



The Lonely Mariner

An Adventure For *GURPS Swashbucklers*

by Matt Penn

Introduction

This adventure is a light-hearted romp aimed at pirate or swashbuckling campaigns. Tailor the names and places to suit your own individual game world. This adventure is best played after the characters have been campaigning at sea for some time, and are ready to throw away their hard-earned booty in a riotous debauched fashion, in true pirate style. The adventure should be played in a port that offers a haven to the brethren of the sea. In a historical campaign, this might be Tortuga or Port Royal, the "wickedest city in the world." Paint a picture of a tumultuous, thriving town, full of brothels, gambling dens, and drinking taverns, where Spanish gold is exchanged for simple pleasures and where life is lived for the moment, as it is often violently short and cruel. The plot is simple and depends entirely upon roleplaying; it may well not be suitable for all gaming groups. A chance meeting with a lovestruck sailor offers the swashbucklers a chance to aid a fellow seaman in the pursuit of a beautiful young woman born to another social class and hence a whole world away.

End of a Voyage

The PCs have disembarked from their ship, after the booty has been divided according to the articles, and are making their way expectantly into the port. Although it is midmorning, already the prostitutes are calling out to them, displaying their wares provocatively from windows. A small market in the town piazza is thriving, where exotic luxuries, stolen from their rightful owners, may be bought for a tenth of the European price. Drunken sailors stumble around, flagons in hand. One or two bodies lie unmoving in the building heat of the day, casualties from the previous night's mayhem. The PCs may wish to attend to their own agendas first, after having been at sea for so long, so have a non-player shipmate suggest they meet that evening for some well-earned entertainment in the Lonely Mariner, a tavern he heartily recommends.

The tavern is easy to find, either by asking around or stumbling across it in the small town. It is down a dirty, cobbled lane, and consists of a simple wooden building. The windows and doors are wide open in an attempt to allow the sea breeze to provide partial relief from the stifling tropical heat and humidity. The simple entrance leads into a dank, dark sweaty room, filled with all manner of desperados carousing at wooden tables, and a small central pit, in which vicious cock fights run continuously. The proprietor is Mme. Beauchamp, a carefully attired middle-aged woman. She seems to be a favorite with many of the patrons, and handles the crowd with skill and confidence, matching their coarseness and vulgarity with her own particular mirth and wit. The night's takings disappear within the many folds of her clothes.

Allow the PCs to indulge in all manner of vice. Mme. Beauchamp also runs a number of prostitutes, who will lead those willing to part with their gold for a few minutes of tenderness, upstairs to a row of small rooms of questionable hygiene.

Among the rogues present, three very different men stand out. A young, energetic gentleman will

capture the sailors' attention. Dressed in light, baggy clothing, with his hair tied neatly back and a carefully trimmed beard, he seems very out of place . . . as does his companion, a lively African man with large golden rings dangling from his ears. Laughing uproariously, they hurl dice around a table, seeming not to care whether fortune is with them or against them. Their antics keep the whole table amused. Mme. Beauchamp serves them drinks herself, and they are obviously favored patrons. The PCs may join them in a furious gambling session, and if they play with a similar devil-may-care attitude, the gentleman will take a liking to them and invite them to carouse late into the night.

The gentleman is a gifted storyteller and revels in a good yarn, and often holds his audience in rapt attention as he narrates various exploits and adventures. He introduces himself simply as Marcel, and his companion as Henri. He cannot disguise his good upbringing, and the seamen will suspect he is indeed a man fallen from grace. Use Marcel and Henri to whip the PCs up into a frenzy of riotous behavior. As the night progresses, the stories and the wagers should become more outlandish and unbelievable. Only those skilled in carousing should be able to keep some modicum of decency.

The third man to capture their attention is an extremely good looking young sailor, sitting quietly on his own, staring down into the depths of his mug of industrial strength rum. He will probably only be noticed after the PCs have embraced the appropriate drunken roleplaying spirit. As his alcohol consumption increases, so does the depth of his obvious gloom and despair. Among the wild festive spirit displayed by every one else, he indeed stands out. The other sailors leave him to his misery; everyone has enough problems of their own, and this night is a chance to forget the evils of their world. The course of this adventure relies entirely on how the privateers approach this encounter. If they are so inclined to attempt to engage this young man in conversation and lift his spirits, they will be able to pry out of him the source of his melancholy. This will take careful roleplaying, good nature, and skill, as what is ailing this young man is hardly the stuff that stout seamen are publicly made of; initially, he is not that willing to divulge. More alcohol will loosen his tongue, but will also turn him into a blubbing mess. If they too ignore this young man, the gregarious Marcel will invite the moping sailor to join him for a drink or two, and loudly pry into the cause of his obvious unhappiness, creating another opportunity for the PCs to become involved.

