

# LARP OF THE DAMNED

Live Action Roleplaying with the **Unisystem**™

By Jason Vey

## Introduction

A big part of the charm of the **Unisystem** is that the rules are so flexible and open, really capable of handling anything from zombies to magic to swords and sorcery, to vampires, werewolves, and chicks with stakes who turn them to dirt. Even science fiction is possible, as earlier issues of *ESP* have demonstrated. A quick Internet search will turn up almost every imaginable application of the system, with one notable exception: there are no rules for Live Action Roleplaying, or LARPing.

The key to developing LARP rules for the **Unisystem** is that they need to be as fast-playing, smooth, and open as the tabletop rules are. Thankfully, most of the options are already done for us. This article will put the pieces together, and hopefully provide an enjoyable and original system of live action rules for **Unisystem** play (and we promise to avoid “Rock, Paper, Scissors.”)

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED

To use these rules, you’ll need a copy of any **Unisystem** core rulebook, and a deck of Tarot cards for task resolution. If you’re using Essence-based Metaphysics in your game, each player will need a belt pouch or pocket full of marbles or large beads (these can be found in almost any craft store and are very cheap).

In a LARP, it is generally necessary to have one overall game master and a number of assistants. In keeping with **Unisystem** terminology, the overall game master in this article is the Chronicler, and his assistants are the Directors. This terminology can be changed to fit the flavor of individual games, of course. If, for example, the game is an *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* game, the Chronicler would be the Zombie Master. If the game in question is one of Eden’s Cinematic **Unisystem** games, the overall head of play is the Director, with his underlings called Assistant Directors.

Often, players acting in a Director capacity also fulfill important non-player roles, such as Adversaries and Guest Stars. They generally are present for on-the-spot rulings and task resolution, and as such each Director should have his own deck of tarot cards. In addition, the Chronicler and each

Director should keep with them a copy of the Success Levels chart, currently found at the bottom of any of Eden’s Cinematic **Unisystem** character sheets.

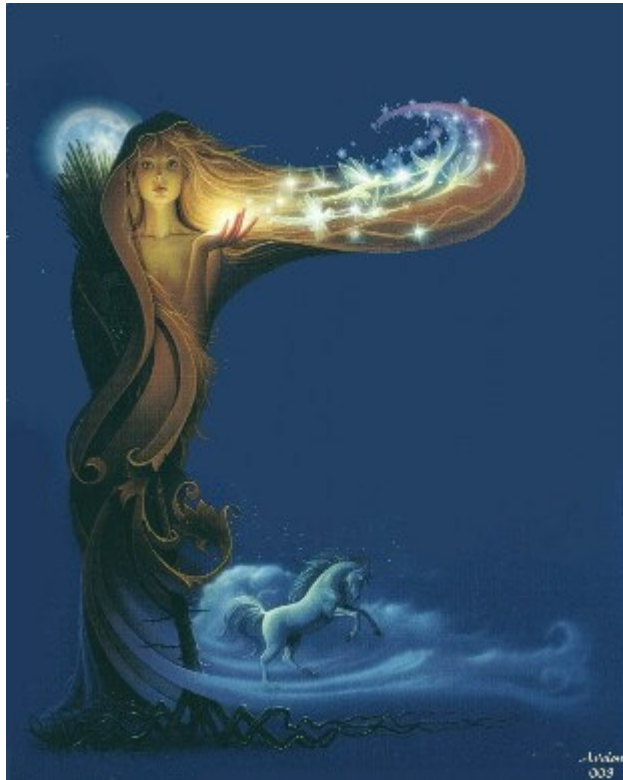


## CAST MEMBER CREATION

Cast Member Creation in a **Unisystem** LARP is similar to that in tabletop, slightly streamlined. For full **Unisystem** games, players only need to worry about one secondary attribute: Essence. Endurance and Speed are not necessary for LARP Cast Member creation. If a chase scene becomes necessary, your Chronicler can determine a Cast Member’s speed on the spot from their Dexterity and Constitution scores. However, if your group is using the Essence Pool Method of metaphysics, then somewhere on your sheet you’ll need to note an “Essence Recovery” score equal to your Cast Member’s Essence Channeling (or Willpower, in the case of supernaturals and Inspired) times five. This will come into play later on. Other than this, create your Cast Member as standard, using a normal Cast Member sheet which the Chronicler and Directors can keep as a full record of your Cast Member in a dossier. This is only in case he needs to check up on a detail at some point in the game.

