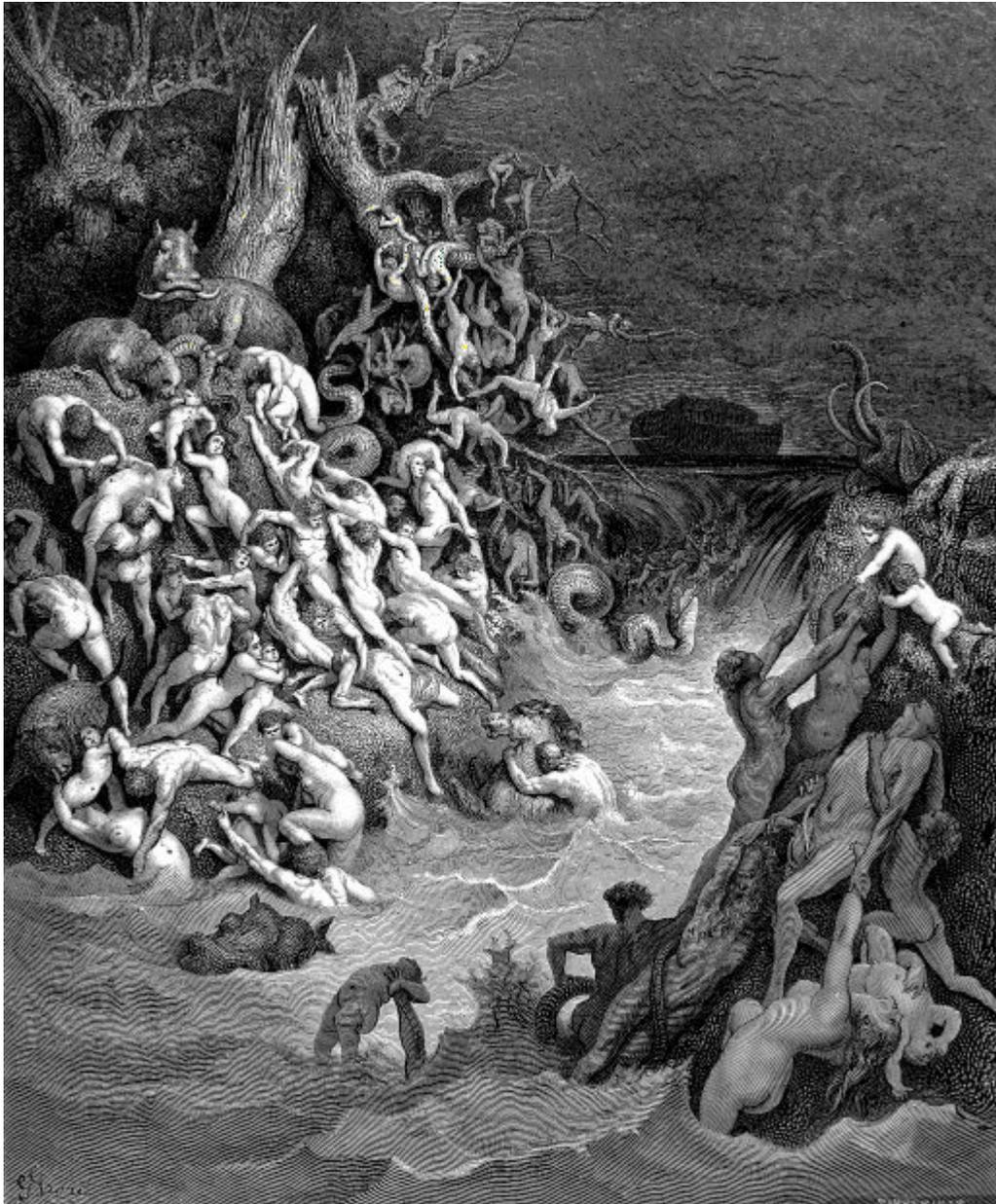


A Sea Deep, Cursed and Rotting

A Horror-Adventure Game by
John Lavolette



A Sea Deep, Cursed and Rotting (Game Chef 2009 entry)

A role-playing game about travelers at sea, cursed with Life-in-Death, aboard a ship of living corpses.

