

Cower not from rolling your dice, for only by doing so may you seize your destiny!

The Bloody-Handed Name of Bronze, by Joshua A C Newman

This game primarily uses a **pool of six-sided dice** to *simulate randomness* in play, to perform *non-trivial actions*, and to *resolve conflicts* generated by the fiction.

Quick Play Procedure

1. **Find your agenda**
2. **Assuming you should roll**, discuss the **difficulty**, the **consequences**, and which **ability** or **capability** to use, and **what kind of roll** this should be:
 - Gather **only your Health dice** if it's a **Check**.
 - Gather **your Health and job dice** for a **Task**, and any other *situational bonuses* or **asset dice**.
 - Then *remove a die* from the pool for each **difficulty factor**.
3. **Get help**, if you need it, or if it's offered.
 - **Merge dice from multiple helpers**.
4. Roll the dice, and **count a success for each die that lands on a face *equal to or more than its rank***.
 - **KISS** dice that fail you, to re-roll them.
 - Spend **Ego** if you want to *double the successes* from all 6s.
 - And watch out for **Snake Eyes**, a pair of 1s.
5. Spend successes *according to the type of roll*:
 - **Checks** need **one success** to pass.
 - **Tasks** need **successes equal to the number of consequences** to fully pass, but *each success is spent to subvert a consequence* creating compromises.
6. If the **absolute difficulty** was **challenging**, instead of *standard*, then *double the number of successes needed* to pass or subvert consequences.
7. **Let it ride**

Finding your Agenda

During play, once it is decided that **you should roll dice**, your **Facilitator** will stop **roleplaying** and begin to openly *discuss your agenda* for that roll. In other words, **talk about what you're trying to achieve and how?**

Coming up with an agenda for each **scene** or **turn** can be a *complex and personal* process; everyone will do it slightly differently, because everyone thinks differently. But the following are some questions you can ask yourself if you're feeling stuck:

- Look to your **principles**, and think about which ones are currently motivating you the most, or which ones can apply directly to what's happening right now?
 - Remember that **goals** can be **SMART**.
- What are your **features**, and do any of them help to prompt you to **roleplay** in a certain way?
- What are your friends and allies trying to achieve right now, and can you **help** them, or *perhaps* should you **hinder** them?
- Check your **jobs** and **assets**, and wonder if any of them can be used creatively to achieve what you want?
- Question your **FC** about your **environment** and the current **situation**, see if they've forgotten to mention anything useful, or if they will yield more information if you ask the right questions or act a certain way in-game?
- Ask your **Peers** for help to parse your thoughts and formulate a plan?

See also

#unfinished

Checks

Pick up your **Health dice**. This is usually two dice, occasionally three, but fewer if you're *wounded*. These dice take on the **rank** of the **ability** or **capability** your **FC** chose for the Check. If you were offered a **helping die** then it use its own rank¹ and is *rolled separately*.

Rolling Dice

Once the **consequences** of failure are clear and the **difficulty is set**, then **roll all your dice and *count successes* for all the faces land *equal to or greater than* your rank**. Then look at the results of your roll according to the difficulty:

- **Standard:** You only need *one success* to pass.
- **Challenging:** You need *two successes* to pass.

A 'pass' means *you get your intent*, and so your **agenda** may be fulfilled.

Failing to pass means you *suffer the consequences*, which may divert the game down a new path and force you to reevaluate your current priorities. This is all part of the fun of **roleplaying**. The consequences of failing Checks are usually not as severe as failing **Tasks** though.

KISSing?

If you got no successes, or not enough successes, you can **KISS** your dice on a Check to *re-roll any dice you like* — but you must keep the new result, even if it's worse — and you can also spend **Ego** after KISSing to *double the successes from any 6s rolled*.

Snake Eyes?

Keep an eye out for a **pair of 1s**. Also known as a 'critical roll', this will count as a *failure with a boon* or a *success with a bane* depending on the main outcome of the roll.

No Dice?

If you're **gravely wounded** and have not received any help, then you have no dice and you will *automatically fail*.

