

Risus Old- School Fantasy By Griffin Pelton

Rules based on a core of Risus with modifications for original Dungeons & Dragons style play.

To be used with
Risus: The Anything RPG
www222.pair.com/sjohn/risus.htm

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Character Creation

Start with 6 dice to build a character with.

Be sure to mark each cliché that is a Channeling or Spellcasting type. Channeling clichés are normal cost (1 for 1) and spellcasting clichés cost twice as much (2 for 1 cliché die). Remember to have a source of magical power and pick a mutation number for each magic-using cliché.

Example: Wizard of Light (3) Angelic Spellcasting 4, is a spellcasting cliché and anytime a 4 comes up on dice when using any magic there is a risk of mutation.

Inventory

Unlike a normal Risus game, for old-school fantasy type games PCs are required to keep fairly careful track of their inventory. Basic rule is if you have the right equipment in your inventory to do something you roll the cliché at full value. If you have makeshift equipment you roll cliché at half. If you don't have any equipment for it, you can't roll the cliché.

Starting money is a roll of your highest cliché, then multiply the result by 10. That's how many silver pieces the PC starts with.

Assist and Defend Slots:

During character creation you may simply spend any of your starting dice to gain slots. During play you can only use dice gotten when advancing a cliché. Instead of adding the die to the cliché that you successfully advanced you can instead trade it for slots, but those slots have to be somewhat related to the cliché that was advanced. Can also add new slots to previously created items/abilities.

Each die spent earns three slots, which can be divided up (or not) between several choices that can be of either type. A single aspect of the character may be a source of both types of slots. In that situation you should write it down in both places to keep the different types of slots separate on the character sheet. Even better, you should actually have them vary a bit in wording. Try to specify what back of having an Abyss Background lets you be better at tasks (Assist Slots) and which part of it lets you endure things better (Defend Slots).

Some magical items give Assist and Defend slots, but slots bought with character dice cannot by magic items.

Assist Slots are items/abilities that can help a character succeed in certain situations. Each slot can be spent to add a single die to a roll that the specific item/ability would be useful in. Assist Slots recover at the beginning of each session. These are declared before the roll they help with.

Example:

Magic McGuyver Bag [] [] []
A bag which a wizard has lots of bits and pieces of useful ritual gear he has accumulated over the years. None of it is useful enough to be a full spell component, but often can be used to help with casting a spell.

Defend Slots are items/abilities that can help a character endure certain situations. Each slot can be spent to prevent a die of a specific type of damage. When used the damage is removed from the Defend Slots instead of a cliché. These are used when damage is taken. Can't be used as a form of healing.

Example:

Abyss-Raised Alertness {} {} {}
Growing up the the Abyss means you can go for days without rest before getting sleepy. Can be used to prevent exhaustion/tiredness damage.

Magic

There are two magic-type cliches: Channeling and Spellcasting.

Channeling cliches are for those that channel raw magic and force it into crude effects that can influence a few targets and/or a small area. Using this level of magic requires telling the GM what effect you are attempting before the roll. Channelers boost magic-using rolls by adding one die to the roll for every die lost from the cliche after the roll. Channeled effects rarely last more than the cliche's strength in minutes.

Spellcasting cliches are for skilled mages who have learned to manipulate large amounts of power. A proper spell can affect large groups of people and city block sized areas. You must inform the GM what spell is being used before making the roll. Spellcasting rolls are double-boosted, which means two dice are added to the roll for every die that will be lost after the roll. Spells can have a duration of the spellcaster's cliche in hours.

Spellcaster cliches can use single-boost Channeling level powers.

Both kinds of magic-using cliche can do minor cantrip-level magic with no boosting, but still has risk of mutation.

Spellcasting

Spellcasters start knowing a number of spells equal to twice their dice of spellcasting cliches. PCs gain no new spells when a Spellcasting-type cliche increases. Gaining new spells is done only through discovering them while exploring, or research.

Spellcasters can only have a small number of their total spells memorized each day. The number of spells that can be prepared is equal to the total dice of all spellcasting cliches the PC has.

So a magic-user character with Fire Wizard (3) Spellcasting, Necromancer (2) Spellcasting, can have a total of five spells memorized. Three fire-based and two necromancy-based.