Meeting The Lonely Mariner

Pierre Sange is a young sailor, who has just arrived from France, crewing on an English merchantship *The Resolute*. Pierre is very quick to emphasize how happy he was before this last voyage. Being literate and numerate -- which is most unusual for a sailor -- he was assigned additional duties several voyages ago, assisting the quartermaster with basic accounting and record-keeping duties. He thus enjoys being privy to the information about what cargo is really being carried, and what it is worth. Given his extra responsibilities, his pay is also significantly higher.

While on his most recent six-week voyage, he had the misfortune to fall head over heels in love with Mme. D'Oreton, the 18-year-old daughter of a wealthy plantation owner, returning home after spending two years in a prestigious finishing school for young ladies in France. He spent many idle hours casting longing glances at her fresh face, her golden ringlets of hair, and her easy grace. The only reaction he ever received from her during the entire voyage was a haughty command to stand aside while she passed through a bulkhead door. This alone shattered his illusions, making him realize the difference between their classes and the impossibility of him ever meeting her and winning her love. Hence his melancholy.

Upon hearing this woeful tale, it is hoped that the joyful, spirited (drunk) PCs will boastfully take on his cause, vowing to help Pierre win her heart. Those PCs who are more hardened and mercenary-minded might be tempted to help Pierre in his quest in return for information regarding cargo details and shipping schedules, thus setting the stage for a future adventure waylaying *The*

Resolute. Pierre has fallen desperately in love and after only a few moments thought, will agree to provide cargo details in the future, providing no crew members are ever hurt, and the source of information is never revealed. (And, of course, GMs can always give Pierre access to campaign-specific items or secrets the pirates have been seeking; surely he would give them up, if only they would help him in this small task . . .) Allow the night to end after such a pledge or bargain has been made, with perhaps a good brawl or passing out in various awkward places.

"We Promised *What Last Night?!?*"

The following day, nursing hangovers and inexplicable bruises, the PCs should encounter their lonely friend, moping about the town. Remembering the previous night's encounter, they should be encouraged to begin plotting how a simple sailor can win this lady's heart. The following information can be ascertained.

From Pierre Sange

- Mme. D'Oreton is the most beautiful, graceful woman he has ever seen. (Every time Pierre is asked about Mme. D'Oreton you should allow your skill at awkward flowery, romantic poetry to blossom, until the PCs wisely learn not to question Pierre about his obsession.)
- A ball is to be held in honor of the three young women who returned from the finishing school. It heralds their "coming out" into society. Pierre overheard the girls chatting about it excitedly on the voyage.

From Townsfolk

- Mme. D'Oreton's father, M. Francis D'Oreton, is a mean, bad-tempered plantation owner with a reputation for harsh treatment of his slaves, even by the poor standards of the times.
- M. D'Oreton was exiled from France for political reasons. He longs to return.
- M. D'Oreton has become incredibly wealthy since arriving in the colony.
- He dotes upon his daughter, giving her everything she wants.

Romeo, Romeo . . .

Every attempt to get Pierre into talking range with Mme. D'Oreton will fail . . . and fail badly. In the town, she will always be accompanied by armed servants, who will take an intense dislike to any ill-bred scum who should leave the pirate quarter and come too close to their master's precious daughter. Attempts to woo her with poetry beneath her balcony or otherwise contact her on her father's property will be foiled, and result in the hounds being unleashed and the plantation foremen attempting to give the guilty party a good lashing with their whips.

The only hope will be for the heroes to secure an invitation for Pierre to the ball, where he can attempt to seduce the young beauty in an environment where she would never expect to meet a common sailor. It is not enough to simply obtain a ticket for Pierre. The heroes should realize that their luckless friend has few social skills, no sense of etiquette, and no suitable clothes. If they don't prepare him adequately for such a potentially vicious social engagement, Pierre will be humiliated beyond belief at the ball. The better they prepare Pierre, the more successful the whole enterprise is likely to be.

The Invitation

The PCs must reason who is most likely to be invited to a ball and how to lay their hands on a written invitation. Each invitation is individually addressed. In a colony full mostly of low-life scum, one could expect that the limited guest list would include the families of wealthy plantation owners, the officers in the local garrison, the captains of any naval vessels currently in port and

important townsfolk and merchants. The simplest way to obtain a written invitation is to waylay a guest on his way to the ball and steal it. This is fraught with danger, as the ball is by invitation only, and if a particular person is missing, his friends will start asking questions . . .

