

Unisystem™

Gothic

Action-Theater

CROSS-GENRE

NETBOOK

Written by Jason Vey

Writer, Director, Producer...heck, even Gaffer and Key Grip: Jason Vey

Art: Varied and sundry (yet talented) photographers and camera people.

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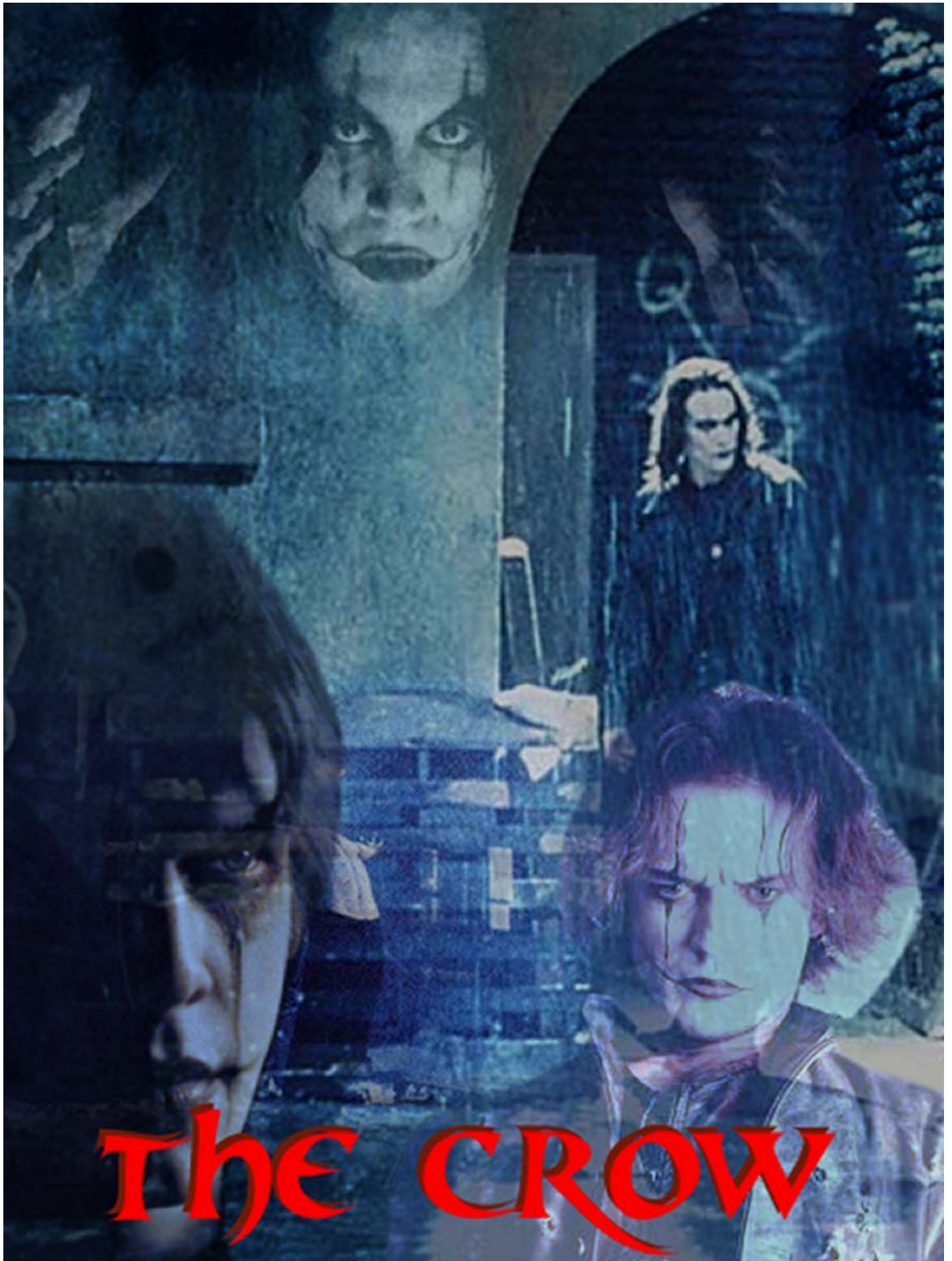
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The CROW

The Crow

People once believed that when a person dies, a crow carries their soul to the land of the dead. But sometimes, something so bad happens that a terrible sadness is carried with it, and the soul can't rest. Then sometimes, just sometimes, the crow can bring that soul back to put the wrong things right.