All known spells should be written down and given a brief description, enough to fit on a index card at most. All spells should be recorded in a group 'spellbook' for new players or new characters to pick from if they aren't feeling creative enough to make up their own spells from scratch.

Spell Research

Researching new spells is a roll of a spellcaster cliche against a base TN 30. Every gold piece spent on supplies reduces the TN by 1. Each day spent on the research also reduces the TN by 1. A specific scholarly work on related matters reduces the TN by 5. If more than two scholarly works are used in researching a spell, no new book is purchased.

For each 10 gold that was spent on successfully creating new spell that is researched the player must give the name and author of one book which was used in the spell creation process. The name must be indicative of a very specialized work that would pertain to the spell his character was attempting to create. So if Mack the Magic-User was creating his Magnificent Mauler spell, Mack's player might say that one of the tomes Mack bought to assist this process was Inquires into the Application of Conjured Downward Forces by Schumpti Rock-dropper. That sounds specialized enough to me. It's certainly more of a dedicated-sounding title than The Codex Supreme: Treatises on All Known Magicks.

Having deemed the book acceptable, both Mack's player and the GM make a note of the fact that Mack now owns this book. At some future time, Mack's player decides that there really needs to be a spell that would fill the gap that feather fall usually does (check the rule books, feather fall doesn't show up until 1st edition AD&D). Deciding to fill that gap with a new spell called Mack's delicate descent, our exemplary MU heads back to the spell lab. Mack has decided to put 5 gold and 5 days into the research, which would normally make the TN 20. However, since Mack already owns a book dealing with conjured downward forces and thus being a reasonable reference source for his proposed new spell, Mack only has to beat TN 15. Mack's player has added a bit of flavor to the campaign world, and I have a springboard to use for new set dressing on future adventures. Maybe Schumpti Rock-dropper has written other books and there's an Inquires into the Application of Conjured Upward Forces to be found in the next arch-mage's tower. Simple, imaginative, and conducive to the shared world experience - it's a win-win for everyone.

Mystic Mutations

The mortal form is unable to handle the stress of high-level magic. This applies to magic of all types. So as a magic-user becomes more powerful the increasing amounts of magical energy twist his body into a more suitable vessel. This can be a controlled preemptive artifact replacement parts, directed mutation most often seen in servants of Angels and Demons to be more like their patrons, or it can be random changes like Arcane sorcerers.

Any character that has magic or spellcasting cliches picks a number between 1 and 6. Whenever that number is rolled on any of the dice when that character is using magical abilities (any time a cliche is being boosted or double-boosted, or even in the rare situation magic is being used without any boosting) there is a risk of mystic mutation. This is extra-dangerous for spellcasters when they are double-boosting their cliches and could be rolling as many as eight or nine dice at once.

If the number of dice that rolled the mutation number is equal to or greater than the number of mutations the character has, he gains another one.

For the location of mutation the GM rolls and adjudicates the result depending on the character's power source. If the location is already affected then the character gets a mental affliction/insanity of some kind instead of a physical alteration.

Mutation Table:

- 1 - Head
- 2 - Eyes
- 3 - Arm
- 4 - Leg
- 5 - Torso
- 6 - Voice
- 7 - Aura
- 8 - Arm
- 9 - Leg
- 10 - Hair
- 11 - Eyes
- 12 - Skin

Mutations have no game mechanic affect. They will change how people react to the character and will often hinder them in some fashion, with the very rare occasion of a mutation actually being helpful in some situation. People will react poorly to a magic-user showing obvious mutations, unless they are of the same church/cult/guild as the magic-user in question.

Advancement

Experience (XP) is gained when a PC spends money. 1 point for every silver piece spent. When spending at least a day in a non-hostile place (unfriendly is fine) a PC may spend XP to try and become more powerful. The cost to attempt improvement in a cliché is (current cliché dice) x100 experience.

Each time you spend the required XP you roll the cliché. If the dice land showing all even or all odd numbers, the cliché gains a die. A cliché (1) must pick either odd or even before rolling.

If you spend more xp then needed on a advancement roll, it will increase the chances of success. Each multiple of the amount needed (x2, x3, etc.) reduces the cliché dice rolled by one, to a minimum of one.

