

CROSSHAIRS

A game of WW1 aerial combat by Stephen Tavener

TOP SECRET

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INTRODUCTION

"There are books of which the backs and covers are by far the best parts." — Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist

Designing Crosshairs back in 2010, I set out to capture the essence of a Great War aerial dogfight in a game with no hidden information or randomness. This should put it in the same category as abstract strategy games like chess and go, but somewhere along the way, it developed a mind of its own, as my designs often do. Hence, you have something straddling the line between abstract strategy and wargame; a wheel in each camp as it were.

As I write this in 2026, Crosshairs has just been implemented on the Abstract Play website (you'll also find my games Furl and Four there), and I thought it might be time to make a few copies available again; hence this extremely limited edition.

CONTENTS

- One board
- One set of rules
- Six planes in six colours
- Twenty cloud tokens (16 plus a few extra)
- Eighty stackable height counters
- Eight achievement cards
- Six transparent markers

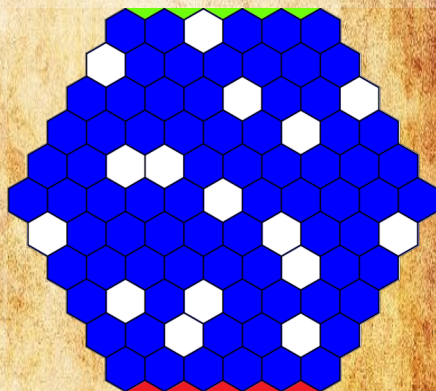
RULES FOR TWO PLAYERS

"Very simple was my explanation, and plausible enough — as most wrong theories are!" — H.G. Wells, The Time Machine

SETUP

Each player chooses one side of the board as their home area; in a two-player game choose opposite sides.

Players take turns placing clouds on the board until all sixteen* clouds are placed. Clouds block line of sight and provide tactical opportunities during play.



Example of cloud placement

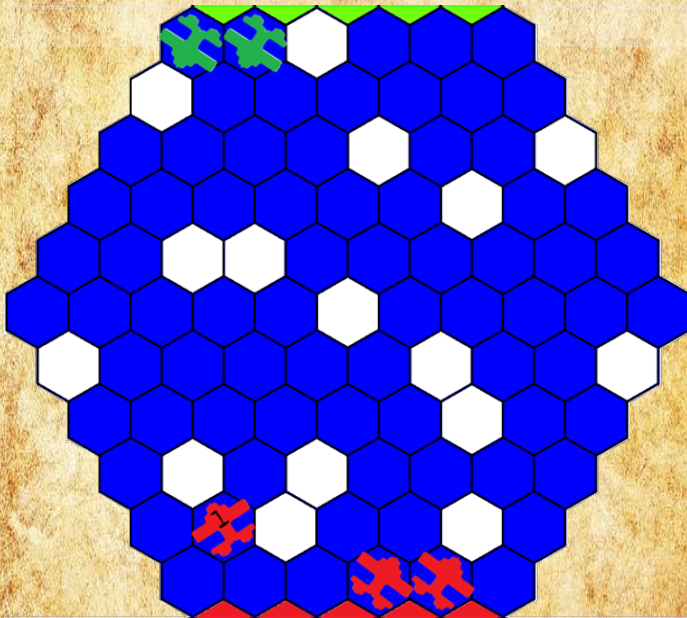
* Some extra clouds are included for those who want to experiment.

Tip: in your first few games, try to block all sight lines across the board, don't leave large empty regions, and don't make clumps of more than two clouds. This should make the game a little less deadly in the opening stages.

THE FIRST FEW TURNS

Planes start off the board, and players take an increasing number of actions each turn until they move all of their planes on every turn:

- On the first turn, player 1 will place one plane in their home area.
- On the second turn, player 2 places two planes in their home area.
- Player 1 now has three actions and a choice; they can place three more planes, or move their existing plane and place two more planes.
- And so on.



Example position after 3 moves.

MOVEMENT

"The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it." – J. M. Barrie, Peter Pan

THE PLANES

Planes have two basic attributes:

- **Height:** in the game, represented by a stack of 0-6 height markers under the piece.
- **Direction:** planes must always face one side of their current hex. This is the direction they are shooting, and the direction they will move.

EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE, NOT ALL AT ONCE

After the first few turns, a player must move all of their planes exactly once each turn. The planes may be moved in any order, but one plane must finish moving before the next one starts.

Tip: there are six transparent tokens in each set; you can place these on a plane at the start of a turn to track which planes have moved.

MOVEMENT RESTRICTIONS

- Planes cannot occupy the same space or move through each other, regardless of their height or allegiance.

- Clouds do not hinder movement but do block line of sight (more about that later).
- Once on the board, planes may not leave the playing area.