Character Creation

Create general character history:

- * Pick a couple broad backgrounds, like "sailor" or "physician";
- * Define how many years you've spent in each;
- * Add 15 years, set that as your character's age.

Option: add a cushion of years for extra backgrounds gained in flashbacks.

Add up to two labels (descriptors that act as both advantages and disadvantages, possibly including risks.)

Pick a broad class of goals/methods your character works towards ("I solve problems by ____".)

Add a distinguishing adjective (behavior, style.)

Roll 2d6 and use highest for Luck.

Option: If using these rules with another game system, use that game's hit points for Luck.

Finish with:

- * a name;
- * homeland;
- * short descriptive phrases that make the character distinct.

Basic Play

Players describe where they are going/what they are planning.

Game Master (GM) responds with challenges and events for the players to respond to.

Actions: automatically succeed if the action is not impossible and not counteracted.

Some actions are outside the scale of the character.

GM compares factors involved to see if action sounds possible or is at an advantage or disadvantage.

Factors can include:

- * action is outside of character's experience (background);
- * character faces opponent with more or less experience;
- * character has a label relevant to situation;
- * action fits character's class or adjective.

Option: If you prefer a game system that includes skill checks, "to hit" rolls, or the equivalent, use whichever mechanic is standard (d20 or d10 + mods, 3d6 under target, etc.) before going on to effects of actions. Factors above provide bonuses and penalties.

Effects of actions: determined by effects rolls.

Don't roll effects dice if you don't need to know any special effects. Roll when you need to know:

- * when something happens;
- * how something happens (how well you do);
- * whether there is a side effect (risk.)

Roll 2d6, pick one (lowest) for speed, one (highest) for power.

Actions happen in order of speed.

High result die can be used for traditional damage roll or for effectiveness against a target.

Power/Effectiveness

If you create a tool or favorable situation, the power of your roll is the tool or situation's power.

If target has a set effectiveness (resistance rating) of its own, your effectiveness must beat the target's effectiveness. Living, conscious opponents can try a defensive action, using the power of their 2d6 roll to resist.

A tool, weapon, or situation can add +1 to power or resistance. GM compares factors of weapon vs. armor, maneuvers, and relevant features of tools or situations.

Exceeding a target's effectiveness does 1 point of damage. If total damage is greater than target's Luck, the victor gets to make a permanent change in target's condition.

Option: if using these rules in conjunction with another game system with a higher hit point range, use the full power for damage.

Risks

If action has potential unwanted side effect, rolling doubles on the pair of effects dice means the risk takes effect.

Risks must be declared in advance; you can choose not to take a risk.

Option: a truly new action beyond your experience might have an unspecified risk, but the fact that it is risky must still be declared in advance.

Risks must be possible for either success or failure. Ordinary actions might be upgradeable to extraordinary actions, with GM or group approval, by offering to take a risk.

Sacrifices

You can sometimes opt to avoid damage by sacrificing something else that takes damage instead. (Crippling wound, shield or armor damage.)

Captured by the Flying Dutchman/Becoming Damned

Life-In Death

Social Interactions with Living: Risk other person feeling you are evil.

Scavengers: Risk of gulls/ravens during day, sharks when swimming, rats underground/below decks on another ship.

Decay: starts at zero

After physically damaging encounter: risk gaining point of Decay.

To heal wounds or disguise the effects of death: beat Decay rating.

If decayed, -1 penalty to most social interactions unless effects are hidden.

No way for damned to heal Decay without assistance from a loved one (see Interactions with the Living.)