Suggestions for spending money: Extremely fancy clothing, custom-made equipment and items, enjoying lavish hedonistic parties, acquiring obscure tomes of lore, etc.

When splitting clichés a player may add new concepts in a new cliché to show off new training or induction in some religious order, as long as it is related to the source cliché in some way.

If the new training or powers can't be attached to the source cliché, then the player will have to spent a split or two guiding clichés towards the desired concept.

At some point a cliché will be high enough that further advancement becomes very unlikely. At this point a player may choose to split one of his character's current clichés into two (or more) related clichés and advance those. The dice of the source cliché can be spread as evenly or unevenly among the new clichés as the player wishes.

Example: A Blind Lecherous Swordsman (6) can't improve that cliché any further. So at the next opportunity he splits it into two clichés. Blind Swordmaster (3) and Irresistible Lecherous Scoundrel (3).

Now the character is even better defined by having two clichés that are each part of the source cliché, yet more specialized. He can now also resume advancing in both of them. The important part is not to make totally new clichés, but to expand on and specialize the abilities the character already has.

This provides all the players with the ability to continue advancing for longer periods of adventuring, and also refine and customize their characters as play continues and the character's personality and abilities become more clear in the player's mind.

The basic rules and creativity of making cliches remain, with the only restriction being the new cliches have to use the old cliché as a starting point. So, from the above example, you couldn't split Blind Lecherous Swordsman (6) into Veterinary Genesplicer (3) and Award-winning Novelist (3). Neither of those are based on blindness, lechery, or swordfighting.

On the other hand the new cliches can be only creatively related to the source cliché. So one of the new cliches could be Blind Master of the Mystic Arts (3) if years of adventuring blind have shown the character the secrets of the universe and allowed him to use magic. Be sure to explain how the new cliches came about to the GM.

As a character advances and splits cliches, don't erase the old cliches. Put the new cliches under the old one, which doesn't have a number anymore. This way you can keep track of how your character has developed and keep his core concepts in mind.

Example:

Blind Lecherous Swordmaster (6)

Into:

Blind Lecherous Swordmaster

Blind warrior-acolyte(3)

Lovable Lecherous Scoundrel(3)

Later:

Blind Lecherous Swordmaster

Blind warrior-acolyte

Weaponmaster of legend (4)

Blind mystic (2) channeling

Lovable Lecherous Scoundrel

Grandparent to dozens of illegal heirs (3)

Thief with bounties in five kingdoms (3)

And so on if a character lasts for a really long time. Just looking at the character sheet in this default state can tell someone the path the character has traveled during his career. It also can be a good source of ideas of what is and is not in a particular character's array of abilities/skills if confusion comes up. If the GM doesn't agree to a certain interpretation, or the player, either can point back to the foundation cliches for support.

When splitting a Channeling or Spellcasting cliché, the player can choose to make one or both of the resulting cliches Channeling or Spellcasting (as appropriate) if the cliches in question are magical in nature.

Treasure

A monster's treasure is determined by rolling the monster's primary cliché (which may not be the highest) and adding all except 1 results, then multiplying by 10. This is the amount of money the monster has. The type of coins will depend on the monster in question. Kobolds might only hoard copper pieces, orcs will probably have silver pieces, and drakes collect gold pieces. 100 copper for 1 silver, 100 silver for 1 gold. It might be carried by the monster, or in its lair. Roll when the party has managed to get to where the treasure is. For true dragons, make the multiplier x100.

Because rolling the lowest result for treasure sucks, a 1 result means there is a magic item of some type in the treasure. Each 1 grants a roll on the following table:

- 1 - Rod/Staff/Wand
- 2 - Weapons & Shields
- 3 - Miscellaneous
- 4 - Potion
- 5 - Ring
- 6 - Scroll
- 7 - Book
- 8 - Treasure Map

If duplicates are rolled it can mean either several items (two +1 swords) or a single stronger item (one +2 sword).

For every 100 silver (10 gold) in value, there is a 10% chance that 100 silver worth of monetary treasure is unusual.

For every 1000 silver (100 gold) in value, there is a 10% chance that 1000 silver worth of monetary treasure is unusual.