—Sarah, *The Crow*

Introduction

Love, rage, sorrow, justice, and revenge: these are the core concepts behind the world of James O'Barr's *The Crow*. In his classic tale of murder and divine retribution, the author created a mythology that touched the minds and hearts of millions of people, and has become an integral part of western mythology, as well as a veritable staple of the Goth subculture wherever one goes. And there was a great deal present that would appeal to the Goths out there. The world of the Crow is dark, foreboding, sinister, and filled with high peaks, cathedral-like buildings, industrial dance clubs, fetish bars, and urban decay. And yet, underneath it all is the central, basic theme that life is worth living and love is worth feeling. While many people see Goths as "tragically hip" and ultimately depressing people, beneath the black clothes and pale makeup is a core of passion and rebellion of a sort that doesn't come from people who are truly depressed. Goths are dismayed with the state of the world as they see it, but on the whole they love life and want to savor every last minute. *The Crow* is a symbol of dealing with tragedy and the darker side of life, and moving on to becoming someone better, to living a better life in a better world.

James O'Barr created the character of Eric Draven to deal with his own personal tragedy: the death of a

loved one. The former marine, artist, and author had no way of knowing that the project would touch so many people in so many ways. In fact, the original comic series almost never came to fruition; the first publisher went bankrupt and O'Barr had an extremely difficult time finding a substitute. It wasn't until the publication of the collected graphic novel that the story began to gain any sort of notice; fortunately for O'Barr and for all of us, one of those who took notice was a film producer, who succeeded rather brilliantly at bringing the work to the big screen.

So here we are, 3 movies (and a fourth in pre-production) later, and the mythology of the Crow still has every bit as strong a following as it ever did. With that in mind I present to you this piece on running adventures in the world of the Crow, using Eden Studios' *Buffy the Vampire Slayer™* Roleplaying Game. The rules below presume that players will wish to run entirely Crow-centric storylines; however, all of the Qualities and Drawbacks, and rules, presented below can be integrated into any existing Unisystem™ game with little or no modification whatsoever, should you wish to genre-jump (which is, after all, the point of this netbook).





The World of the Crow

Eric: "Victims...aren't we all?"

Eric, The Crow

The world in which the Crow mythos is set is very much akin to our own, but darker, more sinister. Compared to the Buffyverse, it is inherently less supernatural as far as the idea of vampires, werewolves, and creatures of the night go, although magic, sorcery, and psychic visions certainly do exist. The world of the Crow is a Gothic, postmodern, punk nightmare where everything is surreal and a dark reflection of the world we see around us every day. Consider that in the first film, all of the buildings in Detroit are black, with high spires and wide, leaded glass windows. It constantly rains. In the second film, Los Angeles is a giant slum that is eternally cloaked in flame. In the Crow universe, it seems that crime syndicates rule every city; the police, with few exceptions, are corrupt or inept; and normal people are often powerless against the strength of the dark forces aligned against them. This is where heroes like those lost souls carried by the Crow—the Spirits of Vengeance—come into play. They stand against the forces of darkness, granted

power by way of their own former victimization. Unfortunately, their tenure in this world is destined to be brief, as they have power only over those who have wronged them. Once a Spirit of Vengeance has completed his or her appointed task, they move on to the next world, where they find the peace that was denied them upon their initial tragic demise. Eventually, a new Vengeance Spirit will arise, but only when one of the dark and evil barons of the underworld perform an act of such utter cruelty and depravity that it becomes necessary.

Between the coming of Vengeance Spirits, it falls to the rare honest cops, private investigators, and magically inclined men and women to hold the line against the forces of darkness in the desperate hope that one day, perhaps someday soon, a better world can rise.

The Mood of the Crow

Judah: "I've got your power now, Ashe. All you have is pain."

Ashe: "Pain is my power." (to the sky) "TAKE HIM!"

Judah and Ashe, The Crow: City of Angels

Mood is essential to any campaign set in the universe of the Crow. Overall, the feel of your game should be oppressive, heavy, and yes, angsty. Angst is the key to the feel of the Crow. It's the story of someone who is out of time, out of place, who doesn't belong and yet can't escape. Your characters desperately want to put the wrong things right, but there are just so many wrongs. Elements of the supernatural in a Crow universe game should be low key at best: rare, mysterious, and dark.



Villains in a Crow-based game will be drug dealers, crime syndicate kingpins, corrupt police and government officials, even cultists, but their powers won't come from claws and fangs and magic (though seers do seem to be a common occurrence). Rather, the danger that villains pose in this type of game is far more mundane and frightening at the same time. They shoot to kill, and are utterly untouchable by the arm of the law. There's no conventional justice for those who are outside of and above the law, and thus it's up to your characters: one spirit of vengeance, and a group of mundane men and women, to bring to light your own brand of justice. It is very possible that for mundane characters such a game could become extremely

deadly, and this is as it should be. A Crow universe game must hinge upon the fact that its characters are driven to struggle against any and all odds to make things better, make them right. There are mortal casualties in two of the three films in the series; Albrecht gets shot and winds up in the hospital at the end of the original film, and Sarah dies in the second. Experienced Hero characters aren't recommended in a Crow universe game, and players who like powerhouse characters as a rule aren't appropriate for such a campaign, as the Spirit of Vengeance is going to be the only character who qualifies as a powerhouse throughout the game.

