

# VIKINGS OF THE CARIBBEAN

A campaign setting for Risus, the Anything RPG (By S. John Ross © 1993-2001

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This is a campaign set in a world where the Norse smashed Constantinople in the late 10<sup>th</sup> Century, pillaged the rest of Europe, and went on to establish a permanent presence in Vinland (the New World). The setting is based on “Midgard” from GURPS “Alternate Earths 2”, by Steve Jackson Games. Other gaming inspiration is drawn from the “Vikings Campaign Sourcebook” for Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, by TSR; “Vikings”, from ICE’s Campaign Classics series; and “Vikings: Nordic Roleplaying for RuneQuest”, a supplement for Avalon Hill’s RuneQuest, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. I also owe a lot of this material to Issaries, Inc.’s game “Hero Wars: Roleplaying in Glorantha”, and its supplements “Thunder Rebels” and “Storm Tribes”.

## VIKING CLICHÉS

These clichés could be used for any “Viking” campaign, set in this campaign or other Nordic campaigns. Other clichés more typical of this setting will follow. Note that some of these are occupations (some of which may or may not be useful for adventuring); some are dramatic roles, and some may be qualities or metaphors. Go figure.

### Thud and Blunder

Though most Norsemen know something of the spear and shield to defend their homes, most of them are not full-time warriors. Warriors typically know how to use a number of weapons, such as swords, spears, axes, and shields; in this setting, Black Powder weapons such as cannons and matchlock pistols and rifles are also found in Vinland, but they are considered unreliable and somewhat dangerous.

Warrior (Weapon & Shield ; Defend the Stead, Sleep Whenever You Can, Carouse).

These are full-time warriors who defend a local community, disdaining those who work with at crafts or farms.

Viking (Weapon & Shield; Bypass Defenses; Rape, Pillage& Plunder; Ambush, Bail).

“Going a-Viking” is not uncommon amongst Norsemen; taking this cliché means that the character has some affinity for raiding.

Varangian (Weapon & Shield, Surtsspjót; Tactics, Strong & Tough, See Opponent’s Weakness, Loyalty to Employer/Plotting Against Empliyer, World Traveller).

Varangians are typically mercenaries in service to a foreign power, learning something of other places and peoples.

Huscarl (Weapon & Shield, Surtsspjót; Riding, Spot Ambush, Touchy Pride, Loyalty to King/Jarl). Huscarls were warriors permantly employed by a king or jarl, and fighting in his wars.

Shieldmaiden (Weapon & Shield; Better Than A Man, Don’t Grab Me, Piercing Shriek, Rally Women, Now I’m Angry, Last Ditch Effort, Valkyrie’s Countenance).

Women warriors were uncommon, but not unknown, even though they faced much pressure to take up a woman’s more proper roles.

**Toiling in the Woods and Fields**

Farmer (Manage Stead, Plow Fields, Strong as an Ox, Talk About Crops, Talk About Weather, Honest Work, Fix Things,)

Fisherman (Go Fish, Keep Quiet, Make Traps, Make Nets, Swim, Know the Waters, Boating)

Herder (Care For Herd, Look For Herd, Train Dog, Stay Alert, Listen, Butcher, Bow or Sling, Run Long Distance,)

Hunter (Bow or Javelin, Be Still & Hide, Know Prey, Stalk Prey, Slay Cleanly, Use Every Bit of Prey, Set Traps, Mimic Animal Sounds, Find Shelter, Know Wild Plants)

**Making and Baking**

Brewer (Brew Ale or Mead, Keep Bees, Shake Off Hangover)

Woodcrafter (Make Things Out Of Wood, Make Good Lumber, Build Longship)

Smith (Make Things Out of Iron, Ignore Burns, Impressive Muscles, Evaluate Metal)

Crafter (Craft, Make Minor Equipment, Find Necessary Supplies, Haggle). Major equipment, such as ovens, kilns, looms, etc., are assumed to be available, and the person able to maintain them, unless otherwise specified. Pottery, baking, and weaving are often part of the household duties of someone on a stead, and may not be a full-time job except in towns.

**In The Town**

Jarl or King (Look Imposing, Bluster, Debate, See Compromise, Keep Warriors Happy, Keep Factions Happy, Rally Followers, Sense Mood of Followers, Instill Pride, Lead Warriors, Intimidate Priest, Find Weakness in Argument, Negotiate)

Lawspeaker (Be Impartial, Cite Precedent, Interrogate Witness, Know Unseen Factors, Respect My Authority, Sense Dissent, Find Weakness in Argument, Talk for Hours, Know the Laws, Find Compromise, Memorize, Speak With Authority, Know History)

Redesman (Solid Citizen, Support Leader, Know the Law, Inspire the Community, Know Factions)

Godi (Viking Myths, Perform Sacrifice, Sense Gods Nearby, Sense Spirits Nearby, Tend Sacred Grove). These are “priests” of the Norse, but they don’t necessarily wield any kind of magic powers from the gods.