Once your Cast Member is created, you’ll transfer it onto three standard-sized index cards, which you can keep in a name badge or in your pocket. It’s a good idea to include your Cast Member’s name on all three cards, in case you lose one. On the first card, list your Cast Member’s name, attributes, Essence Score,

Essence Recovery Level and Qualities and Drawbacks. On the second card, list the Cast Member's name, skills, and any important gear they might have with them (note: you'll need to provide props for any of this gear, so clear it with your Chronicler). On the third and final card, list any special abilities or Metaphysics your Cast Member possesses. In a Cinematic game, this third card is ideal for powers, spells, and supernatural abilities. You can make any notes or reminders for yourself on the backs of these cards.



### ESSENCE-BASED METAPHYSICS

Cast Members in a full **Unisystem** game use Essence to power their supernatural abilities. This causes a logistical problem in a LARP, as far as keeping track of each individual player's Essence Pool, how much is spent, how much is left, and how quickly a given Cast Member recovers spent Essence. To solve this dilemma, we present three options below. One of the options, the Essence Pool Method, more closely resembles the method seen in our tabletop games. However, it also requires much more organization and bookkeeping on the part of the Chronicler and Directors.

#### OPTION 1: ESSENCE POOL METHOD

To use this method, each player is required to provide a number of marbles or glass beads to represent her

Essence Pool. Preferably, each player's beads or marbles should all be the same color, and different from the others, to differentiate between players. These are kept by the player, either in her pocket or in a belt pouch (or even a dice bag). The Chronicler and Directors will also have a "bank" of marbles representing ambient Essence or extra Essence gathered from Places or Times of Power.

At the beginning of each session, every player will be assigned to one of several "Essence Banks," located at various points throughout the play area. These banks will be attended by either a bank attendant or by one of the Directors, depending on how many people are in the group. Whenever a Cast Member channels or loses Essence, remove a number of marbles equal to the amount channeled from the pocket or pouch, and turn it over to a Chronicler or Director. The Chronicler or Director in question will then deliver the marbles to that player's Essence Bank. An individual Cast Member's Essence will always be delivered to the same Essence Bank assigned at the beginning of the session. Likewise, any Essence that is stolen from a Cast Member, by a vampyre, rival magician, or other Cast Member or monster is turned over to the Director, who will deliver it to the bank. The Cast Member or monster who stole the Essence will be awarded marbles or beads from the Director's cache, to keep from getting players' marbles or beads mixed up.

Recovery of Essence is slightly different in a LARP game, for purposes of simple organization. It would be utter chaos if every five minutes or so a Director or Chronicler had to track down everyone who'd spent Essence in the last five minutes and replenish the pool. Thus, in a LARP, Cast Members regain Essence equal to five marbles per Essence Channeling, Willpower, or other appropriate stat, every half hour of game play, on the half hour. At these times, players may approach their assigned Essence banks, show their index cards to the attendant (to demonstrate how much Essence they are to recover) and get that much back. The process then continues in this manner throughout the game.

#### OPTION TWO: TASK RESOLUTION METHOD

This option does not keep track of Cast Members' Essence Pools at all, only their Increased Essence Pool and Essence Channeling Qualities. It becomes problematic when dealing with certain Supernaturals, but is ideal for faster play and smaller groups. Whenever a Cast Member needs to use a metaphysical ability, they must perform a Summoning Task using their Essence Channeling

plus Willpower, with half their Increased Essence Pool levels (rounded down) added as a bonus to the Task. The Difficulty of this Task is nine plus the Essence Cost of the effect. A Player may continue to draw cards each successive round, adding the result to the total until they achieve the necessary result to create the effect.

Supernatural creatures such as Vampyres and Seraphim can channel as much Essence as they like at any given time, and recover their lost Essence quite quickly. For these creatures, the Summoning Task is simply not necessary. Summoning for Supernaturals occurs automatically and in the same round as the ability manifests. The only Task Resolution they need perform is any that is associated with the power in question (a use of the Primal Skill, for example).

