Evens Up: A New Approach to Risus

What follows is a new way to play *Risus* using the dice mechanics from *Faery's Tale* (FT), a RPG by Patrick Sweeney and friends. The two games work well together because both use the same core conflict mechanics—the "Unholy Trinity" S. John Ross outlines in his *Risus Companion*: the "single-action contest" (simply called a "contest" in FT), "combat" (referred to as a "duel" in FT), and the "target number roll" (called a "challenge" in FT). The only major difference lies in how the dice are counted.

The Basic Rule:

Unlike in *Risus*, where dice numbers in a roll are added to form a sum, in *Faery's Tale*, **when dice are rolled, each even-numbered result is counted as a "success."** Odd numbers are discarded. In addition, **sixes always "ace."** That is, each six not only counts as a success, it is immediately re-rolled, with an even result added to the success total (and continuing to ace as long as a six is rolled—the beloved "exploding dice effect.")

How It Works in Risus:

1) **Single-Action Contests**: Both sides roll the appropriate number of dice for their respective clichés. The side with the most number of successes wins. Ties can either be rerolled or go to the side who rolled the fewest (or most!) dice depending on the group's preference. (See the "Goliath Rule" in the *Risus Companion*)

2) **Combat**: Each round, both sides roll the appropriate number of dice for their respective clichés. The side with the most successes wins, resulting in the loss of one cliché dice (or more, depending on the situation) for the loser. Ties can be handled as above.

   This dice mechanic works particularly well for combat, especially as a variant for the "Deadly Combat Rules" also described in the *Risus Companion*. It provides a nice middle ground between the original *Risus* combat rules—which can make even small numerical differences between competing clichés devastating—and the "Best of Set" variant, which minimizes those differences.

   The "teaming up" rules can be handled in one of two ways: either all even results count as successes toward the team leader's total or just sixes, as in the original rules. If just sixes count, allow those sixes to ace as normal. If all evens can contribute, just allow the team leader's sixes to ace.

   (Players should remember that in single-action contests and combat, *opponent's* dice can ace, as well…)

3) **Target Number Roll**: Instead of rolling against a target number, a certain number of successes is required to achieve the desired result using the following difficulty scale:

Easy: 1 / Tricky: 2 / Hard: 3 / Heroic: 4 / Legendary: 5 / Impossible: 6+

The process used to determine the difficulty rating in *Risus*—by figuring out how hard the task is in the context of the cliché's relevance—is still used the same way here, as is the idea that the *degree* of success or failure may affect the overall result. And yes, sixes still ace.

4) **Funky Dice**: Funky dice can still be used in this system. Just make sure that **ALL even results of six and higher ace**. Obviously, the odds of acing on a 12 or 20-sided die-roll are pretty good, but that's what makes them so damn funky.

So Why Bother?

Of course, there's nothing wrong with playing *Risus* as-is. It's a brilliant rules-set that encouraged me to think about RPGs in a totally new way. *Risus* liberated me from a library of stat-filled gaming books and at the same time made them valuable again, since all the cool stuff in those source books can now be expressed as clichés.

So why bother with this method? For me, the FT dice mechanic is clean, simple, and easy. Yes, I know—*Risus* is pretty clean, simple, and easy already, but why not make it even more so? Counting evens is quicker than trying to tally up a lot of individual numbers; thinking of difficulty ratings for challenges in terms of ordinary language tied to a 1-6 scale is easier than trying to pin down a precise target number for a task. Most of all, exploding dice are fun!

Of course, there's no reason why you have to use this method for all three core conflict mechanics. You could just use it for single-action contests and combat, and stick with the normal target number system. Or even just use it for combat as a substitute for the "Best of Set" option. At the end of the day, a cliché gives you a certain number of dice to roll regardless of how you want to count them.

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