

The GameMaster's Apprentice

Adventure Guide: Age of Sail

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Special Thanks

This project was backed on Kickstarter by more than 360 supporters. Without their help, The GameMaster's Apprentice would never have been more than a pet project in my own home games.

Thanks so much!

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INTRODUCTION

What is an Adventure Guide?

An Adventure Guide is a collection of tips for designing and/or running a role playing game, in a given genre, and using The GameMaster's Apprentice deck of cards. These guides should be helpful whether you are using the base, genre-neutral deck or any of the genre-specific decks, and (up to a point) can even be used without the deck of cards, though that defeats the true purpose of the guide: to provide enough inspiration and enough examples that, once you've exhausted the possibilities presented here, you'll have an easy time creating your own story seeds using just the cards.

How to use this guide

After this introduction, you'll find a section dedicated to advice on constructing an open-ended story framework. That framework can serve as structure you fill in, giving you a more complete adventure, or you can use it to help run a more free-flowing story. While this is 100% useable without the cards, this style of adventure prep is also ideal for games where the cards will be used heavily (either as GM support, or as the GM itself), as it provides options to use the cards to choose from, and suggests characters and dangers the cards might be referencing in their random events or story seeds.

Next, the guide goes over advice on generating quest seeds. This consists primarily of tables that work both by themselves and with the deck, and which are aimed at the conventions of the Age of Sail.

Wrapping it up after that are two sections meant to help tweak the use of the deck to generate high-seas oriented characters and random events, and then an example of creating very genre-specific tools for your game--in this case, a ship name generator.

These tools can be used independently or in concert, during prep or during play; I recommend reviewing them all briefly before you start, and then you can decide how you will get the most benefit out of them!

ADVENTURE FRAMEWORKS

The guidelines here are essentially a set of advice on preparing the framework of an adventure, quickly and efficiently. It might seem overly simplistic, but we're targeting a framework instead of a full adventure because it provides you as a GM with two essential ingredients. First, it ensures you have enough information to always answer the quintessential question, "What happens next?" Second, it gives you the freedom to let the story evolve naturally.

One of the biggest problems with a traditional pre-printed adventure is its limited scope of choices and possible outcomes; that's a large part of what inspired *The GameMaster's Apprentice* in the first place. However, even though I love using random content to enhance my games, I do like to be able to keep things consistent--and planning ahead in broad strokes can make that much easier, and makes the stories that result feel more real and engaging.

These frameworks are partially inspired by my work on *Missions for the Demon Hunters: A Comedy of Terrors Role Playing Game*, which was in turn inspired by many other games, some based on the Fate and Apocalypse World systems. If you think the frameworks here work well for your games, you might want to check out those books for more ideas!

Framework Creation Summary

So, to make an adventure framework, follow these steps--a more detailed explanation of each will follow this brief checklist:

- Choose a Core
- Ask a Big Question which the game will revolve around (optional)
- Choose a Doom
 - Describe the Doom's Goal
 - Outline the Doom's Plan to achieve this goal, in 2-3 stages
 - Create the Cast for the Doom, describing 1-3 characters or features
- Create 3 other Problems
 - Choose a different Type for each Problem (recommended)
 - Give each a Goal
 - Outline the Plan each has, in 2-3 stages
 - Create a Cast for each Problem, including 1-3 characters or features
- Ask 1-3 Little Questions that provide interesting hooks (optional)

Choose a Core

A Core is a central principle of the genre; naturally, a given game will be likely to touch on more than one genre convention, but selecting a single Core when planning out a framework is meant to help you focus on choosing other elements that will work well together. The theory here is that stating your target up front will make it easier to achieve. If you find the Cores to be too broad for your tastes, select the most relevant and refine it; reword it or replace it with a more specific version.

Here are three Cores that cover a significant majority of Age of Sail stories; you can add to the list or modify what you see here, as need be:

To weather the storm: This Core covers both literal and figurative storms; a crew trying to survive hard times, a war, a single battle, or any other force that threatens their existence and forces them to band together ever tighter. These stories tend to feature mounting obstacles and the real, increasing danger of losing people or the whole ship, so the stakes need to be very clear at all times. Do you ensure the safety of the ship by risking the life of a friend? Do you gamble your ship for the survival of the fleet?

To go where there be monsters: This Core is about exploring, both in the literal sense, but also in the sense of adventure, or of engaging with the unknown. The crew might be charting unfamiliar waters, making a map for those to follow after, or they might be going to visit a distant and strange land, engaging in social encounters for which they are ill-equipped. The differentiation between this and the previous Core is intent; here, the crew is at least nominally responsible for heading into danger, and not just reacting to dire circumstances.

