Wheel of Fate

Robert &Deborah Donoghue

Introduction

The Wheel of Fate is a highly streamlined rpg that makes a few assumptions, most notably that the reader has at least some exposure to RPGs, and has a sense of what players do and what the role of the GM is. Additionally, this game draws from a number of sources, notably Fate, so familiarity with the Fate system, specifically with its aspects, will be very useful.

The Basics

To do something you roll a certain number of 6 sides dice, notated as Xd6 (so 2d6 is two dice, 3d6 is three dice and so on). You add the dice up and try to match or beat a number, usually 5, 10, 15 or 20, called the difficulty.

> **Example:** I'm rolling 3d6 against a difficulty of 10. I roll 3 dice and I get a 5, a 3 and a 4. They total up to 12, which is greater than 10, so I succeed. If I had rolled a 2, a 3 and a 4, they would total up to 9, and I would fail.

REGULAR ROLL OF 3 DICE

= 11
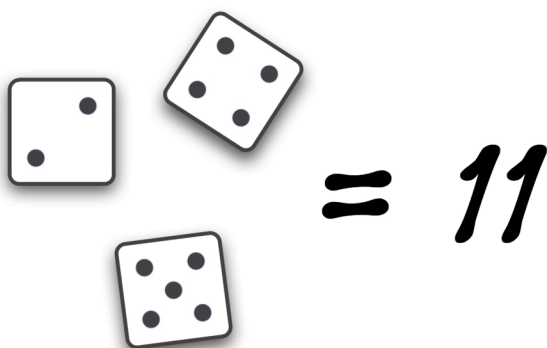
Whammies

Sometimes a character rolls exceptionally well, and beats the difficulty by 5 or more.

Every 5 points a roll beats the difficulty by is a "whammy". Having one or more whammy means the roll exceeded exceptionally well.

> **Example:** I'm rolling 3d6 against a difficulty of 5. I roll 3 dice and I get a 5, a 3 and a 4. They total up to 12, which succeeds by more than 5, so you get one whammy!

Extra Dice

Sometimes you will get extra dice on a roll. Extra dice are added to whatever you roll is, so if you receive one extra die on a 3d6 roll, you will roll 4 dice, and add them all up.

> **Notation:** +xd6, so rolling 3 dice with 2 extra dice is 3d6+2d6 (Though it might must be written as 5d6)
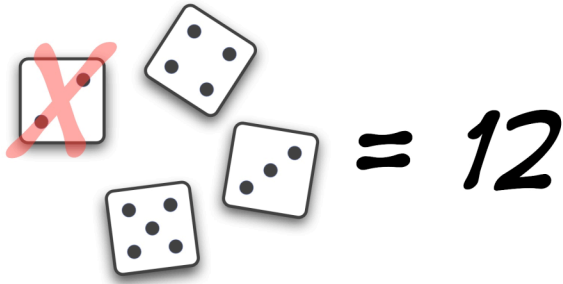
Bonus Dice

Sometimes you will get some "Bonus Dice" on your roll. Bonus dice aren't as potent as extra dice, but they're easy to get. When you add a bonus die to a roll, you increase the number of dice you roll, but you don't change the number of dice you count. This means that if you're rolling three dice with two bonus dice, you roll 5 dice, but only add up the best three.

> **Example:** If you roll 4d6 with 2 bonus dice, you roll 6 dice. If you roll 2,2,4,3,5,2 then you count the four highest values (2,3,4,5) so the total is 14.

> **Notation:** Bonus dice are denotes as plusses, do 3d6++ means 3d6 with 2 bonus dice.

Players receive bonus dice when they have things working in their favor, like having tools, useful knowledge or help from other characters.

3 DICE PLUS ONE BONUS DIE (3D6+)


= 12

Penalty Dice

Penalty Dice are the inverse of bonus dice. When they're added to a roll, you count the _lowest_ dice.

Example: If you roll 4d6 with 2 penalty dice, you roll 6 dice. If you roll 2,2,4,3,5,2 then you count the four lowest values (2,2,2,3) so the total is 9.

Notation: Penalty dice are denoted as minuses, do 3d6-- means 3d6 with 2 penalty dice.

If the number of penalty dice ever exceed the base number of dice, the character automatically loses

3 DICE PLUS ONE PENALTY DIE (3D6-)

= 9
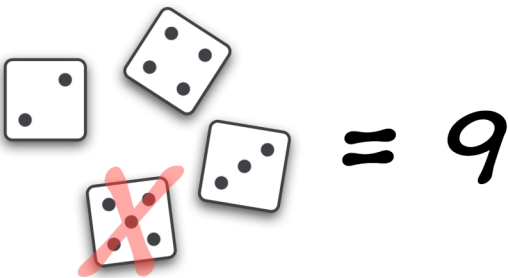
Characters receive penalty dice when they're substanstially impaired, such as when they're working blind

Bonus dies and penalty dice cancel out, so a roll with two bonus dice and one penalty die will effectively have one bonus die.