This method requires much less book keeping, and is much smoother and faster overall, but becomes problematic when dealing with creatures like Vampyres, who survive by stealing Essence from other players. One possible solution is to have Essence loss from creatures manifest as temporary losses to Attributes of the player's choice, losses which are recovered at the rate of the Cast Member's Essence Channeling per five minutes of play. This brings the Honor System into the game, but if Chroniclers and Directors are comfortable with this, then so be it. Another possible solution is to have these creatures feed on Life Points rather than Essence, though this makes them potentially much more deadly.

### OPTION THREE: CINEMATIC METHOD

This option doesn't use Essence at all, instead replacing Essence Channeling, Essence Pool, and Invocations with the five-point per level Sorcery Quality from our Cinematic **Unisystem** games, the Rituals skill, and Invocation qualities. The Sorcery and Rituals Qualities are also only necessary when using Invocations. Necromancy powers simply ignore Essence Cost altogether, and simply work off of Necromancy Task results, and (where appropriate) resisted Willpower Tasks. Activating a Necromancy power requires a number of success levels on the Necromancy Task equal to the level of the power being activated.

**For Example:** Activating the Death Mastery level five power of Wishkill requires five success levels on a Willpower + Necromancy Task, and a Resisted Task using the Medium's Willpower and Necromancy and the victim's Constitution and Willpower.



When creating Cast Members who will use Invocations, players must purchase at least one level of *Sorcery*, a five-point per level Quality that allows "quick casting" of magical effects and adds to Willpower + Rituals for purposes of spell casting. Each Invocation is then purchased as a separate, 5-point Quality. When a Cast Member uses her metaphysics, she describes to the Director what effect she is attempting to create. The Director then assigns a Power Level to the ability, and the player draws a card to cast the spell. She needs a number of success levels on her Sorcery task equal to the spell's Power Level for it to go off, and all damage and effects are based upon Willpower and success levels rather than Essence spent.

The Power level of a spell should always be equal to double what the Essence Cost of the effect would have been. Thus, creating a lightning bolt that normally would cost two Essence requires four success levels on the roll.

This system brings up some of the same problems as option 2, and the same solutions could work to solve those problems.

## Drama Points

Drama Points in a cinematic LARP are represented by stones, marbles, or glass beads that each player keeps in a pocket or pouch. Every player should be handed an allotment of Drama Stones appropriate to their Cast Member at the beginning of the session. As they spend Drama Points, stones are given to the Director or Assistant Director (remember, this is Cinematic terminology). As Cast Members earn Drama Points, the Director or Assistant Director should give extra stones to their players. Drama Points work exactly the same in a LARP as they do in a standard game.

## TASK RESOLUTION

Task Resolution in a **Unisystem** LARP is resolved exactly as in the tabletop versions of the games, but uses tarot cards instead of dice. Players do not need to provide cards; only the Chronicler and directors need have decks. In each tarot deck, leave the Minor Arcana cards (ace through ten only—no kings, queens, or jacks), and three Major Arcana cards: the Devil, the Magician, and the Wheel of Fortune. For those unfamiliar with tarot cards, the Minor Arcana is the four suits consisting of Pentacles, Swords, Cups, and Wands.

## Why Tarot Cards?

These LARP rules use tarot cards as the default Task Resolution system for mood more than anything else. Tarot cards add an element of mystery and horror to the game, and that's Eden's specialty. However, there will probably be some players and directors out there either not comfortable with using tarot cards, or who simply don't want to pay for them. Fear not; it is possible to use the system presented here with standard playing cards. Simply use the ace through 10 of the four standard suits, and substitute the Queen of Spades for the Devil, the Queen of Hearts for the Magician, and the Jack of Diamonds for the Wheel of Fortune. The functionality works exactly the same as described in the main rules; the cards just look different.

Whenever it is necessary to resolve any Task or Test, including skills, Attribute Tests, Combat, and (in a Cinematic game) Sorcery and spellcasting, all players involved draw a single card from the Director's deck. The number on the card is added to the appropriate Attribute + Skill combination to determine the Test or Task result. In full **Unisystem** games, the Rules of 1 and 10 apply as follows: if an ace or a 10 is drawn, the Director shuffles the deck and the player draws

another card immediately, adding half the displayed result (round up) to the total. If the second card is an ace or 10, respectively, shuffle again, draw again, and repeat the process exactly as though a player had rolled a string of 1's or 10's on a die.