To raise the black flag: This Core is central to stories and games featuring a pirate crew, of course, but also others who are out for glory and riches. Treasure hunts could just as easily be featured here as in the previous Core, depending on the motivation and tone of the quest. In this case, the morality of the crew may be in serious question, especially if they behave as actual, historical pirates, rather than the romanticized alternatives.

Ask a Big Question (Optional)

This isn't a required step, but something I bring into my games because I firmly believe that a game can be as much a piece of literature as a novel or a play--and one of the things that defines 'literature' for me is the exploration of a grand question.

When it comes to a novel, the answers (or possible answers) to these questions are often discussed as 'themes' of the text, but those are actually secondary; the important part, honestly, is the question itself. While the best example I've ever seen of a game asking a big question is the classic computer-based RPG from Bioware, *Planescape: Torment*, I've also seen the tactic work well in games I and others have GMed.

If you want to give it a shot, after you've selected a Core, consider these examples of Big Questions that fit easily into games set on ships:

What is one's highest duty?

What is the price of loyalty?

Can one ever be prepared for command?

What is the greatest treasure one can have?

There is a nearly infinite variety of questions that could be asked here; think through your favorite books, movies, TV shows, and games if you need more inspiration!

Once you have a question, what do you do? Keep it in the back of your mind when planning and making decisions for your NPCs. If the question is *What is one's highest duty?* then the game will have to involve conflicting, but equally valid, duties to test against each other. *What is the price of loyalty?* is a similar question, but would probably be best asked in a game with a single bond of loyalty that is tested, again and again, with higher costs each time. Asking *Can one ever be prepared for command?* will surely include many opportunities to prove a leader unprepared, and *What is the greatest treasure one can have?* demands a story rife with temptation of various kinds.

But whatever you do, **you must NOT answer the question** yourself! Let the players explore possible answers as the story unfolds. The best games will develop their answers naturally, if at all, and will still leave you thinking at the end.

Choose a Doom

A Doom is the thing that looms on the horizon. It doesn't have to be the primary focus of the story as it starts, but it squats in the darkness just beyond the firelight and *waits*. This is something that will change the world for the worse unless the characters act.

The biggest challenge in picking an appropriate Doom is realizing that it doesn't have to be physical, concrete foe. Yes, *The Pirate King* is a useable Doom, but so are *The Plague* and *Superstitious Nonsense*.

Really, any major threat that could vastly change the world if left unchecked could be a good choice for the framework's Doom. If you're not sure about an idea, think through these questions:

Can the *characters* (as opposed to the players) potentially see the Doom coming, given warning or reason to be suspicious?

Once identified, could the Doom possibly be stopped by the characters?

Will the Doom change something significant about the world if it isn't stopped?

If the answers to all three are *Yes*, then you probably have an acceptable Doom.

While designing your Doom, keep in mind the Core (and possibly Big Question) you already selected. Whatever it is, the Doom should fit in with a game focused on those elements.

If you can't come up with something that feels worthy of the title, take a look at the Problems section below; the suggested categories of Problems could all apply to Dooms, and might inspire you to pick a Doom you wouldn't otherwise have thought of.

Once you have a Doom, it's time to fill out some details about them.

Describe the Doom's Goal

The Goal of a Doom is their endgame; here, you should specify at least one target they have, one thing that will drastically change the world if they can achieve it. Why do this? Because if you know what it wants, you'll always know how it would adapt to deal with a changing situation.

Write a sentence that describes what will happen if the players choose to let the Doom act unchecked. If your Doom is *The Pirate King*, their Goal might be to *Rule the high seas and keep all others in port*. A Doom like *The Plague* might be 'trying' (despite its lack of intelligence) to *Spread to all ports and bring down civilization as we know it*, and something like *Superstitious Nonsense* might drive townsfolk to do terrible things, like *Burn all scholars as witches and warlocks and bring about an age of darkness*.

Outline the Doom's Plan

With the Doom's Goal already known, create two or three intermediary steps for it to achieve on the road to that Goal. These things will have to happen (or be replaced by other things mid-game, since plans do sometimes change) before the Goal is reached. They serve a dual purpose: they act as a countdown mechanism to let the characters know that the Doom is threatening to harm the world (because bad things are happening, not because they have access to the checklist or know what the Goal is), and they make it easy to provide a new challenge or scene if you don't know what else to do.