See also: **When to roll?**

Tasks

Pick up your **Health dice**, dice from an **appropriate job**, and dice from any other sources of advantage (usually from things like **assets**). This is called your 'main pool', and it takes on the **rank** of the **ability** or **capability** your **FC** chose for the Task. If you were offered a **helping die** then it use its own rank¹ and is *rolled separately*.

1. Declaring the Difficulty

Your **FC** will **set the absolute difficulty** as *standard* or *challenging*, and also declare a **number of *relative* difficulty factors**, by assessing the current situation and your actions, and what you're attempting and how. They may **choose and interpret factors** from a list². Some *examples* from the generic list include:

- "An opponent is mighty, cunning, or ominous..."
- "An opponent's size disadvantages you..."
- "There are other obstacles you must overcome first..."
- "The consequences of a previous failure now rear their head..."
- "The environmental conditions do not favor you..."
- "You are being actively hindered by someone..."
- "You're in uncharted territory or an unfamiliar situation..."
- "You're injured, abashed, hungry, drugged, or tired..."

Each difficulty factor removes a die from your main pool *before* you roll. Whereas help dice are *unaffected* by difficulty factors.

2. Determining Consequences

Your **FC** must also lay out what will happen if you fail the task outright. This is a *loose verbal list* of ***up to four* consequences** made up by the **FC** — and possibly with the help of your **Peers** — which is *suited to foil your agenda*.

These consequences may be conditional upon one another, or all occur independently.

Each consequence is basically a short sentence describing what will happen because of your actions, in the worst case scenario.

Facilitators should be careful to not **double-dip** by imposing a consequence that's already factored in by the difficulty, or *visa versa*. **Peers** may wish to query the **FC** at

this stage about each consequence or difficulty factor, but generally these conversations should follow the **KISS principle: keep it short and sweet.**

3. Rolling Dice

Once the consequences of failure are clear, and you commit to your agenda and accept your fate, **roll all your dice and count successes for all the faces land equal to or greater than your rank.**

KISSing?

If you got no successes, or not enough successes, you can **KISS** your dice on a Task to *re-roll any dice you like* — but you must keep the new result, even if it's worse — and you can also spend **Ego** after KISSing to *double the successes from any 6s rolled.*

4. Spending Successes

Tasks work slightly differently from **Checks**, in that you **spend successes to subvert the consequences³** discussed above:

- **Standard:** You only need *one success to subvert each consequence.*
- **Challenging:** You need *two successes per consequence* to subvert it.

'Subverting' means that you get to negate, prevent, or otherwise ignore one of the consequences laid out before you. So once you know how many successes you have *you must prioritize* which parts of your **agenda** were most important to you.

If some or all of the consequences were conditional, then you must subvert them in an order that makes sense.

For example, to avoid a sleeping monster, the two consequences of failure might be *"the monster wakes up (1) and attacks you (2)."* Well the monster probably can't attack you if it's asleep, so — if you can only subvert one thing — you basically *have to* subvert the second consequence *"it attacks you"*. The decision is made practically without input, and the result should be implicit.

Other times, *more discussion will be required before spending successes;* but this process will get quicker and more intuitive the more you play.

Only if you get enough successes to buy-off all the consequences will you achieve your full agenda.

*But most Tasks won't have four consequences — four is just the limit — so you can rest assured knowing that if you can get *at least one success* then you'll get part of what you wanted out of the roll.*

Making Compromises

Tasks are designed this way to make ***partial failures*** and ***compromised successes*** the most common result of play. *It turns every important roll in the game into a narrative bargaining process.* There's almost always *something* that bites you in the end, and getting away with a task scot-free is supposed to be a rare and celebrated event.

And if you don't achieve your full agenda, then at least you'll *earn exp* for your job. In other words, *if you get fewer successes than there are consequences* then you add one experience point (*exp* : ◇ → ◆) to the job you used on the Task.

See also: [Let it ride](#)

Snake Eyes?

Keep an eye out for a [pair of 1s](#). Also known as a 'critical roll', this will count as a *failure with a boon* or a *success with a bane* depending on the main outcome of the roll.

No Dice?

If you're [gravely wounded](#) and have not received any help, then you have no dice and you will *automatically fail*.