GM Plan

- Set up transition to damnation (taken by Dutchman);
- alternate mood-setting Minor Events with challenging Major Events.

Life on the Ship

Minor events: anything that sets mood (escape/mutiny attempt, communicate with others who are damned, look for food or water.)

Before arriving in a port, you must have:

- * At least one flashback to establish a past relationship;
- * One other kind of event between each flashback;
- * One relationship before the captain will change course;
- * One minor event between each major event.

Flashbacks: used to establish relationships and other details of past life. Consist of social interactions and miscellaneous encounters.

Flashbacks end:

- * When player wants to take a break, as long as there is no current conflict;
- * When player has earned a relationship and wrapped up unresolved issues.

Interactions During Flashbacks

social interaction: decide whether your goal is short term (get a woman to agree to meet you in the garden alone, get a fellow soldier to follow you on a mission) or long term.

Trivial short-term goals: no roll, weigh factors like the character's recent behavior, personal benefit, or social taboos, then make a decision.

Request conflicts with the target's interests: both sides roll 2d6 and pick the best result as per ordinary effects roll.

Long-term goals (establishing relationships): earning loyalty, love, trust or respect:

- * Power of 2d6 roll is "social damage"; if total damage is higher than the target's luck, the player character earns the loyalty, love, trust or respect they seek.
- * Risk interruption if doubles are rolled.

Major Events on the Ship

Interactions with Captain Van der Decken: Captain is very terse. Handle most interactions as trivial short-term.

If character has a relationship, can negotiate with the captain to change destination to location of loved one (long-term social goal vs. Curse rating of 5.) Each unique example of love, respect, or loyalty towards loved one is a +1 to power on 2d6 roll.

Risk is interference by rest of the crew. Continue your argument with the captain if interruption is dealt with.

If total damage is not yet more than Curse: Power of each roll is added to a running total (Voyage.)

If total damage is more than Curse: the captain agrees to set course for the destination you request. Current Voyage number is days of travel.

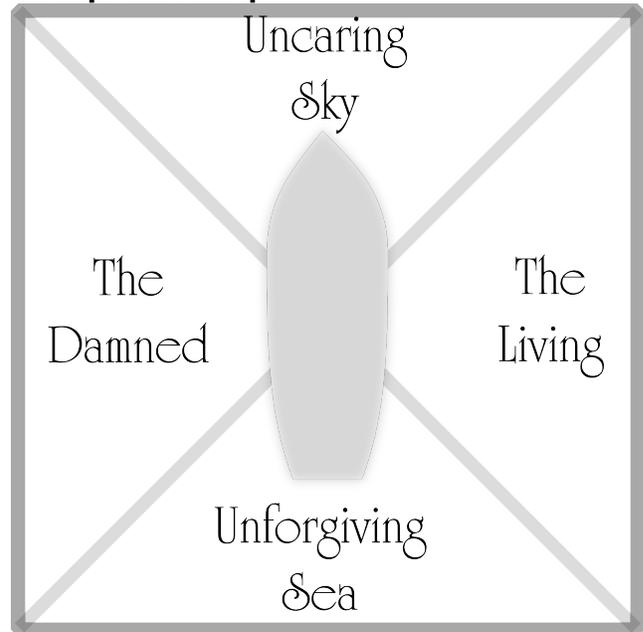
Random Encounters: roll 3d6 on dice map. Where the dice land determines what happens

lowest result: where the threat comes from. Also indicates strength (Luck) of encounter.

highest result: what the threat endangers or otherwise acts on.

Use random encounters roughly once/day, rolling at sunset.

Example Dice Map:



The Damned: The dead crew, whether long dead or newly impressed. As a target (highest result,) may include ordinary corpses, coffins, other symbols of death.

Unforgiving Sea: The raging Deep itself, or creatures in it. As a target, may include actions related to the sea, like walking the plank.

The Living: The land, its inhabitants, and their ships. Generally indicates a merchant ship, warship or pirate vessel. Might also indicate an island.