Write a sentence for each step of the Plan, describing both **what** the Doom is going to accomplish, and **how** it will do so. Before *The Pirate King* can *Rule the high seas and keep all others in port*, he will have to *Earn the loyalty of other pirate captains* and then *Earn worldwide infamy as a ruthless killer*. On the other hand, *The Plague* will have to *Spread to major hubs via stowaways and sailors* and *Infect ships before they can be quarantined*, and the *Superstitious Nonsense* is going to *Instill fear through unfortunate coincidences* and use them to *Cause townsfolk to fear outsiders*, before leading them to *Hate those who bring knowledge or outside influence*.

Create the Cast for the Doom

The Cast is exactly what it sounds like: one to three NPCs who either represent or are involved with the Doom in some way. They could be the Doom itself (*The Pirate King*), or a henchman, victim, bystander, witness, catalyst, the questgiver for the characters.... anyone involved. Of course, more characters will likely be involved later, but this way you'll have something to draw on.

Also, keep in mind that the ‘cast’ for a Doom might include more than sapient characters; critical locations or events might also serve as sources of knowledge or interaction.

At this stage, description is more important than mechanics; write a sentence for each character, naming them and pinning down a few important facts. If you feel like adding stats, go for it. *The Pirate King* might have a valet named *Westley, who serves him only to earn money for marriage*. *The Plague* might be spread by *Rats, cats, and dogs, carrying fleas*, and also be opposed by *Virgil, the Royal Physician*. *Superstitious Nonsense* would have *The young and credulous* and *People proud of their ignorance* as proponents, and would encourage a general *Hatred of scholars and the educated* amongst the populace, as a feature any NPC might have.

Create Three Other Problems

Since the Doom is the big, long-range issue, Problems are the shorter-term... problems. Most settings worthy of adventure will have more than one thing going on at a time, and these Problems will serve as the driving force behind most of the early game, before the Doom starts ramping up its Plan.

Problems can be many things, just as the Doods can; the key difference is scale. Problems are still bad, and they still have Goals that they want to achieve via their own Plans, but those Goals won't shatter the world as you know it (or, at least, not all of it). If the Doom could be a *Pirate King* whose Goal is *Rule the high seas and keep all others in port*, a Problem might be a *Traitorous Navy Captain* whose Goal is to *Pillage the towns of the western coast*.

To encourage the creation of three extremely different Problems, I advise that you make each Problem of a different Type. Below are descriptions of Types appropriate to an Age of Sail setting, but you can always add to this list if you want.

Pirates: Actual pirates, undead sailors, rodents of unusual size; they generally present little danger individually, but become a more serious issue in large groups or when ignored and left to enact their schemes. Their Goals usually revolve around destruction motivated by their own survival.

Brig: Prisons, underground caverns, ancient ruins, lost temples, sunken ships with air pockets; these Problems are actually places, which may pose a danger in many ways. They might serve as a pirate base for raids, or they could contain something that would be terrible and dangerous if it fell into the wrong hands.

Kraken: A particularly vicious pirate leader, a sea monster, a master swordsman who duels all who want to cross his bridge; just because they aren't actually the Doom, that doesn't mean they are going to sit on the sidelines. A big baddie with a Goal that is less serious than "world domination" is still a Problem that needs dealing with; conquering a small village or driving out a legitimate leader is still bad.

Curse: Bubonic plague, evil magic, rampant distrust, murmurs of rebellion; sometimes a Problem is diffuse or abstract in the extreme. These may not be capable of intentional planning, but they still have a Goal, usually one that involves spreading their darkness and causing further chaos.

Give each Problem a Goal

Once you've selected three different Problems with three different Types, give each of them a distinct Goal. Just like the Doom's Goal, the Problems' Goals are their grand plans. Write a sentence for each that explains what will happen if the characters choose not to get involved.

If you want to be extra tricky, the Goals of the Problems could be used as steps in the Doom's Plan (possibly meaning you have to go back and edit that), tying them all together into a coherent(-ish) whole.

Outline a Plan for each Problem

Harken back to the Plan you made for the Doom and repeat the process here. What are the steps involved in the Problem reaching its Goal? Think up two to three steps per Problem, and write a sentence for each step.

Create a Cast for each Problem

Next, create one to three important characters or features (locations, major events, strange effects, etc) for each Problem. While it's entirely possible that some characters might be involved in more than one Problem (a pirate crew who also pass on a plague to towns they raid), try come up with at least one unique individual per Problem; remember that these are just inspiration, and you will probably add to these lists during play.

Ask 1-3 Little Questions (Optional)

As you wrap up, hopefully you've created a number of possible starting points. Once you know who the characters are and where they begin the game, it should be fairly easy to decide which Problem presents itself first.

