

Cinematic Unisystem:

Pirates!

By Jake de Gude

This booklet is intended as a supplement to the *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer RPG* by Eden Studios. It should work with the *Angel RPG*, as well. Unfortunately, I don't own the latter so I can't make sure of that.

Cinematic Unisystem: Pirates!

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The latest version of this document should be available for download at:

<http://sandcat.nl/~jake/games/unisystem/>

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Introduction

We all like pirates. There are few archetypes that bring up such vivid images. We want to play them as player characters in our roleplaying sessions, and if it's at all possible, using the Unisystem rules. Unfortunately, *Arrr, Thar Be Zombies*, the pirate supplement for *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* isn't out yet. (Heck, it isn't officially announced yet.)

This small booklet is intended to allow you to play a pirate-based campaign with the Cinematic Unisystem rules as your core. These can be found in the *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook* and the *Angel Roleplaying Game Core Rulebook*, both published by Eden Studios. You need one of the books to make full use of this supplement.

Page references

I may refer to books in the *Buffy RPG* line. This is done by some letters, followed by a number. The number is the page reference, the letters refer to:

BCR: *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer Core Rulebook*

SHB: *Slayers Handbook*

MS: *Monster Smackdown*

Unfortunately, I can't help you with references to the *Angel* books. If anybody can provide me with those, I would be most grateful.

Fiction

When we think of pirates, we think of dashing heroes, swashbuckling rogues with a heart of gold. Wooden leg, parrot perched on a shoulder, a rolling 'r'. We think of Long John Silver, Blackbeard, or, lately, Jack Sparrow. Few of these images are (completely) historically accurate, whatever that means. Pirates were criminals, and most of them did what they did not because it was such great fun or out of some sort of nobility.

Bah! While it's good to know about the roots of our archetypes, let's not spoil our enjoyment of fiction by such a tiny thing as fact. The stuff in this document has its roots in history, but is romanticized and made more cinematic.

Characters

Characters can be White Hats, Heroes and Experienced Heroes. White Hats may be a bit weak and could need faster Drama Points replenishment than usual. Keep an eye on that.

Skills

The biggest change in the rules is the skill list. Some of the skills in the *Buffy* book are too focused on modern times (ever seen a pirate with a computer?) and are dropped. Other skills are slightly modified or flavoured-up. Finally, there are those that are just renamed. Hah, a good pirate is lazy when he can. The final skill list is as follows:

- Art
- Athletics (renamed and adapted from Acrobatics)
- Bargain (new)
- Brawling (renamed from Kung Fu)
- Crafts (new)
- Crime
- Doctor
- Flintlock Fu (renamed and adapted from Gun Fu)
- Getting Nautical (new)
- Influence
- Knowledge
- Languages
- Notice
- Occultism
- Riding (new)
- Survival (new)
- Swashbuckling (renamed from Getting Medieval)
- Wild Card

Athletics

This skill covers everything under Acrobatics and has two additional uses that are worth mentioning in this genre: swimming and diving!

USING THE SKILL: Mostly, this would require a Constitution + Athletics roll. Wearing lots of clothes makes it harder and results in a -2 (normal clothes) to -5 (wearing some kind of armour) penalty.

Bargain

This skill comprises a wide range of mercantile abilities. You know how to haggle and how to drive a bargain. You can accurately appraise all sorts of goods, from cotton to jewelry, from spices to a horse. You know what goods are wanted at what market. Useful skill for a merchant, but also for a quartermaster.

USING THE SKILL: Bargain and Intelligence to know which commodity is wanted where. Bargain combined with Perception to estimate the true value of something. To haggle or make a deal, use Bargain plus Willpower.

Crafts

You are adept at working with your hands. If it doesn't exist, you can make it — provided you have the proper tools and components. If it's broken, you can mend it: either permanently or temporarily. The latter is easier and quicker, but what you mended may fail you at the most inopportune moment. This is the skill you need to be a ship carpenter, a blacksmith, a boyer or a jeweler.