Characters

Most often, a character will be rolling dice based on one of three attributes, Physical, Mental or Social.

Example: A character comes to a locked door. She could try to break it down (Physical) or perhaps figure out the combination on the keypad (Mental) but she probably couldn't talk her way past it (Social). The door may have a difficulty of 15 to break down, or 20, to guess the combination, so the player looks at her character which has the following attributes:

Physical:	4d
Mental:	3d
Social:	3d

So she tries to bust down the door. She rolls four dice and gets 2,4,3 and 6, 15 exactly! She succeeds.

What's Normal?

0d	The character is entirely incapable in this regard. Paralyzed, in a coma or the like.
1d	The character is challenged by even the most basic (Difficulty 5) tasks. Usually indicative of some sort of impediment.
2d	Normal - The character is pretty normal, but not exceptional. This is a person who is healthy, but not in great shape, educated, but maybe not exceptionally sharp, or socially functional, but not particularly charming.
3d	Talented - The character is on the good side of normal. Healthy, smart and/or charming, they can coast by on most normal tasks but if they push themselves, they're capable of more.
4d	Exceptional - The character is exceptional, capable of standing out

in a competitive field. This is the middle tier where all the geniuses and AA ball players operate.

5d   Awesome. The character is in that top 1%.

6d   Paragon - It is theoretically possible that an individual have 6d in a pool, but such individuals are very nearly legendary. Bruce Lee may have had a 6d physical, and Einstein a 6d mental, but even that is just supposition.

Fate Points

Characters begin play with a stack of five fate points. These can be spent to do a number of different things.
- Add a bonus die to any roll
- Declare a fact, like "I have a flashlight in my bag" or coincidence, like "I want to show up at the restaurant as the argument begins".
- Invoke an aspect (See below)

Gaining Fate Points

You can gain fate point sunder the following circumstances:
- Other players may reward you with them when you do something cool (see "The Bowl" below).
- The GM may offer you a FP to do something based on one of your aspects (See below). You can either accept that FP, or spend one of your own to counter the offer.

Example: You're Strong as an Ox, and you have to catch a falling faberge egg. You catch it, but the GM goes, "You might break it" and offers a FP. You can either take the point, and break the egg, or spend a point, and not break it.

Aspects

Aspects are things that are important to your character, and can be anything from descriptions ("Strong as an ox") to ideals ("never give up!") to interests ("Technician") to fears ("Aie! Spiders!") to anything else. A character has a number of aspects that help paint a complete picture of who she is.

Invoking an Aspect

When you invoke an aspect, you spend a fate point and say which aspect you're using. The aspect must be appropriate to the situation (Strong as an Ox might be useful for breaking down a door, but it might be hard to use in convincing your history prof that a dog ate your homework) though players are encouraged to come up with creative ways to apply their aspect (Strong as an Ox might be handy in impressing a member of the opposite sex if, for example, you can arrange an opportunity to show off your physique).

When you do this, is it like spending a Fate point on steroids. It does the same things, but does them more powerfully. Specifically, when you invoke an aspect you may:
- Add an extra die to a roll
- Declare a fact or coincidence related to your aspect. You'll have a lot more leeway when there's an aspect than just a FP.

The Bowls

When a game begins, the GM puts five FP for each player in a bowl in the middle of the table. When players want to recognize the cool thing someone else did, they give them a FP from the bowl in the middle of the table.

Helping

Many hands make light work. When one character helps another with a problems, the helping character adds her dice as bonus dice to the character they're helping.

Example: Tom (physical 3d) is trying to break down a door. Dave (physical 2d) decides to

help out, so he give Tom two bonus dice, so Tom is now rolling 3d6++.

Rolling Against Characters

Sometimes, like in fights and contests, you'll be rolling against someone else rather than a difficulty. In that case, you both roll, and high roll wins.

If the contest is a fight, argument, or something else that creates problems for the opposition, the loser takes a *stress die*. If the winner gets any whammies, each whammy inflicts an extra stress die.

Stress Dice

Stress dice act like penalty dice on all of a character's rolls until they go away. If a character ever has more stress dice than one of their attributes, they can no longer roll that attribute, and automatically lose conflicts of that type.

In general, if you have more stress than physical, you're unconcious, if you have more stress than mental, you're insensible, and if you have more stress than social, you're incoherent.

At the end of the scene, all stress goes away, butt sometimes you may get an aspects to reflect what has happened.