Another potential is to forge an invitation, which means getting hold of an original, access to the guest list, and finding a suitable forger of master skill. This is a swashbuckling game of high adventure; such audacity should be well-rewarded. The guest list is in the hands of the town priest, Father Pedro, who cherishes organizing such social occasions. The priest also cherishes the governor's wife; if he is followed and observed, he may be caught committing cardinal sins with her, and may be blackmailed into adding an extra name or two to the list. Pierre can then pose as a wealthy merchant or whatever else he chooses to be (or the pirates suggest). A more intriguing way, perhaps, is to find out which of those individuals on the guest list might part with their invitation . . . willingly or unwillingly. If the sailors correctly deduce who might be invited, they may reason that most of the locals would be looking forward for months to the occasion, and that their best bet is to try the barracks or the docks.

Sniffing around, they can discover from off-duty soldiers that the captain of the garrison is leaving the day of the ball. He is a tough disciplinarian and will not be missed. His replacement is to arrive one day before the ball. There being a shortage of eligible (appropriate) bachelors, the new captain already has an invitation waiting for him on his newly vacated desk; impersonating the new captain may spring to mind. This will involve abducting him and physically restraining him for the duration of the social event. The only other officer who will be present from the barracks is the Major. He is popular with the troops, as he is a hopeless alcoholic and very lax. He will not notice the switch for his new captain, as long as he is started early in the evening on some strong rum, and kept reasonably inebriated. The other possibility is that of a French naval captain on board a warship, which has arrived in the port. The naval captain is a surly individual, who is much more interested in spending the night in a brothel than at a high society function, and will willingly sell his ticket for 50 livre, or wager it gambling. Again, going as the naval captain has the advantage that no one really knows him.

The Making Of A Gentleman

- **Clothes.** The heroes may think of having a tailor run up a suitable set of ball clothes. There is one gentleman's tailor in the town. He will take an immediate dislike to those of very low social rank and may outright refuse to offer his services. A suitable threat or gift will suffice to change his cowardly-but-greedy mind. He will initially charge 10 livre. An extra bribe or threat will be needed to prevent the tailor from maliciously gossiping to his other customers about the "sailor pretending to be a gentleman." If this precaution is not taken, Pierre will be immediately recognized by his outfit upon arrival. (Kind GMs will give the heroes the opportunity to discover the gossip *before* the ball, and give chances to repair the damage . . .) If Pierre is impersonating the new garrison captain, the unfortunate waylaid man's uniform must be removed for use during the evening, adding insult to injury. If going as the naval captain, an appropriate outfit must be made.
- **Dancing.** At the ball, the guests won't be dancing a jig to the hornpipe. If the players think of this, they may remember Marcel. If Marcel was befriended, he is more than willing to teach Pierre more formal dancing. This could lead to some very embarrassing scenes . . . This will not grant the Dancing skill, but will allow a temporary default of DX-2. If taught to a player who already has Dancing as a skill, a few days of lessons allows Pierre to learn the basic steps of ballroom dancing, and hence use the player's own skill level.
- **Etiquette.** If asked, Marcel will also give a crash course in etiquette. Correct expressions, how to hold cutlery, how to talk to a young lady, etc. This will not grant the skill *Savoir-Faire*, but will allow a temporary default of IQ-1 rather than IQ-4 when interacting with others at the ball. ("Lesson one: Don't say *anything* unless you absolutely have to . . .")
- **Presents.** A suitable gift for the young lady may win her over. Quizzing one of her maids when she comes to town will reveal that the young lady loves a particular type of flower. If the PC flatters the maid and treats her well, this will be an honest answer. If the PC is vile

and threatening, she will describe a flower her mistress is allergic to.

- **Wooring.** Mme. Beauchamp has had her heart broken many times. She can provide invaluable advice on what a young woman would like to hear.

Of course, any of the above can instead be taught by characters with the appropriate background and skills. However the seamen get Pierre to the ball, his chances of success will depend entirely upon how well they have prepared him. Dressed in well-made clothes, he cuts quite a dashing figure. If everything was well-prepared and well executed he should succeed, and win the young lady's heart; Mme. D'Oreton will fall in love both Pierre's true self, *and* the lengths he went to in order to meet her. (Of course, this may have complications of its own . . .) If the heroes ill-prepared Pierre for his attempt, he will be the laughing stock of the night. Regardless, if the heroes don't attend the ball, this should be a tense evening until they hear from Pierre again; did their efforts work? And if not, will their role in the ruse be revealed?

