

# RISUS

## Icosahedral Monomaniac Edition

*By Rob Edwards, under duress from his children*



## Introduction

This is a set of house rules for *Risus* by S. John Ross using alternate dice mechanics based on the d20 and the d6. When rolling Xd6 any individual die returning a result of 6 explodes.

## Cliché Numbers

These rules replace cliché dice with cliché numbers ranging from 0 to 20 or more. The amount by which a cliché number (CN) or target number (TN) exceeds 20 is significant and is called the surplus, where a score of 24 has a surplus of 4.

*Mental Gear Shift:* When playing *Risus* you are probably used to thinking in terms of cliché dice. Cliché numbers can take a bit of getting used to but the following relationship helps: you can convert cliché numbers into cliché dice by dividing them by 5 and adding 1. An Ogre (6) becomes an Ogre (25).

## Character Creation

Player characters are created by dividing 30 cliché points between 3 clichés, with no starting cliché higher than 15. Players also get 3 lucky shots, which can be used to add a temporary 1d6 bonus to any CN for a single action. Lucky shots refresh at a rate determined by the GM.

## Double Pump Clichés

Double pump clichés cost twice as many cliché points as the cliché number.

## Proper Tools

If you lose your proper tools your cliché number is halved.

## Tests

When you try to do something and nobody is actively trying to stop you it's a test. The GM will assign a target number or TN using the following benchmark values as a guide.

- 0: Challenging for a novice, easy for a pro, routine for a master
- 10: Hard for a novice, challenging for a pro, easy for a master
- 20: Daunting for a novice, hard for a pro, challenging for a master
- 30: Daunting for a pro, hard for a master - nearly superhuman
- 40: Daunting for a master – arguably superhuman
- 50: Impossible for a master – clearly superhuman

The player rolls a d20 and notes whether the roll is odd or even, comparing the result to their CN and the TN assigned by the GM (and their surpluses) at the same time:

- If the roll is equal to or less than both numbers (or two surpluses) the PC succeeds if they rolled even and fails they rolled odd.
- If the roll is equal to or less than one number (or one surplus) the PC succeeds if it's their CN and fails if it's the TN.
- If the roll is greater than both numbers, the PC succeeds with drawbacks if they rolled even and fails with benefits if they rolled odd.

Sometimes you will lose 1d6 cliché points if you fail at a task. Sometimes somebody else will lose 1d6 cliché points if you succeed. What actually happens is up to the GM.

*Target Numbers:* The target numbers provided in the table above are calibrated against the CN of a novice (CN 0), amateur (CN 10) and master (CN 20). The TN values assigned by the GM should vary around these benchmark values just like a CN.

## **Contests**

When you are trying to do something and somebody is actively trying to stop you it's a contest. Combat is a contest. Both the player and the GM roll a d20 and compare the result to a relevant CN (and its surplus). Only the player notes if their roll is odd or even:

- If both the player and the GM roll equal to or less than their CN (or its surplus) the PC wins if they rolled even and loses if they rolled odd.
- If only the player or only the GM rolls equal to or less than their CN (or surplus) the PC wins if it was the player but loses if was the GM.
- If both player and GM roll greater than their CN the PC wins with drawbacks if they rolled even and loses with benefits if they rolled odd.

Losing a round of combat reduces your cliché number by 1d6 points. Anyone reduced to a negative cliché number loses the fight and the winner decides what happens to the loser.

## **Single Action Conflicts**

Sometimes a single round of combat is used to resolve combat quickly. This is called a single action conflict. The loser is reduced to minus 1d6 cliché points and the winner decides what happens to the loser.

## **Lost Cliché Points**

Lost cliché points tend to represent things like anxiety, stress, fatigue and pain. Sometimes they represent more abstract things. They recover at a rate determined by the GM, which will vary depending on the situation.

## **Inappropriate Clichés**

Losing a round against an inappropriate cliché costs 3d6 cliché points.

## **Teaming Up**

When multiple attackers team up against a single foe, their solitary adversary can split their CN evenly amongst any number of foes that does not reduce it below 5. The lone foe can function as that many combatants but loses cliché points from the original CN rather than the split CN. Other attacks are dealt with as unopposed actions with a TN of 0.

## **When Somebody Can't Participate**

Give them a cliché number of 0.

## **Pumping**

You can pump a cliché by as many points as your CN. These points are added to your CN for a single test or contest round, after which they are deducted from your unmodified CN. In a contest they are also deducted from your opponents CN if you win.

## **Double Pumping**

When using a double pump cliché the bonus added to your CN and subtracted from the CN of an adversary if you win is double the number of points pumped and lost.

## **Upping The Stakes**

The stake is the 1d6 cliché points lost by the loser in a conflict. A player can increase the stake by a number of dice equal to their CN divided by 5 rounded down. This is risky but costs nothing.

