

# BLOOD & SALT a game about sailing into dark waters

Choose your number: are you more SALT than BLOOD?

BLOOD

5

4

3

2

SALT

BLOOD: social skills and self-control  
(authority, persuasion, constitution)

SALT: combat and seafaring skills  
(guns, navigation, swimming)

How do others call you?  
(underline one, or none)

LORD/LADY

DOCTOR

FATHER/MOTHER

COMRADE

YOUR NAME

Who are you? (underline one in each column)

1. **SECRETIVE** (what/whose secret do you keep? who is looking for it?)
2. **REPENTANT** (what sin did you commit? is your penance genuine?)
3. **STOIC** (what trauma has desensitized you? what can unravel you?)
4. **RAVENOUS** (you can never stop yourself. what do you crave?)
5. **CURSED** (some call it superstition, delusion. what cursed you? why?)
6. **INFAMOUS** (who honors you? who fears you? what started it?)

1. **CONSTRUCT** (you are a tireless automaton with boundless strength. who created you? how did you become free?)
2. **REVENANT** (your appearance and resilience terrify mortals. what keeps you here? unfinished contracts? borrowed time? someone else's will?)
3. **ENTREPRENEUR** (you are a devil who has bartered in souls for endless aeons. what else do you trade in? who is in your debt?)
4. **CARTOGRAPHER** (your maps disclose wonders and shortcuts)
5. **SAGE** (your journey has a purpose, what do you hope to uncover?)
6. **ENGINEER** (you are a talking rat and your paws can fix anything)

What is your prized possession? (underline one)

1. **AN EXPERIMENTAL GUN** (it malfunctions differently each time)
2. **A FIERY SIGIL** (raw magical power etched onto your bones)
3. **A VORPAL SAW** (it cuts through flesh, bone, stone, and metal)
4. **THE VOICE OF A DEAD GOD** (when it speaks, they listen)
5. **A FRIEND IN EVERY PORT** (a cryptic benefactor? a guild?)
6. **A CAGED MONSTER** (it sings to its kind and attacks all others)

What do you seek? (underline one)

1. **TRACK A MEMORY** (a person? a treasure? a past life?)
2. **BREAK AN OATH** (who did you promise? when will they collect?)
3. **DESTROY FALSE IDOLS** (and those that profit from them)
4. **SILENCE** (when did you start hearing voices? what do they want?)
5. **AUDIENCE WITH THE QUEEN** (what do you need to say?)
6. **BECOME CAPTAIN** (what is your grudge against your captain?)

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# BLOOD & SALT players' guide

## ROLLING THE DICE

When you do something risky involving combat, self-control, social or seafaring skills, roll **1d6** to find out how it goes. Roll **+1d6** if you are prepared and **+1d6** if your skills or items give you an edge. The GM tells you how many dice to roll, based on your character and the situation. Roll your dice and compare each die result to your number.

If you're using BLOOD (social skills or self-control), you want to roll under your number. If you're using SALT (combat or seafaring skills), you want to roll over your number.

0 SUCCESSES: FAILURE. It didn't work. The opponent may get what they want. The GM describes how things get worse.

1 SUCCESS: SUCCESS AT A COST. You barely manage it, but the GM introduces a complication, dilemma, or cost.

2 SUCCESSES: SUCCESS. Good job! You get what you wanted—nothing more, nothing less.

3 SUCCESSES: SUCCESS WITH STYLE. You succeed and gain an extra advantage, determined by the GM.

If you roll your number exactly in any die, you gain BLOODSALT. You gain some apocryphal insight into the situation. Ask the GM a question and they'll answer you honestly. Some good questions are:

What are they really feeling?

What should I be on the lookout for?

Who's behind this?

What's the best way to \_\_\_\_?

How could I get them to \_\_\_\_\_?

What's really going on here?

(A roll of BLOODSALT counts as a success.)

HELPING: If you want to help someone else who's rolling, say how you try to help and make a SALT or BLOOD roll. If you succeed, give them **+1d6** on their upcoming roll.