Variations

You may chose to replace Pierre's role with that of a suitable PC who has fallen for the young lady. A Don Juan in the party may fall in love with Mme. D'Oreton as well, and become a direct rival for her affections, either openly or covertly subverting Pierre's attempts. If a PC attends the ball, you will need to recreate a social situation fraught with "danger" for the inexperienced. Holding cutlery the wrong way, crude language, verbal duels with vindictive socialites, dancing with young ladies, building up the courage to talk to Mme. D'Oreton, etc. Allow your imagination to run riot and make the characters sweat!

Potential Consequences

- The swashbucklers may have made numerous enemies. The captain of the garrison, Father Pedro, M. D'Oreton, and so on. This may make things uncomfortable in the town.
- Vincent Paul (see below) may challenge a PC or Pierre to a duel to protect Mme. D'Oreton's "delicate mind" from the dangers of associating with low-lives, should Pierre's background be revealed. Vincent will not think twice about killing a pirate/sailor, but a PC should think carefully about the consequences of killing a gentleman.
- An angry, vicious M. D'Oreton will scour the town with his overseers, searching for those who embarrassed him in public.
- If Pierre should win Mme. D'Oreton's affections, he may well flee the port two weeks later, driven back to the sea to escape her constant whining and nagging.
- If the PCs make a genuine effort to aid Pierre in his quest, true to his word he will make the cargo inventory, sailing schedules, and route for *The Resolute* available, setting the scene for an efficient high seas robbery.

The Cast

All NPCs speak French as their primary language, except Henri, whose primary language is an African one.

Marcel

Marcel is a dashing 28-year-old son of a noble. Exiled from France for killing a powerful man in a duel, he no longer acknowledges his once-privileged social status. Nevertheless he is a good source for social skills. Impulsive, Marcel doesn't dwell upon consequences of his actions. He is literate, educated, and friendly.

ST 12, DX 15, IQ 12, HT 12
Speed: 6.75, Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 12

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance; Charisma+2; Handsome; Literacy.

Disadvantages: Enemy (the family of the man killed in the duel), Impulsive.

Quirks: Polite. Fastidious about personal cleanliness. Refuses to acknowledge his noble birth.

Loyal to Henri.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-16; Carousing-15; Dancing-15; Fast-Draw (Rapier)-15; Fencing (Rapier)-18; Gambling-12; Poetry-13; Riding-15; Savoir-Faire-15; Seamanship-15; Spanish-12.

Equipment: Well dressed in light, baggy clothes. Transitional rapier. 0.60 Flintlock pistol. Pouch with shot and powder.

Note: Marcel has renounced his noble birth, hence this does not currently count as an advantage.

Mme. Beauchamp

Mme. Beauchamp, the owner of the Lonely Mariner, is a beautiful, successful 42-year-old businesswoman. She is more than a match for any of the pirates; she has a finger in many pies at any given time. Literate and self-educated, she is a good source of knowledge on the isle and its colorful characters.

ST 7, DX 8, IQ 14, HT 10

Speed: 4.5, Move: 4

Dodge: 4

Advantages: Beautiful; Charisma+2; Literate; Wealth-Comfortable.

Disadvantages: Second Class Citizen (woman).

Quirks: Soft spot for charming rogues; distrusts Spanish; courageous.

Skills: Area Knowledge (Tortuga)-14; Black Powder Weapons- 10; Diplomacy-14; English-14; Fast-Talk-14; Gambling-14; Holdout-16; Merchant-16; Spanish-14; Streetwise-16.

Equipment: Concealed .50 Pocket Pistol. Total 100 livre hidden in various places on person.

Henri

Henri is 29-year-old escaped plantation slave who has taken a new French name. He is very intelligent, and was taught to read by Marcel. He has a deep hatred of slavery and plantation owners.

ST 14, DX 10, IQ 14, HT 12

Speed: 5.5, Move: 5

Dodge: 5 Parry: 8

Advantages: Literacy; Language Talent +3.

Disadvantages: Social Stigma (escaped plantation slave).

Quirks: Hates plantation owners. Loyal to Marcel. Raises good luck charm to forehead before risky ventures.

Skills: Brawling-12; Carousing-12; Cooking-14; English-14; French-19; Gambling-14; Knife-16, Knife-Throwing-16; Seamanship-15; Spanish-18.

Equipment: Light sailor's clothes, large knife, 3 small throwing knives, wooden African charm on necklace.

Father Pedro

Father Pedro is a 33-year-old French-Spanish priest born of a French father and a Spanish mother. He cannot control his passions for women, despite his vows. He is literate, highly educated, and very handsome.

ST 8, DX 10, IQ 10, HT 10

Speed: 5, Move: 5

Dodge: 5

Advantages: Attractive; Charisma+2; Clerical Investment; Literacy.