New Quality and Drawback

*Sarah: You've been brought back for a reason, Ashe
Ashe: To find the men that did this to us...and make them pay!*

Sarah and Ashe, The Crow: City of Angels

Spirit of Vengeance: 15-point Quality

Spirits of Vengeance are the Risen Dead, those poor souls that could not rest peacefully in the netherworld, who have returned to wreak divine vengeance on those who have done them wrong. To become a vengeance spirit, one's death has to have been so horrible, so sublimely violent and tragic, that the spirit could not rest until the wrong that sent them to the next world was put right. In every case, love is the guiding force behind the Spirit of Vengeance, be it love for a child, a fiancée, a family, a parent, what have you. The vengeance that the risen brings is not for him or herself; it is for the others who have been lost at the same time. A man wrongly executed for his girlfriend's murder returns to destroy the real killers. A man is forced to watch his fiancée beaten and raped, then is killed himself and returns to avenge his girlfriend's death as well as his. A pregnant woman is savaged and loses her child, then dies herself. She returns to bring justice for the child that never had a chance to live. Love is the key to understanding these wronged souls.

The major weaknesses of the Vengeance Spirit are twofold: First, they are linked to the living, breathing

world by their crow guardians. If the Crow is injured, the Vengeance Spirit manifests the exact same injury, and cannot heal an injury inflicted in this manner via their regeneration power. If the Crow is killed, the Vengeance Spirit becomes instantly mortal again, a normal human being, and loses all benefits of the Quality, except for psychic visions and Calling.

The second weakness a Vengeance Spirit possesses is his or her link to their mission. Vengeance Spirits work for the dead, not the living, and if they lose sight of that goal, or can be duped into believing that they have completed their task, they become completely mortal, losing all benefits of the Quality, until and unless they can regain sight of their true goal and purpose.



The Game Face: Much like Vampires, Vengeance Spirits have a "game face" of sorts. While the functionality of this face differs from spirit to spirit, the face itself always resembles the classic "mime from hell" comedy mask that we're all familiar with. For each Vengeance Spirit, the mask finds its way to them somehow, be it through an irrational desire to paint one's

face, having someone else "in the know" paint the face for them, or through permanent scarring after an accident, all Vengeance Spirits share the comedy mask as a common thread. For most Vengeance Spirits, the comedy mask remains a constant fixture upon their face while they roam the earth. But for a select few, their mission of vengeance becomes one of a crusade against evil. These men and women are effectively immortal, and their comedy mask manifests itself when they engage in their battle against evil. For these very rare spirits, the mask is not only a symbol of their mission, it is as much a link as the Crow is. When the mask is not manifested, they have none of the abilities of the Quality below.

Vengeance Spirits have the following special abilities:

- +2 to Dexterity and Constitution. Both of these attributes may be raised to a maximum of 10.
- +1 to Willpower
- +1 to Getting Medieval, Gun Fu, and Kung Fu
- Fast Reaction Time at no cost
- 2 Levels of Hard to Kill (and may purchase more to a maximum of 10)
- Regenerate their Constitution Level in Life Points per minute
- Improved Drama Healing: a Vengeance Spirit can spend a Drama Point to instantly heal *all* damage taken from any single attack.
- Psychic Visions (by touch): Vengeance Spirits gain the semi-controlled ability to read objects. By touching any item or person that has anything at all to do with their mission, the Vengeance Spirit will see the person or item's involvement in full, and feel the sensations of anyone nearby when the event happened. For example, Eric Draven touches Albrecht and experiences the pain of Shelley's death in intensive care. This ability is automatic and uncontrolled. However, Vengeance Spirits can also *voluntarily* transmit the pain, visions, and sensation to any person whose face they touch. This generally has the effect of stunning the person as they are overwhelmed with unexpected pain and suffering. Victims of this attack must make a Resisted Task against Willpower (doubled) to retain their

composure. The Vengeance Spirit is always at a +2 to his or her roll in this Task. If the victim fails, they become momentarily blinded and incapacitated; effects are similar to the *stun rifle* used by the Initiative (see *Slayer's Handbook* for details). The downside to this ability is that while the Vengeance Spirit retains the memories s/he imparts, they lose the sensations that accompany it, and it is often this rage and pain that drives them to complete their mission; without it, hopelessness ensues.