## OPTIONAL RULES

### Negative Cliché Points

Lost cliché points usually represent transient effects. If a character is reduced to negative cliché points they suffer lasting behavioural, emotional, physical or mental impairment. While lost positive cliché points will recover normally, negative cliché points hang around as a penalty applied to all of your clichés. Negative cliché points are cumulative and recover at a rate determined by the GM. A cliché reduced below 0 cannot be used.

### Shticks

These are the things a cliché is really good for. Every cliché must be assigned three shticks. The more specific the shtick the less often it will be useful, but the bigger the impact it will have when relevant. Using the example of picking a lock, a shtick that is specifically relevant (Lock Picking) will reduce the TN by 10. Generally relevant shticks (Counter Security) will reduce the TN by 5.

*Example: A cliché like Hulking Barbarian Warrior (14) could have shticks like Kicking Ass, Wilderness Survival and Strongman Antics, but they might just as easily have shticks like Axe Wielding, Big Game Hunting and Extreme Carousing. The possibilities are endless.*

### Cliché Relevance

If you don't have a relevant shtick, look to your clichés. Using the same lock-picking example, a clearly relevant cliché (Gentleman Thief) leaves the TN unmodified, an arguably relevant cliché (Versatile Handyman) increases it by 5, an irrelevant cliché (Investment Banker) increases it by 10, an arguably contra-relevant cliché (Simple Minded Janitor) increases it by 15, and a clearly contra-relevant cliché (Angry Dalek) increases it by 20.

### Character Advancement

When a shtick increases your chance of success but the opposing TN or CN is still higher your cliché number, check a box next to that shtick whether you succeed or fail. When all three shticks are checked increase your CN by 1. Clear the boxes and start again.

### Power Scales

Clichés combine power and ability. An Ogre (25) is just an upsized troglodyte, with all the basic abilities of a professional, card-carrying troglodyte. Where size counts it contributes 5 cliché points to their cliché for each successive doubling of body mass over that of a human. You can work it the opposite direction for each successive halving of body mass.

*Example: An Ogre (25) is 2 times the height of a human and weighs 8 times as much, representing 3 successive doublings. This provides a plus 15 bonus to their otherwise troglodytic abilities, which is already figured into their cliché. When they do things size has no bearing on, subtract 15 from their CN.*

### Lucky Shots Revisited

Lucky shots can also be used to recover from being reduced to a negative cliché number, enabling characters to rally dramatically when it seems like the game is over. This is neat.

### Sidekicks

When creating a character you can spend some of your points on a sidekick. Triple the number of cliché points invested in your sidekick and follow the usual rules for character creation to define their abilities.

## **ALTERNATIVE MECHANICS**

I have toyed with a variety of different rules based on the same core mechanics. I have found myself going back to some of them on occasion. You might want to try some of them.

### **The Tie Die**

Instead of using odd or even d20 results to resolve tests and contests I have on occasion used a separate tie die. The player rolls any type of polyhedral die along with their d20 and checks whether the result is odd or even instead. The tie die irons out small inequalities between the effectiveness of cliché numbers for PC's and NPC's and puts all those other dice to use.

### **Supplementary Tie Die Rules**

If the tie die is not required to resolve a test or contest it can be ignored or used for other things. An even result on in a test or contest might refresh a lucky shot. An even result in a contest might mean that the d6 explodes whether a 6 is rolled or not.

### **Joint Tie Resolution Rules**

This is an alternative to the tie die. Both the player and the GM check whether their d20 result is odd or even, with matched results favouring the player: if both roll odd or both roll even, the player wins; if one rolls odd and the other even the player loses. Just like the tie die mechanics this also irons out small inequalities between PC and NPC cliché numbers.

### **Ties and Dramatic Space**

I'm not a fan of unresolved ties in conflicts, because they slow things down. I prefer winning with complications or losing with benefits. However, some people enjoy the way unresolved ties can be used to create opportunities for roleplaying. If you like unresolved ties try using a fudge die as your tie die, where the player loses on a minus, ties on a blank and wins on a plus. Using this rule evenly matched contestants will tie a third of the time. While I haven't tested this I have played Risus using dice mechanics with the same frequency of ties.

### **The Impact Die**

These rules involve a bunch of supplementary mechanics based on an exploding d6, which I call the impact die. While this works very well I have used alternatives. The first iteration of these rules only used a d20, where losing a round in a conflict cost 5 cliché points instead of 1d6 cliché points. The second replaced the impact die with 2d6 in every instance, where any result of 6 was read as 0. Both decrease endurance and speed up contest resolution.

### **Only The Player Rolls**

I designed the rules for tests and contests so that you can use a CN in place of a TN or TN in place of a CN. Both systems deliver very similar results - identical results if you use a tie die. You can play this game using only the rules for tests, where the GM doesn't need to roll any dice. This can make life much easier for the GM when a big fight is going down.

### **Players In Conflict**

The basic rules are asymmetric, where only the player checks whether their d20 roll is odd or even. When players are in conflict one of them has to be given the power to resolve ties. This can make players whine like babies. You can solve this problem by switching to the Joint Tie Resolution mechanics or the Tie Die mechanics where the GM rolls the tie die.