Healer (First Aid, Recognize Illness, Splint and Stitch, Bandage and Bind, Make Healing Broth, Dodge Attack, Carry Patient to Safety, Earsplitting Scream, Evade Pursuers, Hide Self, Survive Battle)

Herbalist (Brew Noxious Potions, Distill Ingredients, Find Healing Materials, Suck Poison)

**At Home**

Steadholder (Happy Home, Intimidate Sons, Please Wife, “Yes Dear”)

Steadwife (Butchering, Domestic Chores, Gardening, Manage A Household, Weaving, Prepare Food, Store Food, First Aid, Tend Animals, Maintain Peace in the Stead, Run Household, Raise Children, Tend Hearth)

Midwife (Old Wives’ Tales, Spot Signs of Pregnancy, Tend Mother-to-Be, Advise Mothers-To-Be)

Thrall (Bear Heavy Burden, Go Without Food, Ignore Pain, Go Without Sleep, Work Till You Drop, Endure Shame)  
 Matchmaker (Assess Boy & Girl, Calm Ardor, Ignite Passion, Reconcile Parents, Kiss and Make Up, Negotiate)  
 Wise Friend (Boost Confidence, Resolve Argument, Prevent Anger, Reach Consensus, Sting Pride, Lift Others' Burdens, Lighten Heart)  
 Grandmother (Prepare Corpse, Geneology, Old Wives' Tales, Hide Possessions, Here's a Treat, Know Secret)

### **On the Road**

Skald (Compose Poem, Sing & Play, Memorize, Learn Local History)  
 Vagabond (Carry Heavy Burden, Endure Bad Weather, Go Without Food, Running, Know Local Area, Hide Possessions)  
 Outlaw (Avoid Enemies, Find Food and Water, Improvise Shelter, Sense Danger, Wild Strength, Strike Secretly, Ambush)  
 Thief (Avoid Trap, Sneak, Remain Motionless, Eavesdrop, Find Escape Route)  
 Wayfarers (Wanderlust, Curiosity, Eavesdrop, Find A Way, Live Off The Land, Go Native, Remember Terrain, Communicate with Strangers)  
 Trader (Evaluate Goods, Drive Hard Bargain, Protect Goods, Organize Caravan, Communicate with Stranger)  
 Trollblood (Nightsight and Nightstrength, Endure the Elements, Hard to Cut; Tall, Grey, and Intimidating).  
 Performer (Amaze/Thrill/Amuse/Terrify/Move Audience, Sing Ditty, Clever Dance, Do Tricks, Cadge Meal, Entice Gratuities, Wanderlust)

### **Envied**

Lucky (Catch A Break, Right Place At The Right Time, Not As Bad As It Could Be)  
 Handsome or Beautiful (Attract Opposite Sex, Remarkable Features, Complimentary Nickname, Much-Envied)  
 Brave (Respect of the Warriors, Steadfast Comrades, Noticed by Skalds, Fearless, First in Battle)

### **Heroic and Magical Clichés (all use the Double Pump option)**

"Wise as Odin" (Staves of Wisdom, Come and Go Mysteriously, Grim Visage, Carve Runes, Bless Corpse, Lift Curse, Know Wyrð)  
 "Staunch as Tyr" (Word of Honor, Maintain Composure, Against All Odds, Recognize Lie, Shame Coward, Frightful Visage, Face Down Foe, Sacrifice Own Welfare, Rally Warriors, Commanding Presence)  
 "Mighty as Thor" (Tremendous Strength, Fling Hammer, Rebounding Hammer, Slay Giant, Drive Goat-Cart)  
 "Sneaky as Loki" (Lie Convincingly, Turn Things Around, Shift Blame, Find Advantage, Endure Misfortune, Invisible Hand, Walk Without Footprints, Squeeze Through Gap)  
 "Swift as Hermod" (Burst of Speed, Leave No Tracks, Swift as the Wind, Travel Safely)  
 "Eloquent as Bragi" (Compose Poetry, Smooth Tongue, Heroic Oration)  
 "Handsome as Baldur" (Soothe Anger, Make Friends, Offer Hope)