But if you have a real, living setting, there is going to be more going on in the world than the various disasters that strike.

Do any of the characters (player or not) have a particular fate they either seek or avoid? Are there any links between characters that might be worth exploring? What is at stake if the Problems or the Doom manage to achieve their Goals--or even just a step of their Plan? Who stands to suffer?

Ask some specific questions about situations, characters, or events; questions that can't be answered until play progresses. These are entirely optional, but force you to consider who or what stands to be lost or changed, depending on the outcomes of the story. Of course, the questions might be voided or necessarily altered before they are answered, but that's fine--these are just to keep you thinking, and to ensure that you have material to draw on if at any point you can't think of what the next scene should be.

The Point: Scene Creation

Your newly-created framework is a reference sheet for where the story *might* go, without interfering with its natural evolution; it lets you play without either railroading the players down a certain path or letting the game grind to a halt for lack of content. The notes you take for the framework are to make sure you always have a way to generate a new scene.

Introducing one of the Problems? That can be a scene. Advancing the Plan of a Problem or the Doom? Scene. One of the Cast needs to be given some screen time? Another scene. If a Problem achieves their Goal, that's one or more scenes right there, and if the Doom reaches its Goal you've probably got one or more whole *sessions* just dealing with that. And, for things with a smaller scope, the Little Questions can be dealt with, or the Big Question danced around.

Example of a Complete Framework

GMA Framework Sheet	
Core: To weather the storm	
<i>Big Question:</i> Can one ever be prepared for command?	
Doom: Turncoat Admiral ventra	Plan: 1) Mutiny against the Navy and take many ships with him; 2) Destroy the core of the Loyalist fleet; 3) Force all major cities to surrender to him Cast: Admiral ventra; his daughter, Captain Elaine ventra; his sickly and bedridden son, willum ventra, who opposes him.
Goal: Control the seas, control the world!	
Problem 1: Captain Greenbeard's Crew (Pirates)	Plan: 1) Steal the official plans for shipping of supplies; 2) Attack under cover of darkness Cast: Greenbeard, bilious pirate; Skwee, his first mate
Goal: Rob the supply ships of the Loyalist fleet	
Problem 2: Rebellions (curse)	Plan: 1) Rile up townsfolk at the taverns; 2) Bring rioting citizens to city halls and so forth; 3) Force leaders to surrender, or be replaced Cast: general discontent; Fond memories of Admiral ventra when he was loyal
Goal: Throw major cities into chaos, turn them over to ventra	
Problem 3: Redmaw (Kraken)	Plan: 1) Follow ships to battle; 2) Attack weakened vessels; 3) Make it impossible to rescue crews from foundering ships Cast: Redmaw, sea monster; Barnaby, grizzled monster hunter.
Goal: Feast on drowning sailors	
<i>Little Questions:</i> will Barnaby catch his prey? will Elaine ventra be persuaded by her brother, and turn on her father? will Elaine fall in battle on one side or the other?	

Blank Framework Sheet

GMA Framework Sheet	
Core:	
<i>Big Question:</i>	
Doom:	Plan:
Goal:	Cast:
Problem 1:	Plan:
Goal:	Cast:
Problem 2:	Plan:
Goal:	Cast:
Problem 3:	Plan:
Goal:	Cast:
<i>Little Questions:</i>	

ADVENTURE PREMISES

The premise of a story is the back cover of the module, the elevator pitch for the game, or the message you send a friend to try and hook them into making a character. It doesn't tell you everything about the entire story, but it gives you a place to start.

Following these tips, you'll be creating fill-in-the-blank style adventure premises that will hopefully inspire further ideas. Before you begin, you should decide for yourself if your game is going to include any fantastic elements, and how historical, military, or piratical you want the game to be, as well as what tone you are going for. After that, if you wind up with an option that doesn't feel like it fits your concept, choose again!