Uncaring Sky: The wind, clouds, sky, and flying creatures. Could also include exposure during the day, since exposed damned character will attract gulls.

The Ship (center): Self-explanatory. Might indicate a mast that breaks, or a sudden breach in the hull. Always indicates the Dutchman itself; other ships fall under The Living.

After dealing with encounter, roll 2d6. If high number is higher than event's Luck, add to Distance Traveled ("damage" to Voyage:) If players took advantage of gales or other encounters, add event's Luck to Distance Traveled as well.

Risk: something unfortunate happens as a side effect.

If Distance Traveled is more than Voyage, ship reaches destination. Voyage and Distance Traveled are reset.

Escaping the Cursed Ship/Escaping Damnation

Dangers of Land

If not on ship, risk of a dangerous accident on hallowed ground, other risks appropriate to being damned.

At sunset every day, damned characters must roll 2d6, risk the crew of the Flying Dutchman dragging them back.

Interactions with the Living

Damaged characters can convince loved one to tend wounds. In place of 2d6 roll risking further Decay, substitute 2d6 roll risking revelation of zombie nature, adding +1 for the relationship factor.

Any NPC in port who recognizes a character as a zombie is horrified. Treat as disadvantage in further social interactions, unless trying to frighten/intimidate.

Interactions with horrified loved ones risk losing the relationship completely.

Hiding zombie nature and lying to/persuading horrified NPCs can remove horrified label.

Redemption

Every time a character protects or rescues a loved one or risks their own life for the good of their loved one, roll 2d6. Risk of immediate visitation by the ship's crew.

Power higher than Curse: do +1 "damage" to character's personal damnation.

Total Damage (Redemption) higher than Curse: character is no longer damned.