Order of Action

If there is no pressing consideration, actions should be declared and resolved starting with the player to the GM's left, and working around the table until everyone has acted, then beginning again. If there is ever a question, the character with the higher total number of dice goes first. Ties go at the same time, which mostly means that neither side gains any stress until both have acted.

It's possible for a character to act faster by adding penalty dice to his roll, effectively acting hastily and less precisely than ideal. These penalty dice are considered to be part of the characters dice for purposes of determining who goes first.

A character who helps another character in a fight can do so at any time, effectively foregoing their action to do so. Helping can be applied to determining who goes first, so one character helping another may allow them to take more penalty dice than they normally could.

Bigger Fights

When there are more than two people in a contest, all participants are assumed to be defending against all other participants, but may only inflict stress on a single target.

Example Fight

Sheila, Jackie and Anne are having an argument, Jackie and Anne are ganging up on Sheila. Jackie has a social of 3d, Anne has a 2d while Sheila has a 4d.

Since it matters, Sheila's going to go first. Anne could take a penalty die to act at the same time, but she decides not to. Sheila begins by ripping into Anne and her terrible haircut, rolling 4d6 dice against Anne's 3d6. Sheila rolls a 14 against Anne's 12, and wins. She inflicts one stress on Anne.

On Anne's turn, she's rolling 3d6- (One penalty die from the stress). Against Sheila's 4d6, that doesn't look promising. Thankfully, she has help: Jackie has only 2d6, but she decides to help Anne (complimenting her shoes and deriding Sheila's taste) rather than act when her turn comes, so Anne's 3d6- becomes 3d6+. What's more, she gets very lucky and rolls a 17, while Sheila only rolls a 12. Not only does Anne win, but she gets a whammy! That means she inflicts **2** stress on Sheila, so Sheila is now rolling 4d6--.

Jackie would normally go next, but she helped Anne, so the action cycles back to Sheila….

Pools

Sometimes a game requires a few extra abilities that are important to your character and to the setting. In a game of a magical school, magical aptitude may matter, in a game of police investigators, various police skills and specialities (finding clues, interrogation, forensics) may be appropriate pools.

The GM should outline what the available pools are during character creation. The list will be fairly small, perhaps not more and two or three items.

Using Pools

Most pools describe types of actions or activities, like fighting, finding clues, shopping, politics or virtually anything else. These are **normal** pools, and they use the same rules: when the character is doing something that one or more of her pools might help with, she rolls the pool's value as bonus dice.

> Example: Mike has the Kung Fu pool at 2 and a physical of 3. When he gets in a fistfight, he rolls 3++, three for his physical, and two bonus dice for his kung fu.

Some games have **special** pools, which might cover things like magical powers, weird gadgets or even peculiar talents. The rules for special pools are specific to the individual pool, and will be handled by your GM.

Character Creation

For character creation, make sure that all of your players are present. Character creation works much better if everyone is there to talk and provide feedback.

Step 1: Summary

Write up a description of your character in under 50 words. Don't forget to include their name.

Step 2: Connections

Write down a list of the names of each other character in the game. Provide a quick explanation and how you know them and how you feel about them

Step 3: Assign attributes

Divide 8d among the character's three attributes. More heroic games may decide to split 9d or 10d, but 8d is a nice baseline. While players may choose to take an attribute at 1d, this is strongly discouraged. Any such character is going to be at a virtually overwhelming disadvantage in play.

Step 4: Questions & Aspects

Answer 5 questions, and based upon those answers, choose your five aspects. The GM may have her own set of 5 questions, but when in doubt, answer the following:

1. What is your greatest strength?

2. What is your greatest weakness?

3. What do you want?

4. What is keeping you from getting it?

5. What are you doing about it?

Step 5: Pools

The GM will tell you what pools are available, and you can distribute three dice among them, according to whatever limitations the GM provides.

Step 5: One Last Question

One more question to answer:

What just went wrong?

GM

Difficulties

When assigning difficulties, keep two things in mind – your assessment of the difficulty of the task, and how capable your player are of actually rolling that. If no one in your group has a Social higher than 3d6 and you set a difficulty at 20, remember that you are effectively demanding that players use one or more aspects. With that in mind, the basic yardstick for setting difficulties breaks down as follows:

5 – Basic: A 2d6 character will succeed at these *most* of the time, but not always, so these are fairly regular tasks which you'd want to make sure you have the time, tools or resources to do.

10- Hard: This is the high end of what a normal (2d6) person can do, and is still challenging for a talented (3d6) person who has only a 50% chance of success without bonus dice, so this is something genuinely challenging, or usually approached with lots of tools.

15 – Very hard. This is the best that a talented (3d6) person can do with the best tools, time and resources, and is still pretty challenging for an above average (4d6) character. Totally outside the pale for a normal (2d6) person without aspects

20 – Even a 4d6 character will need help to pull this off, and a 5d6 character will still need to roll pretty well.

