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Captain's Serious Risus

While "vanilla *Risus*" is great for its free-form nature, dead-simple character creation, and flexibility, *Risus* in its original state has a lot of issues that get in the way of its use for more "serious" campaigns. While it is originally intended as a beer-and-pretzels kind of an RPG, the previously mentioned merits are equally valid for that "serious" playstyle. Over the past few years of GMing for the system I have developed a number of house rules that tweak the rules to provide consistency and tactical options to your characters that were difficult or ambiguous in "vanilla" *Risus*. They help to mitigate some of the "death spiral" and power scaling issues inherent in the core dice mechanic.

Serious Risus is an attempt at a total overhaul of *Risus: The Anything RPG* into a system that is better suited for the consistency and predictability that a more serious campaign or play style requires. The following rules are compiled and re-written based on my personal house rules and borrows the core dice mechanic change from Ye good olde system by F. Andres Domene Caliz from the Risusiverse. As with the *Risus* itself, feel free to change or modify any of these systems to fit your gaming group or campaign. These are merely my suggestions.

If you are new to *Risus*, *Serious Risus* is based on, and references, the "core" *Risus: The Anything RPG* by S. John Ross. The rules which can be downloaded in their 4-page entirety from http://risus.cumberlandgames.com. Consider this a more serious "companion" to *Risus*, designed to compliment and tweak it, but not to replace it.

The Dice Mechanic

The biggest change in *Serious Risus* is a modification of the *Risus* dice mechanic. In order to provide a much more grounded campaign and a much less steep skill curve between cliché ranks, rather than a Cliché (4) rolling four dice on a contest, they will instead roll a single d6 and add the cliché rank as a modifier. So a Cliché (4) really operates as 1d6+4. Everything works very similarly, and a one point advantage over an enemy still equates to a 16% higher chance of success with every rank, but it becomes much more predictable and granular, and lessens the massive gap in skill between a Cliché (4) and a Cliché (3) character, for example.

During contested rolls the cliché is still reduced by 1 rank, which would change a Cliché (4) to a Cliché (3), and the modifier from a +4 to a +3. A character is still out of action when a cliché reaches a rank of 0, and may still switch between clichés during combat. During contested rolls, a cliché rank is only lost for the defender of a contested roll, but not for losing an attack roll (unless a "critical failure" is rolled).

A "critical hit" occurs when you double the opponent's roll or the target number. In the case of a contested roll it should reduce the opponent's cliché rank by 2 rather than 1, and in the case of a target number, the GM should find some especially good result that occurs. A "critical failure" would be rolling half of the opponent's roll or the target number. In the case of a critical failure in a contested roll, not only do you not do the die of damage to your opponent, but you receive a die of damage. Against a target number the GM should determine a particularly negative effect result.

Teaming up needs to be slightly modified, with every team member rolling above a 5 on the d6 adding half their cliché rank to the party leader (rounded up). In addition to being able to "team up" during combat, plays may team up against target number rolls where it would logically dictate that teamwork would help. Examples would be trying to move a massive boulder, or trying to intimidate an NPC.

Advanced Options from vanilla *Risus*

Serious Risus by default uses the rules for "Lucky Shots," "Hooks" (but not "Tales"), "Pumps", and "Double-Pump Clichés", from the vanilla *Risus* document. *Serious Risus* also does away with the rules for "Inappropriate Clichés."

Advantages/Disadvantages

At character creation, you can buy advantages for a cliché by spending disadvantages on the same or different cliché. Acceptable trades are up to GM approval, and should be balanced in a way that both the advantage and the disadvantage situations have a similar frequency of occurring. There should also be the possibility of a "neutral" situation which would be unmodified. For any situations where you roll that cliché in a situation that falls under the advantage parameter, you roll a die type one higher than you would normally roll. For disadvantages you roll a die type one lower than you would normally roll. So a d6 would become a d8 on advantage, or a d4 on disadvantage.

> **Example of using same cliché:**
> Rifleman (4)(adv. long range shots, disadv. throwing/melee range shots)
>
> ○ In this case, a neutral situation would be a mid or standard range shot.
>
> Rifleman (4)(adv. able to take time to concentrate, neut. a fast shot, disadv. under immediate pressure)
>
> ○ In this example, a neutral situation would be where the PC isn't under immediate danger, but doesn't have enough time to plan out a shot.
>
> **Example of spending to different cliché:**
> Barbarian (4)(adv. surrounded by enemies)
> Tribe leader (3)(disadv. communicating with any other tribe or race)
>
> ○ In this example, the neutrals would be a barbarian fighting alone, or a tribe leader communicating with his own tribe and race.

