How to play

When you want your character to do something, and there's an obstacle in your way, you roll 3D6 and keep the two highest dice if you have the advantage, the two lowest if you do not. Then add the relevant stat.

A result of 6- is a miss, so it's up to the GM is you get what you wanted. In addition, the GM can bring trouble to bear. On a 7–9, you get what you want but it's complicated or there's a price to pay. On a 10+, you get what you want and you gain a chit that can be used to gain advantage.

This table lists the main activities pirates in *Avast!* get up to and what parts of those activities fall under which stat (**Brave**, **Sharp** or **Strong**).

	Brave	**Sharp**	**Strong**
PARLAY	romance	persuade	carouse
SAIL	command	navigate	hand, reef and steer
SHIP COMBAT	rally	maneuver	fire guns
FIGHTING	melee	shoot	hold fast

If a player wants their character to take an action not covered here, just decide which stat the action falls under. Use Brave for tests of mental fortitude and willpower, Sharp for cunning and intelligence and Strong for physical tests. Remember, a 6- is a miss and the GM can bring the pain, a 7–9 is a hit but one with complications, and a 10+ is a good hit that also gets you a chit.

Advantage

If you have the advantage, you keep the two best results of the 3D6. But the sea be a harsh mistress, so if you do not have advantage you roll 3D6 and keep the two lowest. You get the advantage if it makes sense in the fiction that you would have it, if you have a trait that applies, or if you or another player spends a chit.

When two crews or ships square off, you should take into account these factors: **scale**, **equipment** and **disposition**. The final call for when the fiction or a trait gives someone the advantage rests with the GM.

Your crew is attempting to board The Golden Boar, *a merchant vessel out of Kingston. Your crew consists of 30 men armed mainly with cutlasses and a few pistols, but ruthless cut-throats all. Against the merchant crew of 15 men that are armed with expensive muskets but cowardly and unwilling to fight, your crew has the advantage.*

Chits

If you have a chit, you can spend it to:
- gain advantage on a roll
- give another player's character advantage on a roll
- cancel out another player's character advantage on a roll
- remove a condition from your or another player's character or the ship

A player can have more than one chits, and may spend as many as they want on a roll, but there's no use being doubly advantaged.

Conditions

When bad things happen to your character or your ship, it causes conditions. This will often be the result of the GM bringing the pain after a miss or if some trouble is ignored.

Making a pirate character

To make a pirate that strikes fear in the heart of your enemies, choose their name (and a nickname if you want!), nationality, look, hook, stats, gear and traits.

Name:

John, Jack, Samuel, Louis, Henri, Alonso, Diego, Cesar, Bernt, Pé, Samyr
Ann, Elizabeth, Mary, Marie, Isabelle, Catalina, Ana, Magrite, Agwé, Yiusa
Gibbs, Roberts, Bellamy, Lafitte, de la Fuente, Fernández, Cornelijs, van Huet

Nationality

English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Taíno, Carib, freed slave, other

Look

Man, woman, abiguous, transgressing
Eyes: Wild, shifty, seductive, laughing, piercing
Body: Tattooed, hairy, scarred, elegant, hulking, wiry

Hook

Declarative statements about your pirate's place in the world, background, relationships etc. No overlap. If a hook is resolved, gain 2 chits and choose a new hook.

- ✶ Rich man's son/daughter
- ✶ In love with governor's son/daughter
- ✶ On a quest for revenge
- ✶ Disgraced naval officer
- ✶ Religious or political refugee
- ✶ You're convinced you're cursed
- ✶ Striving to clear your name
- ✶ Fought hard for your freedom
- ✶ You're not who you say you are
- ✶ Damn it all, you just want to get rich and live the good life
- ✶ Your own hook: what?

Stats

Distribute 2 points between the 3 stats, maximum of 2, minimum of -1. So, some combination of 1, 1, 0 or 2, 0, 0 or 2, 1, -1.