Disadvantages: Lecherousness.

Quirks: Identifies as a Frenchman. When preaching, delivers fiery sermons full of portents of doom for sinners.

Skills: Acting-12; Dancing-10; History-10; Latin-10; Literature-10; Riding-12; Savoir-Faire-12; Sex Appeal-12; Spanish-18; Theology-10.

Captain Fouchard

The 30-year-old Captain Fouchard is the new garrison captain. He is conscientious, upright, and a strict disciplinarian. He abstains from all vice. If he is temporarily abducted for the purposes of obtaining an invitation, he will become an implacable, determined foe.

ST 12, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 14

Speed: 6.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 10

Advantages: Alertness+2; Literacy; Military Rank+3; Strong Will+3.

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty (King of France).

Quirks: Very serious, all the time. No sense of humor. Doesn't indulge in any forms of vice and expects his troops not to either. Strict disciplinarian. Unforgiving of others mistakes/offenses.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-14; Brawling-12; Fast-Draw (rapier)-14; Fencing (rapier)-16; Intimidation-12; Interrogation-12; Knife-12; Leadership-12; Stealth-12; Tactics-12.

Maneuvers: Counterattack-12; Disarming-12; Feint-14; Lunge-16; Riposte-14.

Equipment: Military dress. Transitional rapier. Main-Gauche. .60 Flintlock Pistol. Telescope.

Mme. D'Oreton

Already a difficult, spoiled child, Mme. D'Oreton's years at the finishing school have taught her that social class matters. Treated as an inferior because she was born in the colonies, her school years were miserable. Now 18 years old, she intends to teach others that -- at least in this corner of the world -- she is their social better.

ST 8, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 12

Speed: 6, Move: 6

Dodge: 6

Advantages: Literacy; Status+1; Very Beautiful; Voice.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Bully; Jealousy; Second Class Citizen (woman); Stubbornness.

Quirks: Talks about herself incessantly. Loves performing songs in public.

Skills: Dancing-15; Riding-14; Savoir-Faire-14; Sex Appeal-16; Singing-16.

M. Francis D'Oreton

M. Francis D'Oreton is a 48-year-old bad-tempered, selfish plantation owner who was exiled for political reasons. Irritated by the tropical heat, he is always red and sweaty. He is notorious for the ill treatment of his slaves. If embarrassed in public, he will hound those responsible with the unreasoned passion he has for making others suffer.

ST 8, DX 8, IQ 11, HT 10

Speed: 4.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 4 Parry: 6

Advantages: Filthy rich; Literacy; Single Minded; Status+2.

Disadvantages: Cowardice; Enemy (political enemies in France); Fat; Reputation (cruelty to slaves).

Quirks: Greedy. Selfish. Thirsts for revenge upon those who cross him. Dotes on daughter.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-10; Fencing (rapier)-9; Intimidation-12; Merchant-15; Riding-11; Spanish-13.

Equipment: Slashing Rapier. Flintlock .52 pistol. Flintlock .69 (custom made hunting firearm). Pouch with 200 livre. Flashy clothes.

Pierre Sange

Pierre Sange is a young French sailor. Very handsome. Although he is melancholic, dreamy, and absent-minded, he has accomplished much for only being 20 years old. He is literate and fluent in French and English, with a working knowledge of Spanish.

ST 10, DX 14, IQ 10, HT 12

Speed: 6.5, Move: 6

Dodge: 6 Parry: 7

Advantages: Handsome; Literacy.

Disadvantages: Wealth- Struggling.

Quirks: Romantic at heart. Daydreams.

Skills: Boating-14; Brawling-16; Climbing- 14; Cooking-10; English- 12; Knife-14; Seamanship-12; Spanish- 10; Streetwise-10.

Equipment: Sailor's clothes. Small knife. Gold earring.

Vincent Paul

Vincent Paul is a 26-year-old hotheaded duelist. The aggressive, arrogant son of a plantation owner, he can make a dangerous rival for Mme. D'Oreton's affections at the ball should the GM decide it needs further complications.

ST 12, DX 11, IQ 8, HT 11

Speed: 5.5, Move: 5

Dodge: 5

Advantages: Status+1.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Overconfidence.

Quirks: Dislikes non-French. Dislikes those of lower Social Status. Dislikes non-Catholics.

Dislikes those who are more handsome than him. Dislikes strangers.

Skills: Black Powder Weapons-12; Dancing- 12; Fencing (saber)-13; Gambling-8; Intimidate-14; Riding-12.

Equipment: Well-dressed in gentleman's clothes. Saber. .52 Flintlock Pistol. .69 Musketoon (hunting weapon).

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