For every 5000 silver (500 gold) in value, there is a 10% chance that 5000 silver worth of monetary treasure is unusual.

For every X gold worth of monetary treasure determined to be unusual, roll on the following table to determine in what way it's unusual:

- [1] Unusual Shape (e.g. triangular coins or square gems)
- [2] Unusual Size (e.g. giant-forged coins or small bead-like gems)
- [3] Unusual Color (e.g. green gold pieces or blue rubies)
- [4] Unusual Markings (e.g. strange glyphs on coins or carvings on the surface of gems)
- [5] Unusual Property (e.g. glowing coins or floating gems)
- [6] Hazardous Property (e.g. coins coated with contact poison or gems that give off radiation)

Except for number 6 on the list, all of the other unusual qualities add about 10-25% value to the monetary treasure, but the characters have to work hard to get someone who will be willing to buy them. After all, how many fences have ever heard of blue rubies and would recognize their value when he did? The intent here is to spur side adventures and visits to sages and esoteric collectors in order to offload the weird loot.

Scrolls are single-spell spellcasting cliches that can be used by anyone without risk of mutation. All the dice of the scroll cliche are used at once.

Potions add a temporary cliche to the character who drinks them. Healing potions restore the used number of dice of physical damage. The number of dice a potion has is how many doses it has and the drinker can drink as many (or little) of the potion at once.

Magic weapons/shields that give a bonus (+1, +2, etc) bump the dice type up with each plus for any roll they are used with. So d6s become d8s. Having two items with the same bonus doesn't bump the die type, but instead adds another die when both items are useful to task attempted.

Spell Components

Mystical materials can be discovered during play when a spellcaster experiments with rare/exotic materials found in dungeon/monsters. Whenever a player finds something that they think should be useful as a spell component they can attempt to gain something useful from it.

Roll the cliche being used to harvest the components from whatever (magic fungus, dragon corpse, etc) and consult the table below, reading each die rolled separately:

[1-3]: Nothing usable. You've only gotten a mess out of it.

[4-5]: 1 point of usable material. Pick something minor from the target that is useful.

[6]: Jackpot. Something major is still intact. 3 points of usable material.

Each point can be used instead of a die lost to boosting a cliche. Each component should be useful only to certain types of magic, determined by DM at the time of acquiring it. This should be related to the source of the components. For example: blood from a red dragon will be useful for fire spells, but not very useful for protection magic. The size and potency of the target may limit the amount of components that can be harvested.

Conflict

These rules are written with a physical combat bias because that is the most common type of conflict greedy adventures get involved with. However, because these rules are based on Risus the combat rules can be used for any type of drawn-out conflict. Anything from negotiations, to a high-society evening party, or a trial to defend one of the party members that got caught breaking the law, or rooftop chases.

In combat everyone involved picks a relevant cliché and rolls it, keeping the dice on the table. This roll is initiative, actions, and hit points combined.

If a character doesn't have a relevant cliché for the conflict they roll a non-relevant cliché at half strength (rounded up) and should be even more creative with their attacks.

Whoever has the highest total roll goes next, which means someone might go several times in a row. Ties are broken by number of dice rolled.

If a character or monster has no clichés with dice they are considered to be out of combat and their fate is decided by the winners.

A magic-user who wants to use magic must declare it before the roll and boost, or double for spells, as normal. Actions with those dice should be related to the effect created.

Attacking is spending a single die to take out an opponent's die of lower value. The die used for the attack does not have to be your highest die.

Even in physical conflicts attacks do not have to deal direct physical damage. You can stun your opponent, disarm them, make them tired, or hurt their morale. 'Damage' can be anything that reduces the target's ability to use their current cliché to resist you.

Can assist other people by giving them any of your dice. They re-roll it and add it to their pool.

When a rolled cliché runs out of dice through damage or actions, PC may re-roll the cliché or switch to a different one.

Anytime you spend a die to attack an enemy or assist an ally, that is your action and the next person goes.

A character is not taken out until they have no dice in any cliché. So if one cliché hits zero, PC uses another right then.

Different types of damage will recover/heal at different times and rates. Boost damage happens when all the dice in that cliché are used up, or PC switches clichés.