If you're not taking an action relevant to BLOOD or SALT, you automatically succeed at a cost. You do not roll any dice for this. The GM describes the possible cost, and you decide whether you wish to follow through with it.

## CRYPTIC AND BIZARRE SETTING

After reading the character sheet, you may be more confused now than when you started off. Some descriptions do not make sense, and the language is far from straightforward too. Am I a devil metaphorically? Is there magic in this world, and is it good or bad?

All the character prompts in Blood & Salt are ambiguous and unclear by design. Work out with your GM what it all means, and think of explanations or practical uses for your choices. Use the questions provided on the sheet to flesh out your character's backstory, and make up more on your own. Brainstorm with the group how to answer the questions, and try to find additional connections with other players' characters.

Embrace the weirdness when describing or role-playing your character. Make up quirky mannerisms or a nasty scar (physical or emotional). However, be respectful of other players' sensitivities. During setup, ensure that there are boundaries on the themes that can be explored during play and stop immediately when others are uncomfortable. If you do not like where the GM or another player is taking the story, simply say so with no explanation or argument; your group should respect it. Consider using the X-card by Stavropoulos or other tools to ensure group consent when delving into darker aspects of the world.

## MAKING A CHARACTER

Use the different lists to guide you on what type of character you want to play. You can make your choices very targeted in order to create a strongly themed character or mix and match to create a complex character with contrasts (e.g., why does a Sage want an Audience with the Queen?). Alternatively, you can roll **4d6** and allocate them as you wish among the lists.

Choose your number after this: do you want to play a charismatic character with no self-defense skills? Choose 5. A hardened, slightly mad sailor? Choose 2.

Don't try to maximize the "power" of your character since the game system is not really about winning (or surviving, for that matter) but on telling good stories. Think of weird backstories and brainstorm with your GM and your group on how your collective choices mesh together and help form the world. Your characters ultimately shape the stories around the table.

Blood & Salt is an adaptation of the Lasers & Feelings RPG by John Harper. It is created by Antonios Liapis (2022) but feel free to take any part of it and expand, rewrite, adapt as you see fit—as long as it's for a non-commercial application and the author is attributed.



Blood & Salt is inspired by the Sunless Sea computer game (Failbetter Games, 2015). Some concepts and word jumbles are inspired by the game and are used as prompts for GMs and players to use, tweak, replace. The author of Blood & Salt is not affiliated with the publisher of Sunless Sea. This document does not use any copyrighted material, and no monetary profit is made from it.

# BLOOD & SALT horror story worksheet

Fill in the captain's mission (underline choice in multiple choice items):

1. \_\_\_\_\_ requires passage to | through \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Establish contact with \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Steal the \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Deliver a crate of urgent | fragile | unstable | contraband \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Discover the location | fate | truth of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Stop the birth | death | theft of \_\_\_\_\_.

Then fill in: \_\_\_\_\_ is | are watching.

**COLONIES:** Sinking parliament | Office of lost and found | Prison of thought | Garden of the dead | Devil-run sanatorium | Tigers' court

**WONDERS:** The gate to Sky | Blood honey apiary | Unfinished tower of self-discovery | Reservoir of Lethe | Cave of mirrors | The whirlpool at the end of the world

**PASSENGER:** Explosive rebel | Defecting inventor | Heretical priest | Concealed bride | Composed murderer | Fussy noble

**CAPTAIN:** Mercenary of a hundred wars | Unlucky inheritor | Disenchanted miser | Addicted to anxiety | Superstitious tyrant | Ambitious patriot

**TREASURE:** Sealed coffin, conversant | Song of the last whale, unsung | Plague jar, cracked | Tonic of agelessness, untested | Future tapestry, self-weaving | Lead puzzle box, never opened

**CARGO:** Dreamwine casks | Inert war automatons | Unclaimed hours | Blank sheets stamped and signed by the Ministry | Unrefined souls | Liquid sunlight