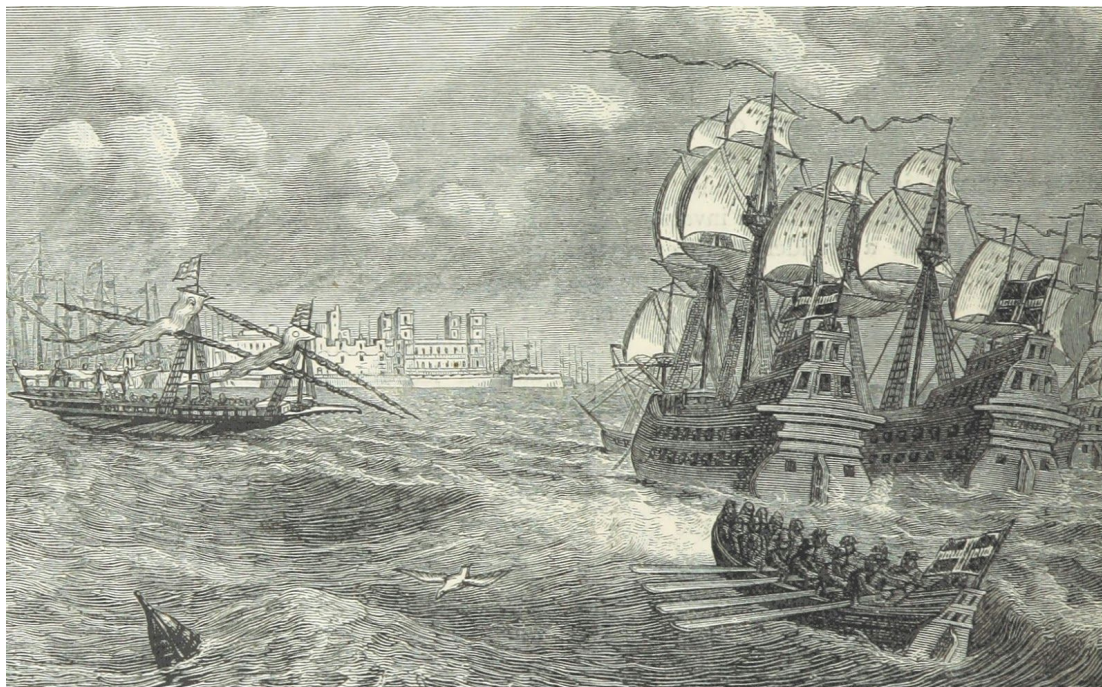
To use these randomizer lists the way I do, follow these steps.

Fill in the Blanks

Start with this sentence, treating the underlined portions as blanks to fill in:

The Questgiver asks you to complete this task because reasons.

If any parts of that sentence are already decided for you (or by you), fill them in first, and then skip the associated steps below; if you know the Questgiver is going to be the character's boss, there isn't a reason to randomize it. Also, before you start rolling, review these tables and replace the options you don't like with ones that fit your style.



The Questgiver

Who is sending you on this quest? For a more down-to-earth game, use the Difficulty Selector to randomize; for a game more likely to involve the strange and powerful, just use a d10. (Note! If there are several ideas listed in square brackets ([secret society/religion/guild]), then pick or randomize from that sub-list.)

Roll	Questgiver
1	The high council of a [secret society/religion/guild]
2	A tremendously powerful [military/political/religious/mercantile/pirate] leader
3	The [officer/pirate/company man/strange old person] that once did you a favor
4	Your hometown's [elders/governor/innkeeper]
5	The [captain/master/employer/leader/owner] you serve
6	A [family member/friend/old flame/merchant/traveler]
7	A [shadowy figure/old wanderer/note on your door] at the inn
8	An apprentice [pirate/tradesman/scholar/priest] in over their head
9	An apparition in an [unsettling nightmare/induced vision/recurring dream]
10	A seemingly real (but still a charlatan?) [wizard/witch/spirit/mermaid]

The Task

Here we have a more interesting table. The first column covers warfare, but also the diplomatic missions that might arise during a war; the second provides exploration and adventure to strange lands; and the third is focused on tales of piracy and swashbuckling romance, including espionage (because actual, realistic piracy would be a bit limited and a lot villainous). All three columns contain potential or blatant supernatural elements, but those are always in the very high or very low numbered rows. If you wish to avoid them, use the Difficulty Generator and edit or reroll if you prefer an entirely mundane world.