Advantages and disadvantages may also be applied by the GM on-the-fly in any situation where a PC or NPC is put into a significant position of advantage or disadvantage compared to their opponent. It is possible to disadvantage your opponent on one turn, then find an advantage for yourself on the next, resulting in a roll of a d8 for yourself against a d4 for your opponent.

Magic/Psionic/Superpowers/Technology/Prayers/Martial Techniques etc.

Magic or technology based clichés are typically handled as flavor to how a character handles a situation. For example, in combat, there would be no real difference between an equally skilled magician firing magic missiles and a ranger firing arrows. Or a demolitionist blasting down a door with a firebomb compared to a fighter running at it full sprint. The rolls work exactly the same.

For any abilities that would have a substantially greater or more complex effect than a standard roll would warrant, the character must first roll the cliché versus a target number set by the GM to determine if the ritual/preparation/incantation etc. was successful. If the effect was something like a buff or similar instantaneous effect then only the target roll is needed. If the ability has to then be deployed/aimed, such as a fireball, the player would make a standard cliché roll against the target to see if the application to target was successful.

When using such an ability, the player would name the ability and add a brief description of it to a list on their character sheet. This list can be named your Spellbook, Technology Manual, Style Guide etc. tailored to the type of abilities your character would use. The GM sets a target number at this time based on the challenge that ability would pose to the character. That target number is recorded on the sheet and used for any future attempts. This ensures that tactical options are fluid for each player to set for themselves, but consistent enough to be relied on. Abilities can be added to or removed from this list at will, and target numbers may need to be adjusted after a session by the GM for consistency

> **Example:** Say you have a Rogue (4) that wants to use a poison he has in his inventory to poison an enemy on his next strike. The rogue decides this would be an "Apply Poison" ability, and the GM determines that the target number would be 5. The rogue adds this to his Rogue Tricks list as "Apply Poison TN 5 - Applies a vial to the currently in use weapon just prior to attacking." The rogue would then roll his d6+4 against the target number of 5 to determine if he could apply the poison quickly and accurately enough, then roll his d6+4 against the opponent's cliché to see if his attack struck.

If a player fails at the target number portion of the action, the player may make no follow up action until their next turn.

Special Items

Any item that would offer a benefit or advantage outside of the normal tools of the trade of one of your clichés can be added to your character sheet as a special item. These items can offer benefits including, but not limited to, the following:

1. **Bonuses to dice rolls:** Such as a "Sword of Rending +1" that would offer a static +1 bonus to any cliché rolls that the sword would be used in. Can also take the form of a die type, such as "Sword of Rending d8" which would change the die rolled to a d8. On an advantage such a sword would be bumped all the way up to a d10!
2. **Additional character clichés:** Such as a "Trophy Dragon Head (2)" that could give your character an additional, but specific, additional cliché. In this example, you could use the Dragon Head for trying to impress local villagers. You could roll just the cliché for dragon head, or if you have another applicable cliché, you can roll that cliché and then roll the special item to apply a bonus in the same way as "teaming up". Or a "Sword of Dragon Slaying (5)" which would offer a huge combat capability, but only vs. a specific enemy type.
3. **Non-statistical bonuses:** Such as a "Magic Compass of Intent" which could always point towards the location of your heart's desire. These items don't provide any direct bonus to rolls, but provide a benefit in roleplaying terms.
4. **Limited use items:** Such as a "Med Pack -4-" which can be used to repair missing dice to a cliché during combat. Each time you use a charge for the item, you would reduce the number by one. Or a "Combat Steroid (+1) -2-" which would provide a benefit similar to another item type, but with a limited number of uses.

Sidekicks:

Characters met during game may join the party as a sidekick. This NPC assigns to whichever PC helped out the character the most, or is most relevant to the NPC. NPC has a single cliché and may apply their rolls following the same rules as teaming up to the PC's rolls.

Character Advancement:

In *Risus*, even with the modified dice mechanic for *Serious Risus*, adding even a single die to any cliché represents a significant increase in the capabilities of that cliché. This should be reserved for rather major occasions, such as the end of an entire story arc, or monumentally impressive feats after several sessions. An alternate way to provide for character progression is through magical (or technological) items. Such items in *Risus* can provide tangible benefits and power increases, as well as specialized abilities, without causing issues with power creep that would result in ranking up a cliché every session. In addition, items can be tailored to the play styles and interests of the PCs, can can be doled out along with standard loot, or given as options by merchants etc. in town for their hard earned gold.

Comments