**NEMESIS:** The queen below the waves | The hungry storm | Domineering fungus | A pocket of unstable time | Dreamwalkers of another dimension | A bureaucratic mastermind

**SOCIETIES:** Memory-stealing apes | Church of the flesh | Venom merchants | Institute of entropy | Rebellious bohemes | Sisterhood of the rat

**SEA MONSTERS:** Dead god | Children of Medusa | Truth-spinning spiders | Phantasmal bats | Star-blessed Cancer | Elemental eels

**SAVIOR:** The heir to time | The thousand-faced moon | Automaton rebellion | Council of living gods | First flying contraption | Mystic bloodline

## Thinking on the spot

### NAMES

**SURNAMES:** Wilburn | Giles | Bennett | Selma | Fiona | Elaine

**LAST NAMES:** Weston | Griffin | Holland | Remmington | McFadden | Fitzsimmons

**HONORIFICS:** Master | Reverend | your Holiness | your Eminence | the Honorable

**SHIPS:** Orion | Discovery | Cavalier | Growler | Shinkai | Minghua

**CITIES:** Clearwater | Silvergorge | Blackflats | Marrowpost | Lordscross | Grimlanding

### OCCUPATIONS

**CITY:** spy | celebrity | fence | pilgrim | inquisitor | customs officer

**NAUTICAL:** deckhand | gunner | quartermaster | helm | boatswain | oiler

### PLACES

**SEA:** reaches | enclave | refuge | grotto | marshes | rift

**CITY:** cloister | foundry | obelisk | bazaar | vault | lighthouse

### ADJECTIVES

**PEOPLE:** transient | curious | industrious | grotesque | predatory | bewildered

**PLACES:** verdant | frozen | crumbling | scorched | Cyclopean | shrouded

**ANY:** diseased | foreign | haunted | bloody | treacherous | ancient

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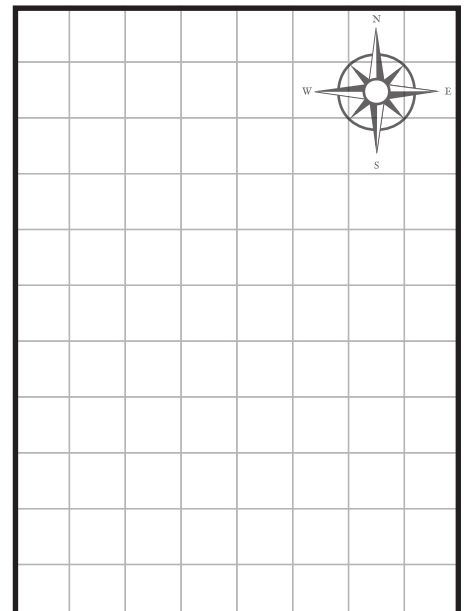
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# BLOOD & SALT master's guide

## SETTING UP THE GAME

Help players flesh out their characters before starting your own story setup. Ask them questions about their choices (example questions are included in the sheet) and help them answer questions if they are stuck. Brainstorm with players how they can use their bizarrely worded items or goals. Be creative in the interpretations of the words on the sheet, and ask other players to help come up with more ideas. Connect characters together if they have seemingly similar or opposite goals. For example, if two players are entrepreneurs, have they worked together for an eternity and how did that affect their relationship?

Use the players' answers, goals, and preferences when setting up the story. The GM sheet includes six indicative missions that have fairly freeform answers. Some indicative choices are provided in the sheet for quick generation. You can roll 1d6 on one of the lists to fill in a blank. Be creative when choosing which list to roll in for filling in mission details, and apply broader interpretations to the text. For instance, mission 6 is created with the Savior list in mind, and expects GMs to interpret birth or death broadly as e.g. beginning or destruction. However, it can be easily used for theft of a treasure but also for birth of a city (see city names). Use the "thinking on the spot" lists during setup or when players start asking questions during the session. All the lists purposefully include more evocative names or entities, and it is expected that the GM can expand on them with occupations such as Captain and Police Constable or societies such as Pirates and Smugglers.