BRAVE ☐   **SHARP** ☐   **STRONG** ☐

Gear

Choose three of the following or ask the GM for something exotic instead:

- ✶ an ornate rapier
- ✶ a vicious cutlass
- ✶ a razor-sharp knife
- ✶ a long musket
- ✶ a brace of pistols
- ✶ a purse of gold coins
- ✶ the finest of clothes
- ✶ a treasure map
- ✶ a crate of rum

Traits

Common pool of traits, everyone chooses 1, but there's no overlap. Traits give you advantage to your roll, if it applies. Traits are also descriptive: if your pirate is Bloodthirsty, they are always the most bloodthirsty bastard in the room.

- ✶ Bloodthirsty
- ✶ Drunkard
- ✶ Heartthrob
- ✶ Eagle-eyed
- ✶ Born leader
- ✶ Accomplished cook
- ✶ A way with words
- ✶ Giant
- ✶ Polyglot

Conditions

EXHAUSTED ☐   KNOCKED OUT ☐   TRAPPED ☐   INJURED ☐   DYING ☐

The ship
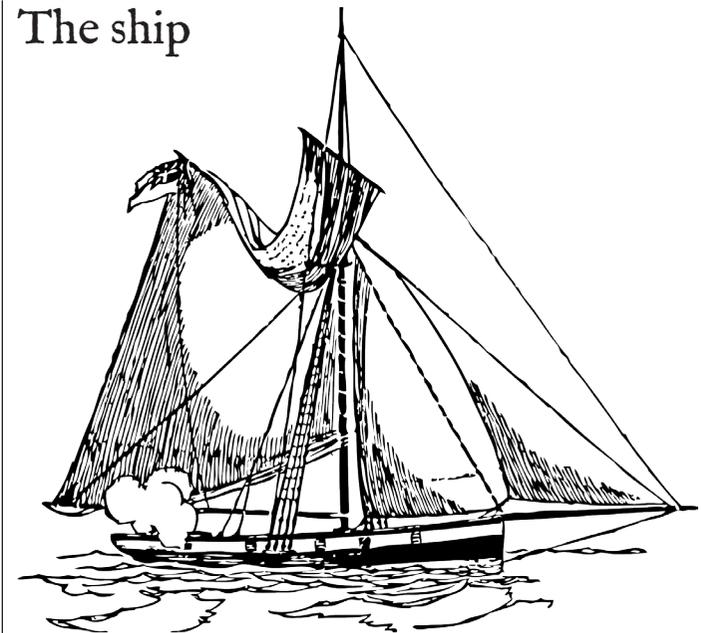
Name:

The Antelope, The Ferret, The Tigershark, The Harpy, The Hazard, The Virgin Mary, The Sting, The Pride of Barbados, The Sparrowhawk, La Concorde

The ship that the PCs are sailing on is a one-masted, fore-and-aft rigged Bermuda sloop. She is armed with 10 4-pounder guns. Aboard her, a motley crew of 30 pirates. She is fast and nimble and can out-gun most merchants, but she's outclassed in a stand-up fight against any real naval vessels.

Tags

Choose 1 or 2.
Heavily armed: she carries up to 12 6-pounders
Very fast
Privateer
Fearsome reputation
Well stocked and equipped
The crew all know their jobs and strive to do them well
Specialist: a great cook, a proper surgeon, a carpenter

Drawbacks

Choose as many as your tags.
Savage crew
Skeleton crew
Crew is undisciplined and discontented
Ship is in bad shape, sails in rags and taking on water

Conditions

LOW MORALE ☐   MUTINY ☐   LOW STOCKS ☐   CRIPPLED ☐   SINKING ☐

The Caribbean

The golden age of piracy in the Caribbean is coming to an end, but none of the buccaneers and cut-throats know that yet. There's still spanish gold to steal and rum to drink!

Here are some ports of call in the Caribbean.