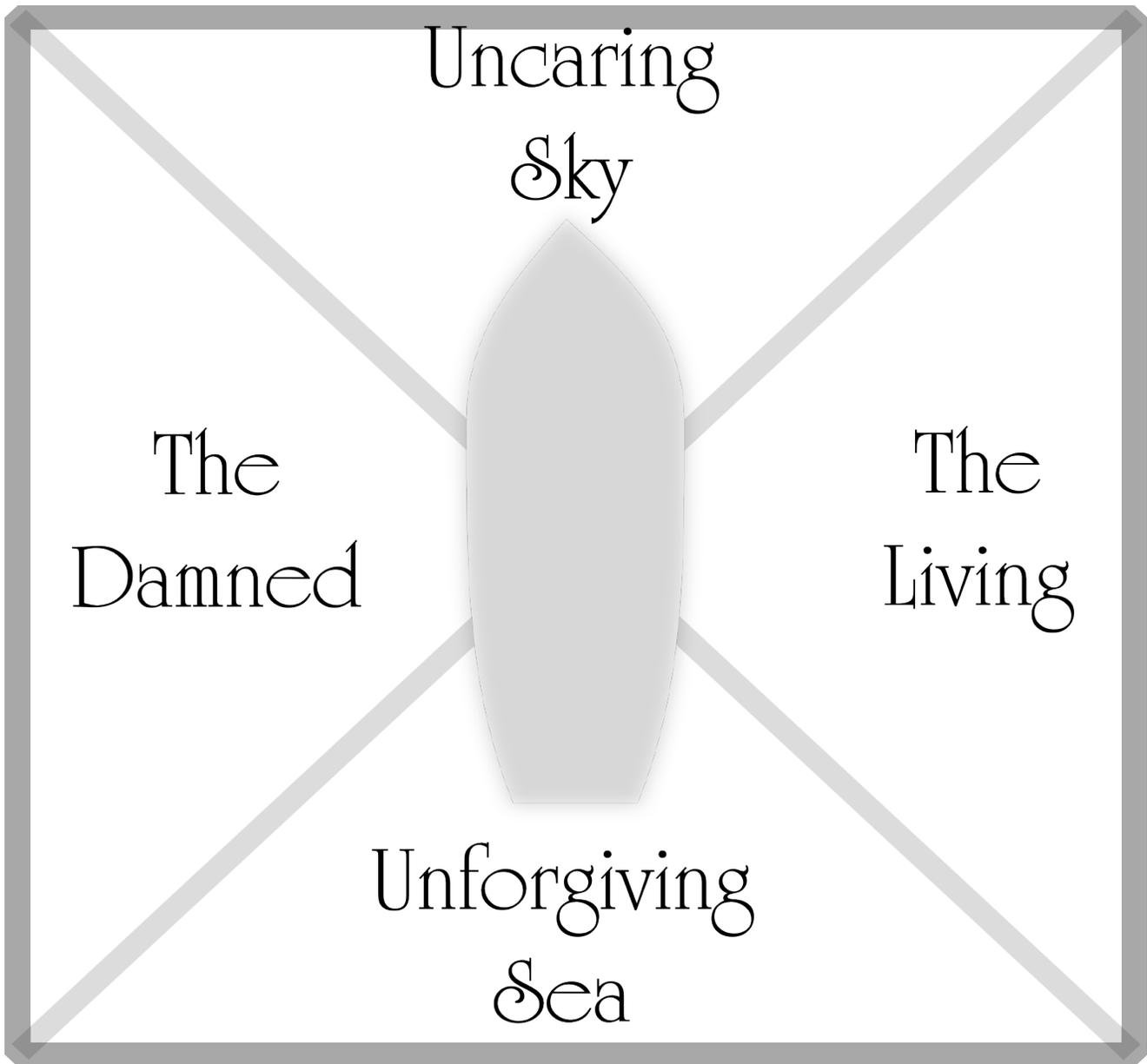
Notes

This is the second draft of the rules summary, completed for Game Chef 2009. The suggested theme of Intrigue did nothing for me at all, so I ignored it. Three of the four ingredients – Dividers, Star, and Seabirds – suggested something maritime, and in that context Seabirds reminded me immediately of the Albatross in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner". I decided to *only use that ingredient*, plus the **The Wm. Appleby-Jenkins Chair of Archaeological and Zombiological Sciences** award, to reinterpret Coleridge's concept of Life-in-Death and create a game of damned, zombie characters on a cursed ship, the *Flying Dutchman* itself. It's *the Rime of the Ancient Mariner* crossed with *Night Gallery*, *The Twilight Zone*, *Tales from the Crypt* and the *Tales of the Black Freighter* comic-within-a-comic in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.

This game, at least in this incarnation, may also qualify for the Brevity Award (four pages of rules or less,) depending on whether you interpret "the rules" to mean the actual game description or the entire document; ignoring the cover page and the full-sized version of the dice map, the document is four pages long. The final rules will be longer, with the summary rules being included as sidebar material, summarizing longer explanations in the main text.

The illustration is by **Paul Gustave Doré** (born 1832, died 1883,) an early illustrator of Coleridge's *Rime*. Amusingly, the illustration isn't from the *Rime*, it's from an illustrated version of the Bible and depicts the Great Flood; I liked it and decided to use it. It's in the public domain and is available on [Wikimedia Commons](#) as "[The World Destroyed by Water](#)".

The Character Creation and Basic Play sections are a basic framework I've used on a couple other games ([Resist the Atom!](#), [Out of Frame](#)) that evolved out of my earlier Game Chef/24 Hour designs.



Roll 3d6 on dice map. Where the dice land determines what happens.

- **lowest result:** where the threat comes from. Also indicates strength (Luck) of encounter.
- **highest result:** what the threat endangers or otherwise acts on.

Suggested Interpretations:

- **The Damned:** The dead crew, whether long dead or newly impressed. As a target (highest result,) may include ordinary corpses, coffins, other symbols of death.
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