one-step infantry unit. This gives France a few more PP to spend before they fall, and the small force on Crete will require the Axis to use 2 units. This is my preferred scenario, and I play with all house rules in effect. Ultimately, the game feels more authentic. I hope I can convince the designer to adopt this setup as official if ever a 2nd edition of Black Swan is made.

Following the above suggestions, you should be able to find an optimal balance. Handicapping can be done in other ways, though it may be somewhat problematic. PP bidding might not be effective as some of the PP bid could be wasted. Moreover, PP bidding does not address certain deficiencies of the vanilla game, as mentioned in the design comments. Therefore, it's advisable to experiment with different combinations and adjust them as player skills improve.

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comments and suggestions welcome

V1.1 10/8/2023

V1.2 11/13/2023 Added house rule 10

V1.3 Renamed house rule 1 and changed the hit chance. Added some new info into 10. Added rule 11. Added play balance suggestions section. January 2024

V1.4 Rewrote the whole document for better clarity. Added a small caveat to sub blockade running. Swapped two house rules around and removed the house rule about Simferopol and Krasnodar as my rewrite of the v1.05 rulebook makes this moot. 11/10/2024