"Wise as Freya" (Calm Patient, Ease Birth, Bless Child, Increase Fecundity, Ignite Passion, Calm Ardor, Terrible Beauty, Manipulate Lover, Lift Curse)

"Cute and Furry as Ratatosk" (Amuse Children, Earn the Respect of the Aged, Attract Fleas)

"Steadfast as Heimdal" (Stay Awake, Hear Any Sound, Ignore Distraction, Awake and Alarm, Night Vision, See Far, Sleep With One Eye Open, Endure Cold)

"Wet as Njord" (Attract Good Catch, Enticing Fish Lure, Inescapable Net, Reel In Catch, Strengthen Fishing Line, Avoid Reef, Crest Waves, Keep Boat Afloat, Point to Nearest Land, Avoid Tides)

"Relentless as Ullr" (Attract Prey, Conceal Hunter, Hide Scent, Invisible Pitfall, Sure Throw, Avoid Claws, Run Up Tree)

"Capable as Frigga" (Midwife Lore, Mother's Magic, Bless Stead, Cheerful Song, Weave Without Flaws, Always Have Enough On Hand, Berate Family)

Second Sight (See Ghost, Know Wyrd, Farseeing, See Curse, Unavoidable Doom)

Berserker Fury (Ignore Wounds, Against All Odds, Terrifying Visage, Fight While Dying, Smash, Crush, Kill, Intimidate, Immune to Fire, Great Strength, Become Bear/Wolf, Single-Minded Slaughterer). Berserkers often sacrifice to either Odin or Freya.

Shaman (Sinister Countenance, Unmanly Acts, Climb Platform, Enter Trance, Blunt Edged Weapons, Sing Magic Songs, Visit the World of the Dead, Clairvoyance, Curses and Curse-Breaking, Scrying, Blunt Iron, Dying Gaze, Final Curse, Animate the Battle-Dead, Lay the Dead to Rest, Obscure Battlefield, Interfere with Other Shamans). Shamans are most often women; male shamans are seen as unmanly because of their reliance upon magic rather than martial prowess. Their magic is often called "platform magic" because they perform it upon a tall, gallows-like platform. Male shamans worship Odin, while females follow Freya.

Trollwise (Find Troll Mound, Trollfriend, Blunt Edged Weapons, Find Magic Ingredients, Tie Up/Release Wind and Waves/Fire/etc., Enchant Animal Skin, Brew Magic Potion). Trollfriends tie magic knots, brew potions, and can assume the shape of a wild animal by putting on an enchanted animal skin, which others can wear as well.

Runeshaper . A trained runeshaper starts out with the knowledge of one Rune (see the Rune Magic section, below). Anyone who knows one of the Runes automatically knows how to carve it is stone or wood or bone, stain it with his blood, and improvise a poem to enchant it.

### **Vinland-Specific Clichés**

(Gunpowder and ocean-going sailing technology are available to Vinlanders, which proves to be a great advantage to them in their new home. The most common types of firearms are cannons and black powder weapons such as matchlock pistols and rifles, or surtsspjóts, all of which are unreliable single-shot weapons.)

Vëlverker (Make Gunpowder, Forge Cannon, Make Matchlock Pistols/Rifles, Mining, Mineral Lore). These are the gunsmiths of the Norrsemen. Because their firearms are often touchy, it's not uncommon for a Vëlverker to be missing some fingers, teeth, hands, limbs, or even eyes.

Shipwright (Build Ship, Patch Leaks, Make Sails, Boil Pitch, Career Ship)

Sailor (Trim Rigging, Row Boat, Swab Deck, Endure Hardship, Eat Disgusting Food, Endure Seasickness, Batten Down Hatches, Step Lively Now, Sing Shanty, Tie Knots, Tattoo, Wenching, Carousing, Brawling, Girl In Every Port)

### **Other Clichés**

I still need to work on clichés for Christians (“Pious as a Saint”, etc.), Skraelings (native American tribes such as the Algonquin and Iroquois groups), Muslims from the area of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico area, Aztecs, etc.

### **Flaws**

Ugly: Scare Children, Disgust the Opposite Sex, Unflattering Feature, Uncomplimentary Nickname, Sour Milk

Coward: Hated By All, Slinker From Battle, No Friend of Dogs, Belittled and Abused

Blood Feud: Your family is at war with another family, and may have been so for generations. Sometimes the feud recedes into the background, but it flares up whenever your families interact too closely. Attempts at ending the feud often tend to end badly; marriage between the two clans is usually disastrous.