Havana, Cuba: A large Spanish port town that serves as a staging point for products from the New World before they are sent back to Spain in large treasure fleets. Havana has often been the target of pirate attacks, but is now heavily fortified.

Léogâne, Saint-Domingue: One of the towns of the French western part of the island of Hispaniola (modern day Haiti). To the French, Saint-Domingue was the "Pearl of the Antilles", a rich and prosperous colony. To others, it became infamous for the cruel treatment of the slaves forced to work on the plantations.

Port Royal, Jamaica: Founded by the Spanish but captured by the English in 1655. It's a large port, famous as a safe haven for privateers and pirates, and known as the "Sodom of the New World" for it's loose morals.

Tortuga: A wretched hive of scum and villainy, and the Caribbean buccaneers' main port of call. The inhabitants are mainly English, French and Dutch, and many of them are pirates.

Tierra Firme: It's what the South- and Central American mainland is called. Claimed by the Spanish, and source of vast treasures in silver, gold and various wares to be shipped back to the Old World.

Florida: Florida was a Spanish colony until 1763. It's in a constant state of conflict with both the native american tribes in the area and the English settlers that are trying to move in on the territory.

Some ships to encounter

A merchantman: usually a three-masted, square-rigged ship. She's slow, sluggish and lightly armed, with around 6 4-pounders and a crew of around 15.

A brig: a two-masted ship, moderately fast and maneuverable. She can be fitted for trade or as a figting vessel. If the latter, expect her to be armed with 10–18 guns, and a crew of 100.

A navy frigate: a frigate is a fearsome warship to all pirates. She's fast but not very nimble, armed with 28 9-pounder guns, including bow chasers, and crewed by around 200 fighting sailors including a compliment of marines.
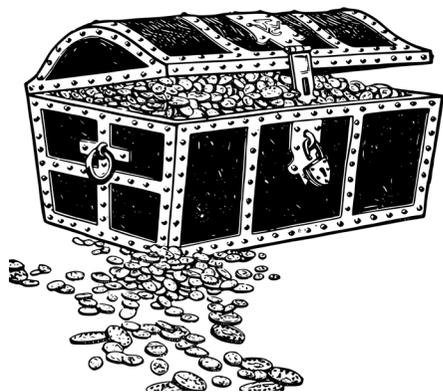
The Gamemaster

The goal of the game is to have a cool and exciting conversation about pirates. Thus, the job of the GM is to help everyone at the table say cool pirate-y stuff. The main way of doing that is to follow these principles:

�֍ Be a fan of the characters
✖ Make their lives interesting and complicated
✖ Play to find out what happens

Being a fan of the characters means that you should be interested in their lives in the same way you would be interested in the main characters in a show or movie you like. You're rooting for them, but at the same time you want them to have conflicts and face difficulties, otherwise it would get boring.

It also means you should take an active interest and ask lots of questions about the characters. The story is about these people and their desires and actions, so you should be curious about them. When something happens in the narrative, check in to see how they feel about that. When you introduce an NPC, ask the PCs if any of them know them already and what their relationship is like.

Making their lives interesting and complicated means coming up with interesting things that happen, obstacles that the PCs must overcome to get what they want, and complications that keep them on their toes. One of the things you'll be doing is introducing trouble on the horizon. That means showing them something bad that will happen unless they take active measures to escape or avert it. When you've showed them the impending trouble, always ask: *What do you do?*

Then, if you get the opportunity because someone rolls a miss or they ignore the trouble brewing, you strike home and bring the pain.

Playing to find out what happens means you don't come to the table with a story prepared. Instead, springboard off of the characters. Look at their hooks and ask the players what they are interested in doing. Encourage the players to be proactive by dropping hints of things going on and seeing what they go after, or if you don't feel like being subtle just drop a situation in their lap. Like, say they're out at sea and the look-out spots a fat merchant ship on the horizon. Or they're at the bar and an old lady starts talking to them about a cursed treasure. Or the ship's coming out of anchor, and oh shit! It's the *HMS Resolute* just coming in to the lagoon.