Roll	Warfare	Exploration	Piracy
1	find a way to fight a seemingly immortal [ship/captain/crew/monster]	seek out a [person/spirit/monster/place/ship] of legend	decode a cryptic map that leads to [treasure/power/an important place/a hidden port]
2	Tow a ship to port after [it was captured/its captain was killed/it was damaged]	find and bring back [an artifact/ancient knowledge/a cure]	crash a fancy party so you can [speak with/seduce/kidnap] someone important
3	bring [medicine/supplies/weapons] to someone who needs them	find a retired [scholar/captain/navigator/pirate] who knows important secrets	smuggle [contraband goods/medicine/ a person/weapons] past authorities
4	travel on a mission of [diplomacy/military aid] into hostile waters	explore a [shipwreck/island/lost city/dangerous sea]	travel on a mission of [espionage/assassination]
5	cut off supply lines to [a colonial authority/a shipping empire/an occupying force]	find and help the survivors of a [shipwreck/lost expedition]	capture a ship with a particularly valuable cargo of [goods/weapons/important people]
6	cross battle-lines to deliver a vital message to [your/your enemy's] military commander	go where there be dragons, and fill in the map with [island/coastal] details	foment [rebellion/uprising/piracy/resistance to invaders]
7	capture a famous [pirate/enemy] captain alive	survive the navigation of a dangerous [storm/strait/reef/passage]	identify a traitorous [enemy agent/former friend/person of power]
8	suppress desires or ability for [rebellion/uprising/piracy/enemy resistance]	find a missing person who [vanished/was kidnapped/was press-ganged]	build a reputation with [nobles/pirates/explorers]
9	escape from a [shipwreck/island prison/fortress]	bring [settlers/travelers/trade goods/important diplomats] to a newly discovered land	yet again [fight/escape from] your nemesis
10	destroy a dangerous [beast/curse/ enemy ship] that threatens an area	prove or disprove rumors of a [sea monster/ghost ship/curse/enchanted treasure]	claim the bounty on a [sea monster/ghost ship/beast]

Reasons

Why must you complete this task? What drives you? Unless some reason has already presented itself (and it might well have, either because you knew it ahead of time or because the task you picked suggests one to you), roll on this table to find out. Like the Questgiver table, this one is weighted to have more 'reasonable' motivations grouped in the middle, so use the Difficulty Selector if that appeals to you.

Roll	Reasons
1	you were promised [a royal pardon/land and title/vast power].
2	your [fate/birthright/family/life] hangs in the balance.
3	you are compelled to by a [curse/debt/oath/duty].
4	a [lover/friend/mentor/crewmate] of yours could die otherwise.
5	you were promised [treasure/a favor/fame/greater challenges].
6	you must, to prevent [the deaths of innocents/destruction of lands/greater losses].
7	you must, as this is [a personal trial/a singular opportunity/your only hope].
8	you need the [personal healing/self-confidence/leadership experience] it will bring.
9	you are the only ones who can [complete this task/know about it/survive the challenge].
10	you must, to prevent [war/plague/famine/the fall of civilization].

Premise Tag Symbols

These can be used in the creation of any Age of Sail adventure, using the premise system or not; consider this an example of how to create a tag symbol table for your own games.

After filling in the blanks in the premise, draw one card and look at the three tag symbols that result; if at all possible, find a way to apply their meanings to your game. Only redraw if you can't fit two of the three into your concept; if just one seems to be an outlier, just ignore that one.

Tower	An impressive fortress, a sprawling palace, a powerful flagship; some kind of massive structure is involved. It is likely either remote or heavily guarded (or both).	Moon	Recent events leave loyalties confused and uncertain, perhaps by revealing the flaws in nobility and other leaders. Who is 'good' and who is 'evil' may be in question; suspicion abounds, and betrayal may follow.
Crown	The rich and famous are involved. They may be coming aboard, or may be the subject of the quest (a poisoned ruler to cure, the money-man wants to come along to see the job is done right, etc).	Sword	Open conflict begins; if it already had, it escalates or moves into a new arena. This implies a military conflict, but it could be social, religious, or mercantile instead.
Heart	Family, friendship, or romance are at stake; if they were already involved, then the situation becomes more extreme, or the relationship is threatened. This can be very significant if it involves characters of different social classes!	Shield	The characters must protect someone or something vulnerable--either constantly, or it becomes part of their overall goal. A rescue might be involved, or playing bodyguard.
Skull	Fatal consequences are likely; death may already have struck. Someone could be dying, or have recently been killed, or could be sentenced to death. Seeking or earning a pardon may be critical!	Target	A new, secondary goal is introduced; completing it will help with the primary quest, but failing to do so will NOT stop the characters from reaching their objective.
Sun	A recent discovery (probably by an explorer or captain) has revealed something extremely important; this discovery must be acted upon quickly. A land rush?	Wand	The appearance of the supernatural (even if it turns out to be a clever hoax by a charlatan) is part of the story. Monsters? Ghost ships? Magic? Anything is possible. If you want things to be more symbolic or unclear, perhaps instead someone has strange dreams of ominous portent...

CHARACTERS

You can already randomize characters with the deck, but to tweak them for an Age of Sail game, here are two suggestions.

Professions

Before you draw for any other components of the character, consider giving them a random profession appropriate to the current setting--that may give you some ideas to start with, and will help cut down on the problem where 90% of people encountered on the street are either a drunk sailor or a fat merchant.