MOVE, THEN TURN

Planes first move forwards then optionally turn up to 60° unless explicitly stated in the next section.

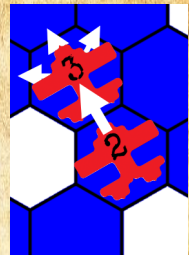
Tip: this means you can usually anticipate where your opponent's planes will be next. Plan ahead, or you'll find yourself forced to move in the wrong direction!

MOVEMENT OPTIONS

Each plane must perform one of the following actions:

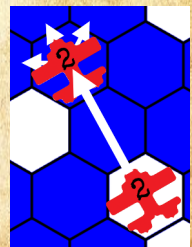
CLIMB

- (required) Increase height by one
- (required) Move forwards one space
- (optional) turn 60°



LEVEL FLIGHT

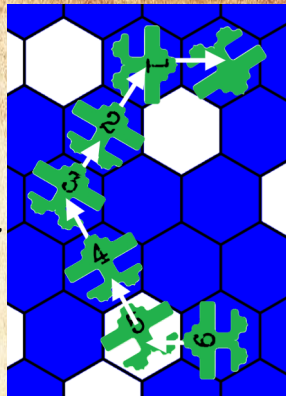
- (required) Move forwards two spaces
- (optional) turn 60°.



DIVE

A diving plane may make a series of manoeuvres, losing height with each one. Each manoeuvre consists of one of the following:

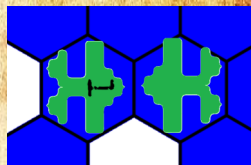
- Power dive (turn without moving).
 - (required) Lose two height
 - (optional) turn 60°.
- Swoop.
 - (required) Lose one height
 - (required) Move forwards one space
 - (optional) turn 60°.



CRASH

If a plane can neither move nor dive, it crashes into the ground and is removed from the game.

Tip: crashes usually occur if a plane cannot move forwards and has insufficient height to dive (0-1). Plan ahead! Remember that planes cannot leave the playing area, and cannot move into a space occupied by another plane.



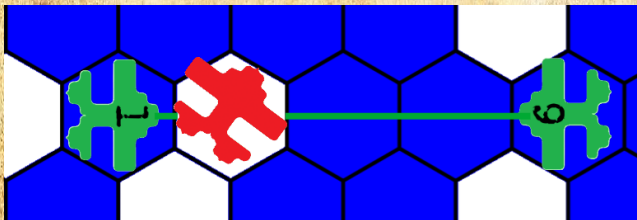
These planes can neither dive nor move; one will crash.

COMBAT

"I don't want to go to heaven. None of my friends are there." – Oscar Wilde

LINE OF SIGHT

- Planes shoot directly forwards
- Planes are not limited by range
- Line of sight is blocked by planes and clouds
- A plane in a cloud has no line of sight



The red plane is safe. Planes cannot shoot into, out of, or through clouds.

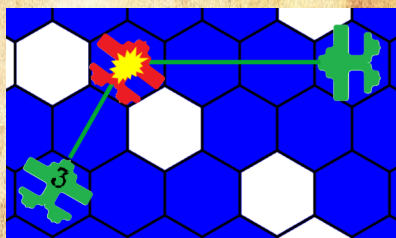
CAUGHT IN THE CROSSHAIRS

If a plane is in line of sight of two or more enemy planes, it may be destroyed. Players may shoot:

- at the start of their turn
- after each manoeuvre

Players may not shoot:

- during an opponent's turn
- between the move and rotation of a manoeuvre



Green may destroy the red plane.

Notes

- There is no friendly fire
- Height is not a factor when shooting
- Shooting is optional (but recommended, except in very rare circumstances)
- If you shoot down a plane, immediately check if any more planes can be shot.

GAME END

"If we don't end war, war will end us." — H. G. Wells

As soon as a player is reduced to one plane*, they are eliminated from the game. When there is only one player (or team) remaining, that player (team) wins.

**Note that it is possible to win or lose the game in the middle of your turn; if so, the game ends immediately. Do not complete that turn.*

MULTI-PLAYER GAMES

COMMON RULES

There are several options for multi-player games. The following rules apply to all variants unless otherwise stated:

- **No friendly fire:** two planes on the same team cannot shoot each other.
- **Hostile fire:** if a plane is in the crosshairs of two enemy planes, it is destroyed. Even if they are on different teams.
- **Complete turns:** each player must move all of their planes before the next player moves their planes, even if they are on the same team.
- **Friends near:** unless otherwise stated team members should have adjacent home areas.
- **Enemies far:** unless otherwise stated enemy home areas should be as far apart as possible.
- **Ramping Turns:** player 1 takes 1 action, player 2 takes 2 actions, etc.