Notes

1. If two or more types of dice differ in grade then use a different color of die for each, or otherwise roll the main dice pool first and then the other dice separately.
2. A more experienced FC may begin to set more arbitrary factors once their Peers trust them. But new players of this game should try to get a feel for the *approximately equal weight* of each factor first, before [making up their own](#).
3. You may view a Check in this light as a *simplified Task* that has only one consequence but enough difficulty factors to always mean that your job dice and other bonuses don't matter.

Helping Rolls

Any character may *offer their aid* to a player while they are performing a **Check** or a **Task**, so long as: they do so before any dice are rolled, they have a **relevant job**, *aren't currently preoccupied*, and **roleplay** appropriately.

- If a player accepts your help, then they roll your die independently and count a success using your own ability's **rank**, not theirs.
- The helping die is not affected by difficulty factors for Tasks.
- You can **KISS** your die separately too, to re-roll it, without contributing to the usual KISSing limit for that player.
- But you are tied to the **consequences** of their actions, for good or ill.

Merging Dice from Multiple Helpers

A player can be offered help from *as many allies as makes sense* — where everyone whose help is accepted is tied to the consequences of the roll — **but there can be only one helping die rolled** on any given Check or Task.

So instead a **merge operation**, denoted \oplus , is performed as follows: **For every two helpers who's ability rank is the same, merge their dice into a single die of one rank lower.**

Examples: Two rank fives merge to one four (ie. $5 \oplus 5 = 4$). Two rank threes merge to rank two (ie. $3 \oplus 3 = 2$). And two rank twos would merge to rank one (ie. $2 \oplus 2 = 1$), which is an *automatic success*.

Helpers of the same rank must be paired up in this way to merge their dice, so if there are two helpers with different ranks then the player must choose which one's help to accept or else make multiple merges *if that's feasible*.

Any helper who was involved in the merge can **KISS** the helping die to re-roll it, but remember that **a die can only be KISSed once per roll**.

Some example multi-merge operations:

$5 \oplus 5 = 4$	$4 \oplus 4 = 3$	$3 \oplus 3 = 2$	$2 \oplus 2 = 1$
$(6 \oplus 6) \oplus 5$	$(5 \oplus 5) \oplus 4$	$(4 \oplus 4) \oplus (4 \oplus 4)$	$(3 \oplus 3) \oplus 2$
—	$(5 \oplus 5) \oplus (5 \oplus 5)$	$((5 \oplus 5) \oplus 4) \oplus 3$	$((4 \oplus 4) \oplus 3) \oplus (3 \oplus 3)$

Snake Eyes

Regardless of **which type of roll you're making** or **what the difficulty is**, *whenever you roll a **pair of 1s*** — including **help** and **asset** dice — something else special may happen *in addition* to the initially stated **agenda** and **consequences** your actions. Also known as 'critical rolls', these moments can add a bit of extra unpredictability to otherwise expected outcomes:

- **If the roll was failure**, then Snake Eyes means you get *failure with a boon*, meaning there's a twist or a silver lining. You may choose one of the following options:
 - Learn something new, **establishing a relevant fact**, *and earn a bonus exp* in an appropriate job.
 - Gain an asset?
 - Earn favor?
 - Regain a **Lot**?
 - Nothing
 - **#unfinished**
- **If the roll was a success**, then the Snake Eyes will means *success with a bane*, meaning there's a sting or that something must be sacrificed. Your **Peers** may choose one of following options:
 - Damage an **asset** used in the roll, reducing its rank by 1, or *lose it entirely* if it was already only rank 6.
 - A **VINPC** who helped loses favor with you
 - Lose health? this is harsh!
 - Nothing
 - **#unfinished**

Note that **KISSing** dice that were not 1s and then finding a new pair of 1s from the result *will still count as a Snake Eyes*. But if you had Snake Eyes and KISS them before the end of the roll then they *will not count*, unless they land on 1s *again*, so there is a bit of strategy to using KISSes.

this needs rephrasing: only look for snakes eyes after KISSING

Many-Eyed Snakes?

Option ruling, decide the first time it comes up in game, then stick to that choice throughout the campaign.

When do we Roll Dice?