Missing limbs or eyes: especially for gunsmiths and sailors. Peg legs, patches, crutches, prosthetic hooks, and parrots may be appropriate.

Wyrd: Doom, Fate. Your character knows something about the manner in which he will die. Attempts to circumvent this will not be successful, and are often seen as cowardly. Meeting your fate bravely, knowing that your time is come, is very admirable.

Outlawed: All Norsemen typically enjoy the support of their kin, their comrades, and their patrons. In war and in law, a man’s worth depends on how many will stand with him. An outlaw cannot seek redress, and can often be killed without penalty to his murderer. Incest, kinslaying, secret murder, and oathbreaking are typical reasons that someone may be outlawed; ignorance of the circumstances may be tragic, but do not mitigate the crime.

### **RUNE MAGIC**

Runes are hard to learn. Typically, one will learn a rune from somebody who already knows a rune, or from some magical occurrence (fasting and mortification, a bird whispers it in your ear, a divine revelation, etc.) Each rune must be learned separately; in effect, it is its own cliché.

The runes have to be carved carefully and artistically, dyed with the runeshaper’s own blood and then enchanted with a poem which is improvised upon the spot. Anyone can try to carve a rune, but if a rune is miscarved or misenchanted, then it often rebounds disastrously upon the carver. In addition to the futhark, or runic alphabet, the runeshaper uses other artistic details such as ornamentation, depictions of the person or event, natural or mythic beasts, etc.

Runes are usually shaped for a specific target, time, event, or purpose; you cannot shape a rune ahead the time it will be used, or store them up. They can be shaped for the caster or whomever or whatever he wishes, as appropriate.

Typical places to put a rune, depending on the purpose, are:

- On an amulet, which stays in effect until the amulet is taken off;
- On a plank which is put in the target’s bed, typically for love charms, causing or curing diseases, etc.;

- On a standing stone, stake or pole which is driven into an appropriate piece of ground (the target's property, a grave mound), which can be removed by the target;
- On a piece of hide, skin, or feathers of an appropriate type of animal;
- On a piece of wood which is thrown into a fire, the sea, etc., lasting until the event is over (voyage ends, sailor shipwrecked, fire is out)
- On an object to be used appropriately by the target (drinking vessel, shield, weapon, helmet, etc.).
- You can't carve a rune on a living being. (Well, you can, but it's messy, and the target often objects.)

### Typical Runes

- Ale: Vessel shatters when poison is poured in Rune lasts until cup is shattered..
- Bind: breaks fetters, unties knots, and opens locks. Can also be used to make unbreakable fetters, untieable knots, and unopenable locks (except for the target).
- Catch: Allows the wielder to catch spears, axes, knives, etc. when thrown at him, for a day.
- Beast: Speak with a specific, individual wild animal (e.g., the bear that killed Theyni last winter)
- Battle: Weapon prowess, until the weapon is put down or exchanged, or the character is asleep or unconscious.
- Shape: Assume the form of a wild animal, until character falls asleep or unconscious or wills it to end.
- Love: must be hidden in the bed of prospective lover; may anger lover if discovered.
- Dead: Converse with a specific dead individual, or keep him from afterganging. The dead cannot lie, but they are not always cooperative or helpless, and may not always lie easy afterwards.
- Disease: victim wastes away.
- Fortune: foretell the future, in a general fashion, which usually comes true.
- Cure: cures diseases, must be placed in the bed of one suffering from natural or non-runic diseases.
- Iron-Can't-Bite: protection from battle-runes.
- Limb: cures most battle injuries short of loss of a limb.
- Lore: seek the answers to a single question, summoning a prophetic dream within the week. If miscarved, visited by the unquiet dead.
- Luck: good or bad, in effect from sunrise to sunset.
- Curse: must have a good cause for the curse, and the rune is planted on the property of the victim. Curse cannot kill the victim directly. Lasts until either the victim or the curser is dead, have resolved their issues, or the rune is destroyed or negated.
- Quench: rune is carved on a piece of wood and cast into the fire.
- Sea: protects sea-voyagers. Carved into prow, rudder, oars, and mast of ship; lasts until any of these is destroyed.
- Sight: gives second sight to individual for on use.
- Speech: target is eloquent for half a day, while he wears the amulet.

- Shield: protects a warrior when carved inside his shield. Will only work for shield's owner; is negated when character is defeated in a duel or runs from battle.
- Strength: lasts a few hours.
- Triumph: lasts for a specific battle, or until the user drops or changes his weapon, goes unconscious, or is defeated.
- Water: Protection from drowning or exposure in the water.