When damage brings a cliché down to 0 the character gets a serious wound of some kind. Permanently reduce the cliché by 1 and write down the wound/scar. Cliché reduction from boosting and double-boosting doesn't count as damage for this if it is the damage that reduces the cliché to 0.

Some Common Damage Types:

Physical - When you are stabbed, punched, etc. Recovers at the rate of 1 die for each full night's rest in a safe location.

Poison/disease/etc - Spider bites, black death, so forth. Restores only when cured by a specific antidote, or magic. Gets worse over time.

Drain - Powerful undead can suck the very life force out of their victims with a touch. This can only be restored by powerful magics.

Casting - Using magic (boosting and double-boosting) exhausts magic-users. This type of damage is restored with a full night's rest.

Maneuvers and Tactics:

Normal attacks can only remove a die of lower value in combat. For removing a die of equal value a PC can use situational tactics or features of the surrounding environment to gain a +1 combat advantage to the die being used to attack. Which allows a die to take out a equal value die.

Keep in mind that many tactics are better expressed using the assist mechanic.

Examples:

Swinging on chandelier to get at enemy.

Crushing enemy with stone pillar.

Fireball spell against ice monster.

Using a slashing weapon against unarmored foes.

Wearing heavy armor against enemies with simple/crude weapons.

And so on. GMs are encouraged to be generous in allowing clever ideas, but should also not allow the same tactic/maneuver more than once (maybe twice) in a battle. Unless it was one that is easily duplicated, like using fire against an ice monster.

General Guidelines

A quote: "Don't make them roll dice if you can't handle their failure." The GM should be prepared to carry on the game if the PCs fail at any point.

If GM calls for a roll, the default is to roll a cliché and add up all the results. GM should give a good idea of what the roll is for so that people can pick a appropriate cliché for it. The GM will have a Target Number (TN) in mind, adding +5 or +10 for clichés that aren't specifically focused on what the roll is for.

Regarding finding things: If you just say 'I'm searching the room' the GM will assume you are just rummaging through piles of trash and opening desk drawers to see if there is anything obvious in the room. Secret doors, hidden compartments, or concealed latches will take more specific examination to find.

Rolling for perception/spot is only if the GM thinks there is a random chance for something, otherwise it's just a matter of spending the time and saying what you are looking for.

Triple damage attacks can either remove three dice of lower value from the target, or a single die of any value.

Strong monsters may have more than one cliché, and may switch between them in combat like a PC. For very large/powerful monsters each cliché will be a different ability. Such as Breath Weapon (4) Spellcasting, or Claws (3). Very strong monsters (such as Dragons) will even roll several clichés at the same time in combat.

Because of how initiative works, it's best to split large grunt squads into several smaller squads for conflicts. Decide how many dice the entire horde of monsters has, then try to divide it up evenly into a number of grunt squads equal to the number of PCs in the party, assuming that doesn't stretch the monster dice too thin.

The damage system includes saving throws and the like. Just use the triple-damage. This means a Basilisk's stare may be avoided once more twice, but the moment a cliché is reduced to zero, that character turns into a statue. Call it 'paralyze' damage. Representing the Basilisk's eyes meeting a character's for a brief second, but the character flinching away just in time. Perhaps with just a heaviness in their body is a side-effect. Monster attacks that do this sort of thing should take effect on a victim the moment any cliché is reduced to zero by the attack.

Advancement probability

Rolling current cliché level of d6s and attempting to get all odd or all even.

Percentages are approximate.

1d6: 1 in 2 50% 100exp
(Pick even or odd)

2d6:	2 in 8	50%	200 exp
3d6:	2 in 16	25%	300 exp
4d6:	2 in 32	12%	400 exp
5d6:	2 in 64	6%	500 exp
6d6:	2 in 128	3%	600 exp
7d6:	2 in 256	1.5%	700 exp
8d6:	2 in 512	0.75%	800 exp
9d6:	2 in 1024	0.37%	900 exp
10d6:	2 in 2048	0.18%	1000 exp

Power levels (type of dice)

d6 Normal mortals and animals

d8 +1 items
or magical creatures

d10 +2 items
or demons/angels/spirits

d12 +3 items
or ancient dragons/
elemental lords