USING THE SKILL: Often this comes down to a Dexterity plus Crafts roll. Intelligence plus Craft may let you reverse-engineer a device or construction. Jury-rigging something gives you a bonus on your roll (+5 at most). Lacking proper tools gives you penalties (“where did I leave my hammer?”) or renders the task impossible (lacking a forge).

Flintlock Fu

You can handle all kinds of black powder weapons like muskets and pistols. You also know how to treat gunpowder, flint and other elements of the guns. What's more, you can load, aim and fire cannon without blowing yourself to bits.

Getting Nautical

You know your way around a boat— erhm, ship. You know which line to pull, what a belaying pin belays, and how to tar a deck. What's more, you can read maps and perhaps even navigate by the stars!

USING THE SKILL: Perception and Getting Nautical to see whether everthings in its place. Intelligence and Getting Nautical to use charts and to navigate. Dexterity and Getting Nautical to splice a rope or tie a knot.

Riding

This skill covers riding a horse, but also handling of a horse-and-carriage and, if you can find it, a chariot.

USING THE SKILL: Roll Dexterity plus Riding to stay in the saddle. Willpower and Riding could be combined to tame a stubborn stallion. To assess the health of your mount, use Riding and Perception.

Survival

Living from the land you can survive far from the 'civilized world' without the proper tools. Marooned on an island, you make your own fire, and a raft from sea turtles, bound together with the hair from your back. Robinson Crusoe sure had high marks in this one.

USING THE SKILL: Dexterity and Survival to set traps or make a fire. Constitution + Survival to get through that desert or the wilds of Jamaica. Use this skill with Perception to notice the tracks of a wild boar.

Qualities & Drawbacks

Of course, not all the Qualities and Drawbacks from *Buffy* are appropriate in the Golden Age of Sail. Some, like Robot, are right out. Some are just renamed. Yet other Qualities and Drawbacks are added.

Renamed Qualities

Jock → Natural Athlete
Nerd → Scholar
Photographic Memory → Total Recall

New Qualities & Drawbacks:

Animal Companion

(1- or 2-point Quality)

Your character is a walking cliché with that parrot on her shoulder.

You've befriended a small exotic animal. It's quite the bargain — you take care of it, and in turn it makes you look all pirate-y.

The one-point version of this Quality doesn't offer you much beyond looking cool. Of course, sometimes that's all it takes. Although you don't understand what your companion is trying to communicate, you can always *pretend* that you do!

At two points, you've developed an empathic bond of sorts with your pet. You understand its basic emotions (for example, when it's trying to warn you) and it understands simple commands like "bring me that key."

Gunner

(2-point Quality)

Your character has spent long, arduous hours training reloading her firearms. While reloading, subtract 4 rounds from the reloading time. This Quality cannot reduce the time needed below one round.

Example: Dave the gunner's mate is reloading a musket. Normally, that would take 12 rounds. He has Flintlock Fu 3 and Dex 3, and rolls a 8. Combined, that is 14, which is 3 Success Levels. This reduces the time needed for reloading to 9 rounds. Dave also has the Gunner

Quality, which nets him another 4 rounds. Reloading this musket takes him 5 rounds: still a considerable time, but certainly faster than a untrained person.

Hook

(2-point Drawback)

One of your hands is gone — cut off in combat, amputated or lost in an accident. In its stead, you got a mean, hard-iron hook.

You get a -4 penalty to every Dexterity roll involving your hook. On the other hand (bad pun! bad pun!) you now have a weapon with you at all times. To hit somebody, roll Dexterity + Brawling or Dexterity + Swashbuckling. You do 2 × Strength Slash/stab damage.

And maybe somebody will make a movie about you, hey?

Impressive Scar

(2-point Quality)

Wow, that sure is a wicked scar. I don't mean to pry, but relate the tale to the Director and the other characters, and I'll grant a +2 on every roll where you want to intimidate anyone.

Note that you can combine this Quality with Attractiveness and get the best of both worlds.

Landlubber

(2-point Drawback)

Your character has the opposite of sea legs. Due to seasickness and a strong aversion of anything sea-related, she won't perform nearly as well if on a boat. Ship. Whatever.