Free-For-All

Each player starts with five planes (3-4 players), or four planes (5-6 players); there are no alliances.

When a plane is destroyed, the active player takes it as a trophy. Once a player is reduced to one plane, they are eliminated from the game; the active player takes the remaining plane as an additional trophy.

When only one player remains, the player with the most trophies wins.

Circle of Death

Each player starts with 4 planes.

A plane is only destroyed if at least one of the shooting planes belongs to the player to their *right*. The first player to eliminate (reduce to one plane) the player to their *left* wins the game.

TEAM PLAY

1 vs 2

One player (A) has 5 planes; the other two players (B and C as a team) have 3 planes each. Turn order:

1. A moves 1 plane.
2. B and C move 1 plane each.
3. A moves 3 planes.
4. B and C move 2 planes each.
5. Move all planes each turn.

1 vs 3

One player (A) has 5 planes; the other three players (B, C and D as a team) take 2 planes each. Turn order:

1. A moves 2 planes.
2. B, C and D move 1 plane each.
3. A moves 4 planes.
4. Move all planes each turn.

2 vs 2

Each player takes 5 planes. Turn order:

1. A and B (team 1) move 1 plane each.
2. C and D (team 2) move 2 planes each.

3. A and B move 3 planes each.
4. C and D (team 2) move 4 planes each.
5. Move all planes each turn.

3 vs 3

Each player takes 4 planes. Turn order:

1. A, B, and C (team 1) move 1 plane each.
2. D, E, and F (team 2) move 2 planes each.
3. Team 1 move 3 planes each.
4. Move all planes each turn.

VARIANTS

ACHIEVEMENT CARDS

Achievements are intended for use when you play a series of games back-to-back. The first player to satisfy the conditions for an unclaimed achievement during a game puts it in front of themselves; the winner of the game keeps any achievements they claimed. At the end of the match, the player with the most achievement points is the winner.

HANDICAPS

If one player is less experienced/weaker than the other, give them some height tokens at the start of the game; they can bring their first few planes onto the board with a height token. Note that even just a couple

of height tokens can give a big advantage to a seasoned player.

TURBULENCE

A player entering a cloud immediately loses 1 height.

CONCEALED FIRE

Players may shoot out of, but not into, clouds.

ACES

Once a plane has made a kill, it becomes an **Ace**; Aces can make the Immelmann manoeuvre and lose 3 height to turn 180°.

STRATEGY TIPS

*"There is no education like adversity." –
Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil*

Height is power. Climb whenever possible. In particular, if a plane's height is less than two, it will crash when blocked. More height opens up more movement options; in particular, your height tells you (and your opponent) how far you can move when diving.

Your direction at the end of each turn is important since it commits you to moving in that direction unless you want to burn a lot of height. A poor choice will allow the opponent to set a trap for you, or prevent

you from targeting the opponent on your next turn.
Plan ahead!

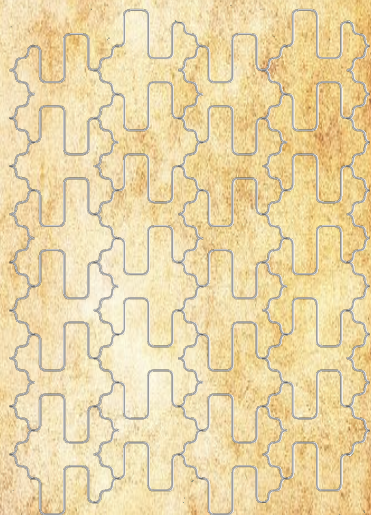
Use the cloud cover; clouds block sight lines, allowing you to get closer to the opponent before unleashing your attacks. Blocking an opponent while hiding in the clouds is strong, because your plane is hard to remove.

If you have trouble visualising the movement, think about where you want your planes to be and work backwards; if they have enough height, there's a good chance they can get there!

RANDOM DESIGN NOTES

Early versions of the game didn't have level flight – but all my playtesters asked for it! Feel free to try playing without it; crosshairs is one of those robust games where you can tweak quite a lot and still have an interesting game.

Wonder about the unusual plane shapes? They are tessellated, to minimise the amount of acrylic used and the cut distance. Even so, this set was super expensive to produce. Hope you enjoy it!



ONLINE RESOURCES

Play online at Abstract Play: <https://play.abstractplay.com/>

Play against the computer in Ai Ai:
<http://www.mrraow.com/index.php/aiai-home/>

Discuss on BoardGameGeek:
<https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/78093/crosshairs>

My other games:
http://mrraow.com/uploads/MyDesigns/my_designs.html

*"For after the Battle comes quiet." — H. G.
Wells, The Time Machine*

Limited edition ____ of 40

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