This table is weighted with more statistically common professions towards the middle, so draw for the Difficulty Selector instead of rolling a d10 if you want the randomization to be more “realistic” (scare-quotes because the percentages are weighted towards the intersection of real life and shipboard life, but I make no claims to a specific level of historical accuracy for a given era, and your game-world may balance jobs differently).

Roll	Professions
1	Commissioned Officer (commodore, captain, commander, lieutenant,)
2	Warrant Officer (master, surgeon, chaplain, purser)
3	Standing Officer (gunner, boatswain, carpenter)
4	Petty Officer (yeoman, watch captain, master-at-arms, mate)
5	Seaman (gunsmith, able seaman, quarter gunner)
6	Tradesman (ropemaker, shipwright, blacksmith, cobbler, clothier)
7	Servant (ship's boy, maid, cook)
8	Criminal or Noble (thief, con artist, assassin, saboteur, duke, baroness)
9	Adventurer (big game hunter, explorer, archaeologist)
10	Leader (political, religious, company, nobility)

Character Tag Symbols

As with anything else, you can modify characters by drawing one card and applying the Tag Symbols; here is an example table to get you started. When you draw, try to fit at least two of the results into your NPC!

Tower	The NPC is taciturn and generally unwilling to talk to anyone without significant motivation. This could be because of their backstory, or simply a natural inclination.	Moon	The NPC is hiding a secret, either or big or small, that has at least a little bearing on the story. Characters are likely to spot this, but may not be able to divine the secret.
Crown	Regardless of current circumstances, the NPC has a powerful family or bloodline. They may literally be related to the crown, or they could be elevated for their past deeds, or similar	Sword	The NPC is a more capable fighter than might otherwise be apparent. Their talents might lie in unusual training, natural ability, possession of a powerful weapon, or even something mystical.
Heart	Either the NPC is a potential (or former) romantic interest for a character, or the NPC is linked to the story through romantic or family ties.	Shield	The NPC is highly protective of their friends and loved ones, and is extremely dedicated; they would willingly sacrifice themselves for their duty.
Skull	The NPC is sick--not necessarily with fatal consequences, but that depends on the circumstances. The disease, its spread, or its interaction with other problems may prove serious.	Target	The NPC has an agenda that they want the character's help to fulfill-though the characters may not be aware of it at first, and it may or may not align with their own goals in the end.
Sun	The NPC is naturally curious or adventurous, and would be easily persuaded to join the party, and may likewise be hard to dissuade from stowing away.	Wand	The NPC is especially charming and witty, whether or not they are actually nice, kind, or otherwise friendly. Enemies with this trait may come across as particularly disturbed or disturbing...

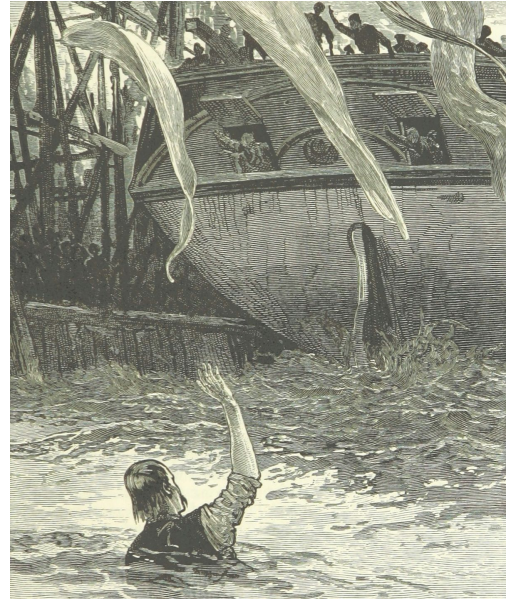
ENCOUNTERS

Here are two tools to help keep things moving if you need a quick random encounter. They can be used separately or together.

Premade Combos

One problem with true randomization is that the results have the potential to throw you for a loop or be otherwise frustrating. If you draw for a random event, but get a combination of Noun + Verb you don't think makes any sense (or if you just want to start your game with some pre-made suggestions available), roll on this table!

Because it only provides a Noun and Verb, you can also then draw an Adjective to further modify the encounter.