Every time you board a ship, and every time when you wake up aboard one, make a Willpower roll (not Doubled). If you fail, all your actions are at -2 for the rest of the day.

Larger Than Life

(1-point/level Quality)

Even for a Cast Member, your character has done extraordinary things, or so it's said. Whether by design or due to external circumstances, the tales of your deeds are the stuff of legend. Your exploits are exaggerated and very not true, but for the rest of the world, the fiction

is fact. Hey, given enough time and a big enough ego to begin with, you may start to believe the stories yourself!

You are given wide berth in every harbour, and ships surrender at the drop of your name, before a single shot has been fired. Or, if your reputation is more reputable, you are given a lot of credit at the inn, or maybe the innkeeper even gives you money to have you stay in his place. Members of the opposite sex are naturally drawn to you, whether you appreciate it or not.

On the other hand, there are always people out there trying to earn a name as the one who bested you. If your reputation is that of a criminal and the authorities catch you, they will try you for the deeds done in your tales, not those you *actually* perpetrated yourself.

Add the level(s) of your character's Larger Than Life to rolls if you want to get something done. Oftentimes, this will be Influence Skill rolls.

If you take this Quality, work out with the GM what your reputation is. Bonus points for writing a few of your tales down!

Married To The Sea

(2-point Quality)

You need no wife, for you already have one. The sea may be fierce mistress, but she cares for you and her actions are easier to predict than any red-blooded woman's. You can tell from her whispers and her fair looks what's she's thinking and what she might do next.

You get a +2 bonus to all Getting Nautical rolls and all Knowledge and Perception rolls whenever they involve the sea.

One Eye

(1-point Quality)

Fate took your eye, the bitch. Now you get to wear a real cool eye patch. This gives you a +1 bonus on all rolls (Influence, mostly) involving intimidation.

Peg Leg

(2-point Drawback)

Your character lost one of his legs in the past. It was amputated — whether that was strictly speaking ‘necessary’ or not! All you got in its stead was a wooden peg. Sometimes you could swear you can still feel your feet — both of them.

Hand-to-hand combat is hampered a bit, giving you a -1 penalty. You can not move faster than one-half normal speed.

(This is the Physical Disability Drawback, with the Missing Leg option. Yup.)

Slept With The Fishes

(1-point Quality)

Somewhere in the past, you nearly drowned. Through Fate, Faith, sheer Good Luck or the hefty expenditure of Drama Points, you got through the experience alive. Poseidon left his mark on you, though. You have a slight blue-greenish sheen to your skin, or perhaps even something like scales at certain places.

If you’ve got the Attractiveness Quality, it’s reduced by one level. Attractiveness (+1) is effectively removed. If you’ve got negative Attractiveness it’s lowered even more, by one level.

On the positive side, your tough skin provides you with an Armor Value of 4 against blunt trauma. Its toughness doesn’t help against Slash/Stab or Bullet damage, though.

(This Quality is effectively Attractiveness (-1) and Natural Toughness rolled into one.)

Equipment

Flintlock pistol

Notorious for its inaccuracy. Reloading took such a long time that it was a matter of 'fire and forget.' Of course, nobody prevents you from carrying two pistols... Damage is 13 points (Bullet type). Reloading takes 12 turns, minus the Success Levels of a Dexterity and Flintlock Fu roll. Uses pistol ranges, with one additional -1 all over the board. So a shot from your trusty piece with the target up till five yards away (short range for pistols) takes a -1 penalty.

Musket

Can't be a musketeer without a musket, y'-know. These big guns are not very accurate (use pistol ranges) and reloading is a bear. Way back then, most people carried a sword or knife or bayonet around, just in case. This puppy is available from the "Three Musketeers" era all the way to the end of the Civil War (and still available in the hands of collectors or war-reenactment fans even after that). Damage is 17 points (Bullet type). Reloading a musket takes 12 turns, minus the Success Levels of a Dexterity and Gun Fu roll. (*SHB, page 38.*)