The setup assumes that players are onboard (as crew or passengers) a ship currently on a mission undertaken by the captain. The players should know the mission, but do not necessarily have an interest in its success. You can have the captain as a fully fleshed out non-player character (NPC) that pushes to complete the mission, or you can make them indisposed (feverish, mad, or overboard) at the start of the session and throw players in the thick of it.

If you are running a 1-session game, either play out the journey or start when players reach their destination—not both. If you start play arriving at a destination, accentuate the weird and exotic nature of the location and its residents. If you play the journey, before each scene remind players in how many days they complete the journey and their dwindling resources (crew, fuel, supplies). Introduce threats that deplete these resources, and make the sea and NPC crew seem increasingly dangerous.

## PLAYING OUT THE HORROR

Blood & Salt is designed as a horror game, set in a bizarre world where unexpected things can happen at any moment—most of them bad. As such, try to keep players constantly second-guessing and promote indefinite anxiety and paranoia. Introduce hints of the threat slowly, and build anticipation. Do not show the main antagonist from the beginning. Use hallucinations, the weather, or uncanny NPCs (crew, passengers) to keep players guessing what the threat is. Build on players' paranoia—don't be afraid to change your planned antagonist to e.g. an NPC passenger that players are especially afraid of. Do not request extra dice rolls to increase tension; dice rolls should have interesting repercussions on success and failure. Use BLOOD-SALT rolls to help players along while creeping them out with hallucinations and nonsensical descriptions.

Before a threat does something to the characters, signal what is about to happen, then ask them what they do. "The blood bees start swarming over the ship. What do you do?" "With a toothy smile, the composed murderer and invites you to their dark corner of the mess hall. What do you do?"

There are more resources to find inspiration for stories set in Blood & Salt. Obvious examples come from digital games such as Sunless Sea, Sunless Skies, and Dishonored; these have heavily inspired this writeup. While the story worksheet provides a few shortcuts, consider expanding them via online generators such as <https://www.fantasynamgenerators.com/> which provides names for NPCs and places but also evocative descriptions. Be bold; leverage weirdness and randomness to make players uneasy. Avoid investigation mysteries as in Call of Cthulhu; this system is better at action-oriented play.

If you have ideas, get in touch at [an.liapis@gmail.com](mailto:an.liapis@gmail.com) or make your own version! All content is CC-BY-NC and free for remix as long as the purpose is noncommercial and the original author is credited.



## ROLLING DICE, AND FAILURES

Use SALT for combat and nautical skills, e.g. brawling, firing cannons, steering the ship in a storm, swimming.

Use BLOOD for rolls related to composure, insanity and people skills, e.g. facing a terrifying monster, calming the crew, impersonating someone, controlling or channeling magic, resisting hunger, holding your breath.

Only players roll dice. Call for a roll when the situation is uncertain. Don't pre-plan outcomes; adapt the story to player's actions. Failures push the action forward. The situation always changes after a roll, for good or ill. Don't allow players to retry the same action in the same situation: a success or failure changes the character's situation or the environment and makes the same action impossible. If a player rolls SALT to shoot a gun at an enemy, failure or success at a cost would not allow them to shoot the gun again: the gun's recoil may push the character off the ledge, and they have to roll SALT or fall overboard.

Do not ask for rolls not related to BLOOD or SALT (e.g. sneaking about). If it's an action, have it succeed but with a cost that pushes the action forward. Sneaking into the hold succeeds, but a sailor spots you on your way out: convince them with BLOOD or take them out with SALT. If you can't think of something that moves the action forward, delay the cost until an appropriate time: bandaging a wound works fine short-term, until the wound opens at the heat of battle. Do not roll for knowledge: if the character has a skill or edge that would warrant that knowledge, they know it. A Doctor may know rumors of or have contacts at an insane asylum but not the local crime gang.