The difference in Task resolution for the LARP rules are those three Major Arcana cards, which exist as a sort of surprise random element for the Director and Players. If a Player draws the Magician, something extraordinarily good happens (Chronicler or Director's option) to them without the need to draw further. Likewise, if a player draws the Devil, something painfully bad happens (Chronicler or Director's option). If the Wheel of Fortune is drawn, all players involved in the conflict return their cards to the deck, and draw all over again, except for the player who drew the Wheel of Fortune. That player immediately draws another card, then decides if she wishes to draw again with the rest of the Cast, or if she wishes to keep that card while the others re-draw.



## COMBAT

Combat is a given in a roleplaying game, particularly one that involves the themes of the various **Unisystem** games. Handling combat in a live action game is touchy at best, as it can become chaotic and

even dangerous to the participants if not handled properly. Thus, while most live action roleplaying takes place in real time, much like improvisational theater, when combat occurs it becomes necessary to bring things to a stop and handle actions step by step. Thus, whenever a player decides her Cast Member is entering into an aggressive posture or making any sort of aggressive act, she should *under no circumstances* act out that aggression; rather, she should get the attention of a Director and explain what is happening. At this point, the Director will call a stop to the game and announce that Combat is beginning.

Initiative is determined by common sense; whoever initiated the combat generally acts first, barring outside circumstances or Fast Reaction Time (which always acts as an “initiative trump card.”) Each Cast Member may perform actions in combat exactly as they would in a table top game, with additional actions beyond the first suffering the same cumulative -2 penalty. During the Intentions phase of Combat, each player declares what her Cast Member is doing. On her turn, she will move to the appropriate area of play, and she and any opponent she battles draw cards to resolve any necessary Tests or Tasks. The actual actions involved in Combat are resolved using the normal Task Resolution system.

**For Example:** Jane decides her Cast Member is attacking Sammy’s. They flag down a Director and Jane tells him what’s going down. The Director calls a stop to the game and explains that Jane is attacking Sammy’s Cast Member. Nobody has Fast Reaction Time, so Jane will go first. On Intentions, Jane announces she’s attacking Sammy with a .9mm pistol. Sammy says she’s dodging behind a chair and firing back with her own gun. Joe, across the room, is trying a diving tackle at Jane to stop her from killing Sammy.

Now combat begins. Jane draws a card to attack Sammy. Her total result on the draw is a 12. The Director now re-shuffles and goes to Sammy, who moves behind the chair her Cast Member dove at. Sammy draws and her total after penalties (remember, dodging bullets is tough) is a 13, just barely enough to dodge the shot.

### The dangers of theatrical combat

It’s a shame that this needs to be reiterated, but under no circumstances should players ever actually attempt to simulate real combat; even if one or more players have training in stage combat, accidents happen and it is rare that all players will be well-trained enough to handle simulated battle scenes. Players in a LARP should always talk to the Chronicler or Director to see what (if any) prop weapons are allowed in the game, and we strongly discourage any real weapons in the play area. Guns should be brightly-colored water pistols or cap guns; swords and melee weapons should be made of foam rubber or be children’s soft plastic toy weapons. While this may seem overly cautious, it’s better to err on the side of caution in situations where emotions can run high and the danger of injury is real.

When props are permitted, it is okay for players to simulate basic actions, such as pointing that water gun at their opponent to simulate firing, or crossing those plastic swords with their opponent to simulate the battle; however, never should such actions degenerate into “real” combat actions. Always use common sense in these situations.

Now it’s Joe’s turn. He walks over to Jane and puts his hand on her shoulder to show that his Cast Member is tackling hers. He draws his card, and gets a 14 result. The Director rules that Jane can’t dodge since she didn’t see Joe coming. She goes down and takes damage from the fall; Jane lays on the floor to simulate this; Joe lays down beside her. Sammy pops up from behind the chair, gun drawn, but decides not to fire, as Jane is now on the ground, and Sammy doesn’t want to hit Joe. Combat continues...

All combat damage should be resolved using the fast-play options. Damage is always determined using parenthetical values, plus success levels and any applicable modifiers, then modified for damage type.

**For Example:** a 9mm pistol, which deals D6x14(12) points of base damage in the tabletop game, deals 12 points of base damage in a LARP. The success levels of a successful attack with this weapon are added to the base damage, and it is then modified for bullet damage type. So an attack with this gun that achieves four success levels deals 16 points of base damage (12+4=16), and if the victim is human, this damage is then doubled to 32 for bullet type.