Quite often, being the GM means coming up with good complications and introducing trouble as a response to the players' rolls. Often, good complications and trouble will flow naturally from the narrative. If something feels like the right thing to say, just say it. If the narrative's not that well formed, ask the players. Turn the question to them. *Oh man, you're giving him the bedroom eyes and everything but he's not feeling it at all. Why is that? / So y'all start out making good time for Tortuga, but suddenly something happens to throw you off course. What do you think would do that?*

If things are slowing down, you'll want to kick-start the action by showing some trouble on the horizon. If you like, you can start from inside and move out. Is it something to do with the characters themselves? Somebody's hook, maybe? Is it one of their friends or relationships? Is it their crew? Any crew is one bad streak of luck away from mutiny. Something to do with their ship? Is it a rival pirate, their ship & crew? Or a former lover scorned, looking for revenge? A naval ship – a pirate hunter perhaps? Or is it the elements? A storm brewing or a treacherous reef? A pirate's life is many things, but it should seldom be boring.
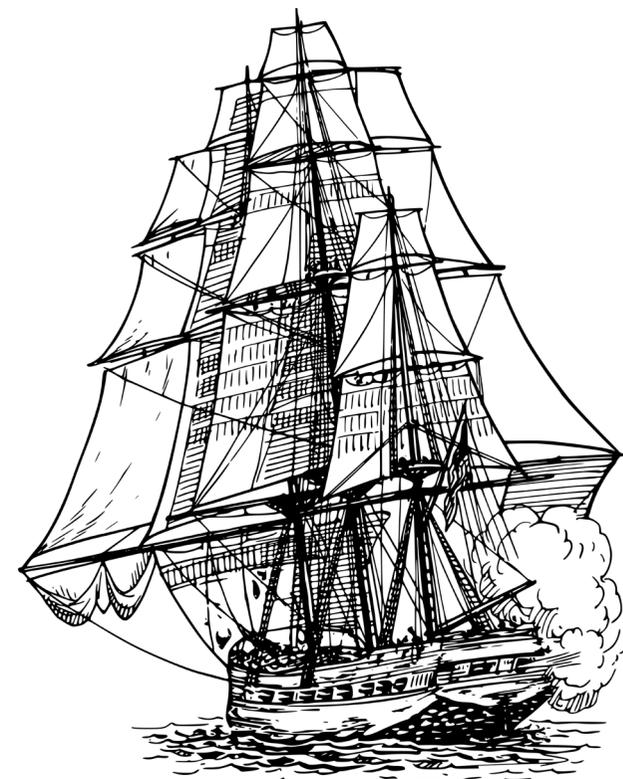
Avast!

A game of Hollywood pirates and other salty dogs.

What is *Avast!* about?

The players take the roles of pirates or privateers, hunting for gold on the high seas of the Caribbean. They must work together to gain the upper hand on their prey, manage the morale of the crew, and try to make it back to port alive to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

The Gamemaster (GM) helps frame the conversation and makes it interesting by introducing complications and threats.

You will need: this pamphlet, some friends and extra pamphlets or scrap paper to use as character sheets, at least three six-sided dice, pencils and some chits – like peanuts or coins.

Media touchstones: Stan Roger's *Barrett's Privateers*, *Master and Commander*, *Pirates* (1986), *Captain Blood*, *Pirates of the Caribbean* (the first ones, that still make some kind of sense), *Black Sails*, *Sid Meier's Pirates*, *Assassin's Creed Black Flag*.

Ludography: Vincent Baker's *Apocalypse World* and *Poison'd*, John Harper's *Lady Blackbird* and *Blades in the Dark*. Jason Morningstar's *Night Witches*, Marshall Miller's *The Warren*.