- **Crowvision:** Vengeance Spirits are linked to the realm of the living by their Crow guardian. They can see and hear everything that the Crow does at any given time, at will.
- **Calling:** Vengeance Spirits are linked to the crow, which carries inside its breast the soul of someone who has lost their way after death, or not yet passed to the realms beyond. In times of desperate need, the Vengeance Spirit can call upon any or all crows within her line of sight for assistance. The assistance called upon can be minor, such as carrying a trinket, or even severe, such as taking the soul of an evil person. However, the latter should cost Drama Points, and this ability does not equate to control over crows; the animals can refuse the requested assistance if it's not appropriate. The job of bringing divine retribution isn't meant to be a simple one, after all.
- **Obsession (vengeance, 2 point).** The Vengeance Spirit gains no points for this drawback
- **Honor (Major, 2 point).** The Vengeance Spirit gains no points for this drawback
- **Love (Tragic, 2 point).** The Vengeance Spirit gains no points for this drawback.

Open Wounds (2-point Drawback)

Prerequisite: Spirit of Vengeance

The Spirit of Vengeance afflicted with Open Wounds finds that no matter how much damage they heal, they still retain the mark of the injuries they have suffered throughout their mission. Knife wounds and gunshots fester; serious wounds like a shotgun blast to the head heal, but scar horribly. Burn wounds leave a horrific, Freddy-Krueger-like scar behind. This Drawback has the same effect as negative

attractiveness, but works slightly differently. For every 10 points of damage that the character must heal, he gains a -1 roll to any Task where his appearance is a factor, and once this penalty reaches -5, he causes all of those he meets to make at a Fear Test.

Qualities and Crossovers

Alex: "Big bang? Primordial ooze? Divine hand of a benevolent creator? All possibilities, although recent events have given me doubts about the benevolent creator."

-Alex, The Crow: Salvation

Many (if not all) of the Qualities and Drawbacks in the *BtVS RPG* fit rather seamlessly into the mythos of the Crow, but some are more common than others, particularly Qualities such as Addiction, Honor, Cop, Criminal, Misfit, Teenager, etc. Other Qualities are quite inappropriate, such as Robot, Werewolf, Vampire, etc. In the end, Directors and Players should use common sense and their own conception of the universe to decide what is and is not appropriate. Without a doubt, there are those out there who will seek to use the Vengeance Spirit Quality to crossover their *Buffy* series with that of *The Crow*. The transition should be fairly seamless; however, keep in mind that Vengeance Spirits are very powerful and are designed to be the centerpieces of their own series. If you don't mind a character that can overshadow your Slayer, then there's not much of a problem there. Otherwise, take care to keep the focus of the game where you want it. Possibilities for crossovers with various other genres are listed below.

Vengeance and the Slayer: Perhaps a cult dedicated to the Big Bad of your season murdered a man in the process of kidnapping and sacrificing his daughter to their demonic masters a year before the Season begins. Now, one year later, the man arises and the Cast becomes aware of his presence. He can be a valuable ally, fighting alongside the Slayer and her gang, or he can be a potent adversary, should the Slayer decide that his brand of "justice" isn't his to deliver (most likely how Buffy would react once the murders started).

Blade: A woman and her husband crossed the wrong people and were led into a trap by a powerful city figure who also happened to be a Familiar. She was forced to watch her husband turned into a vampire, and was then murdered at his hand. Now she has returned and sought out the Daywalker, both to wreak vengeance upon the men and creatures that did this to her, and to lay her husband to rest, so they can be together in the next world.

Vampire\$: A corrupted bishop within the Church has fallen to darkness and betrayed one of the characters, a slayer under his employ. The character's team was ambushed and laid waste; the character survived, only to return home to find his fiancée, the love of his life, turned into a vampire. She killed him, but did not turn him, and the last thing he saw before dying was the leering face of the bishop standing over him....

The Prophecy: A father and son are caught in the crossfire of the war between the Angels, victims of the

human agents helping to carry out the war. Now, father has returned to correct the sins visited upon mankind by Heaven itself.

Highlander: A wealthy and ancient Immortal, head of an international crime syndicate, made the character pay an unholy price for a small transgression. But criminals such as these don't strike back at the man; they take his family first. Now he has returned and begun to work his way up the food chain, seeking to discover the secrets of his powerful enemy as he comes ever nearer to his final salvation.

Dark City: A woman awakens and watches her most beloved crushed in a Tuning experiment gone wrong, just before she, too, falls victim to the powers of the Strangers. She returns with the memories of every life the Strangers ever imprinted upon her, desperate and filled with rage. She is a force of retribution who may prove to be the salvation of everyone trapped within the city.