Sometimes, *no roll is even necessary* to do what you want to do: **we do not roll when there is nothing at stake**. In these cases, the **Facilitator** may move on to keep a good session pace, or could come back to you when you're ready to push for a stronger agenda.

Saying 'Yes'

Vincent Baker, co-creator of **Apocalypse World**, put it best in his first game Dogs in the Vinyard¹ with the phrase

Roll dice, or say 'yes'.

But the converse is also true, meaning: *When there is conflict, roll dice*.

Saying 'No'

However, it's also fair to say that the above is *just a heuristic*, not a universal truth. And since 2004 we have discovered through play and discussion that there are several times when you have to say 'No' to things too, either as a **PC** or as an **FC**. Players can follow these guides to avoid being told 'No':

- **Don't cross a line.** If you ran a full **development session** before you **made characters**, then there was a discussion about **consent and safety tools**. So attempting to cross any pre-established lines should be met with an immediate 'No', but sometimes you only discover that something is a line while in play: *Players should feel comfortable either saying 'No', or leaving the scene, or otherwise [[Let it ride#Rolls that _Don't Ride|re-winding]]*, when this happens too._
- **Don't jam the signal.** Similarly, if you ran a full **development session**, then you would have also covered themes, tones, and *player expectations*. So if your behavior would *significantly disrupt* that established game feel, you may be asked to reconsider your actions by your **Peers**.
- **Don't go out of bounds.** *This one is more for the **Player Characters**:* Your FC has likely spent a lot of their free time **preparing a game** for you to play and enjoy, and thinking of ways to **challenge** your **principles**. If you want to suddenly go off in a direction that they have nothing planned for, then you may be told that you *can* go that way or that you *can* do the thing you wanted, but that you'll have to *wait another week or two while the FC preps new material*.

- **Don't challenge circumstances.** *This one is more for the Facilitators, and applies specifically to [Agora](#):* The PCs all have hand-written [circumstances](#) that defines their core concept and appearance. Players can opt to put some of these circumstances into the 'foreground', meaning they are *changeable*. But the power to change those foregrounded circumstances still lies solely in the hands of that character's player. *You may prod a circumstance, but expect to be told 'No' if you try to [challenge](#) one.*
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Notes

1. 'Dogs in the Vinyard' is now defunct and out of print, but its spiritual successor [DOGS](#) is a generic system made with Vincent's blessing, if you're interested in checking it out.

A player shall roll *once* against an obstacle, and shall not roll again until conditions legitimately and drastically change. Successes from the initial roll count for all applicable situations in play.

A player cannot ask for multiple rolls of the same ability to accomplish their intent. So try to distill down to as few rolls as possible. The successes of those rolls are said to *Ride* across the entire situation, scene, or session.

Even if a player generates no successes, the result stands.

These are close to the words of Luke Crane, from his game [Burning Wheel](#) (page 32), which articulates a philosophy of play that is *applicable to all tabletop games*, not just [Agora](#). Still, it is worth repeating here, in case you've not heard the phrase 'Let it Ride' before.

Rolls that *Don't Ride*

As with [saying 'yes'](#), there are [exceptions](#) to 'Let it Ride' which [Burning Wheel](#) fails to adequately cover. Times when you need to **rewind the game back a few moments**, *void any related rolls*, and take it from the top. Such as when:

- **A line was crossed.** If your [consent and safety tools](#) are in place then this should never happen, but if it does then you can rewind *as far back as you need to*, until you reach a point where everyone feels comfortable again.
- **Stakes were not set.** If a player rolls without hearing the [consequences](#), then they were too eager. Again, this should never really happen, but mistakes are easily made in the heat of the moment. So to be fair to your [Kismet](#), you should restart the [roll procedure](#) and ignore whatever your dice just said would happen.
- **A player's intent was misinterpreted.** Either because you've mistaken what the player's [agenda](#) was and *applied consequences far higher than they anticipated*, or because they *were not really clear enough about what they wanted to begin with*; then that player can restart their whole [turn](#). This can be especially common with new players who are not used to having to [fight for their principles](#) so readily, but the onus is on [everyone](#) to encourage them to lay out their intentions to the best of their abilities so they have a *fair shot* at getting what they want.

Retroactive Continuity