Roll	Verb, Noun, and Suggestions
1	Launch/Grudge: Something ignites a feud between two characters. Who? Why? And how serious is this grudge?
2	Meet/Salvation: Characters in dire straits meet someone who can help them--or, if not, perhaps they meet an interesting priest or pilgrim or other religious NPC.
3	Befriend/Death: A murderer or other bad person appeals to the players for help.
4	Foil/Chaos: A disaster is narrowly averted, but perhaps will strike again if not rectified.
5	Exchange/Contraband: Someone offers a bribe of illegal goods in exchange for not being stopped from going about their "business."
6	Travel/Ship: Getting to the ship becomes an adventure goal all by itself; was it stolen?
7	Interrupt/Relief: Just as things seemed to be getting better, something terrible happens...
8	Alter/Freedom: Characters are arrested or released, pardoned or charged.
9	Trespass/Prison: The ship accidentally finds itself run aground on an island prison...
10	Discourage/Food: A short, unimportant scene, highlighting the disgusting nature of the food available aboard ship.

Encounter Tag Symbols

This sample tag symbol table is geared towards modifying events and encounters. These can be used with any encounter (random or not) with suggestions appropriate for the genre. Try to find applications for at least two of the results.

Tower	The encounter introduces a new or unexpected obstacle in the path of the player's main quest. This could be environmental, adversarial, or accidental. Explorers and problem solvers will be front and center here.	Moon	The encounter provides information that contradicts something previously known or discovered. Whether this revelation can be trusted, or is simply a red herring, is unclear. Investigative PCs may have more to do after this.
Crown	The encounter is much more significant than it appears at first; rewards and consequences are more severe. Political or intrigue-interested characters will have their work cut out for them.	Sword	The encounter includes a direct confrontation of some kind--physical, social, mental, or otherwise. If it already did, the difficulty of that confrontation (or the difficulty of avoiding it) increase. Fighters may earn themselves a new enemy here.
Heart	The encounter is personal for one or more characters; something related to their family, their love, or their past is involved or brought to light. Social characters will be highly engaged.	Shield	The encounter gives the characters a chance to rest and recover, or any immediate danger (physical or not) is partially mitigated by circumstances or a third party. Doctors, care-givers, priests, and similar characters will be called upon.
Skull	Death is a potential consequence of the encounter; if it already was, then part of the challenge may be that someone is mortally wounded, and that must be dealt with. Leaders will have to make tough choices.	Target	The encounter is a critical moment for a character, either a PC or an NPC; it may have been arranged or sought out intentionally, in order to further an agenda. Something about it helps them fulfill a goal. At least one character has a personal 'sub-quest' advanced.
Sun	The encounter seems certain to yield clues or information the characters would value, but it may take digging or puzzle-solving to sort them out; navigators and scholars, get to work!	Wand	The encounter introduces or includes elements that are or at least appear supernatural; priests, witches, and alchemists may be helpful--or may be proved charlatans.

Ship Name Generation

While most players would surely want to name their own ship, trying to come up with an interesting name for more than one NPC ship at a time can be as annoying as trying to name every NPC the players speak with. Here is one possible solution.

When you need to name a new ship, draw a card and look at the Tag Symbols. This chart contains 10 different suggested naming habits--unlike most Tag Symbol tables, however, you are going to need to pick ONE from the three possibilities. Consider all three ideas, and pick the one that appeals the most to you in the current circumstances.

Of course, you could simply roll on this table with a d10, or choose from it at will, but the Tag Symbol draw combines a degree of freedom and choice with the randomness provided by a roll. I find this helpful because not every naming convention will be appropriate for every ship, and yet I still want to avoid getting caught in the rut I would surely create for myself if I was choosing freely from the whole set.

Tower	The name of a place or a building, like 'castle,' 'temple,' or so on. Consider drawing a Location for ideas.	Moon	A name that implies skullduggery, murder, or other shadowy endeavors. Take a look at the Random Event Generator or Catalysts for ideas.
Crown	The name of a royal or an important person, or even simply a rank: 'Baron,' or 'Princess Angelique.' Drawing a random Name might help.	Sword	The name of a weapon, or something dangerous or daring. Perhaps select a weapon and then draw a random Adjective or Verb from the Random Event Generator, or a Name ("Owen's Blade," for example).
Heart	The name of someone's sweetheart, or a generic pet name like 'Bonny Lad.' Drawing a random Name may be useful.	Shield	A piece of armor, or a defensively-themed word of some kind. An Adjective, Verb, or Name might go well with it.
Skull	Something intentionally ominous; a synonym for a word such as death, destroyer, disease, or slaughter. Draw a card and look at the Random Event Generator for appropriate words.	Target	A goal-based name, such as Justice or Vengeance; consider modifying it with a Name, Adjective, or even the name of a nobleman or mythological figure.
Sun	A cheerful, lighthearted name, likely referencing light, the sun, or flame. Draw a card for the Random Event Generator as suggestions.	Wand	A mythical creature, such as a mermaid, is featured in the name, perhaps complemented by a Verb or an Adjective.