25 – Requires 5d6 to even have a chance of success.

Bonuses & Penalties

Feel free to be very free with bonus dice and stingy with extra dice. In general, if the character is doing something that would logically help them out (Taking extra time, using tools, calling in favors) just handle it by granting them a bonus die., no need to worry. Similarly, if there seems to be something getting in the way of getting the task done, just giving them a penalty die is a quick, easy way to handle it.

Success and Failure

Only call for a die roll under two situations.

1. When you have something clear and interesting in mind for both success and failure.

If you call for a roll and you don't have an interesting failure option, then you'll get stymied when the dice

2. When you know the character will succeed, but you need to know how well they succeed.

In these situations, when a roll would otherwise be a "failure", just have something else go wrong, or toss them a stress die because they hurt, embarrassed or distracted themselves doing it. Alternately, turn whammies into extra facts or bits of good luck.

Other Tips

Only roll once – Even if the player is doing something long, like sneaking over long distance, have them roll once, and let the result stand. If you have them keep rolling until they fail, that's just unfair to the player. The time to violate this rule is when players get creative in the face of failure. If players fail on an initital roll, you can allow them a chance to roll again if they're clever in their new approach.

Tools – Tools are the most common source of bonus dice. Bear in mind that tools are not limited to physical tools. A killer outfit might be a social tool, a search engine might be a mental tool, and of course,

getting other people to help can be the best tool of all.

Perception – Your goal, as the GM, is not to hide information. Sometimes it may seem like you should make it hard for players to find something out, such as when they're looking for a hidden object. The things to beat in mind is that the rules of success and failure apply, and it is very hard to come up with an interesting outcome where the players fail to get information at all. Instead, when you're giving out information, concentrate on what eh roll means about *how* they get the information.

Pools

Picking the pools for your game takes a little bit of work. The good news is that you really don't need to pick more than a handful of possible pools, but picking that handful can call for some serious thought.

To really decide on pools, stop and think about what sort of game you want to run, and what sort of characters you see in that game. If this was a television show or movie, what would be the things that would really distinguish these characters from one another? Not in terms of personality and history, but in terms of the things they *do*. Does anything distinguish them?

Now, the answer might be "no". There are ideas where distinction is purely in terms of personality, and for games like that you might want to consider simply including no pools, or offering only one pool. Suppose, for example, you want a game about the intrigues of four suburban housewives. You might just say that aspects provide all the distinction they need, and leave it at that.

Of course, even in that sort of situation, you could probably find some differences.

Is one of them a homemaker? A soccer mom? A professional? A trophy wife? Right there, you have a fascinating list of possible pools, and the fact that a player may split their pool between two or more of them makes them all the more interesting. One wife is professional 2d and trophy wife 1d? What does that suggest to you? I admit, to me it suggests a husband getting very surprised that his trophy wife was not as decorative as he'd expected.

This leads to one of the secrets of Pools. Come in with a strong idea of your list of options, and then be willing to be flexible about it if someone comes up with a better idea, or even one that just excites them more.

Pool Values

The more dice a player puts into a pool, the more important that idea is to the character. A character with a 3d pool is remarkable in their field and much of who they link they are is probably tied to that pool. Some games may allow pool values to get higher than 3d over time, but that's a flavor decision.

Special Pools

Ok, if you're including special pools, you should be doing so because you already have a strong idea of what these pools can *do*. Whatever that may be, you need to ask yourself a few questions:

1. What does it mean if a character has it at 1d? 2d? 3d?

Whether you ever call for a dire roll, the level of the pool should still mean something, and you need to make sure that 3d in a special pool is more **something** (usually powerful or flexible) than a 1d pool.

2. Can the pool get more powerful than 3d?

If so, figure out what 4d, 5d and beyond mean. Will you let players reach this point?

3. Is this pool a danger sign?

Some pool possibilities are red flags because they can cause practical problem sin play. These include:

Travel – travel powers that allow players to circumvent obstacles (especially "phasing" powers) make it easy to scatter players too far afield, and can be very hard for the GM to plan for.

Information – Pools that give the player information, like ESP, precognition and clairvoyance make it very easy for players to end run around anything the GM is trying to do, and take the fun out of mysteries.

Isolation – Pools which isolate the character from the group (some travel powers do this, as to some sneaky powers) can really suck the fun away.

Now, the fact that a pool is a danger sign doesn't mean you should refuse it outright, but it means you should be paying extra careful attention to questions 4 & 5.

4. Do your players have the same clear idea of what the pool means that you do?

If you're basing a game off a specific book or other media, if your players are all on the same page about the genre of the source material, you can allow a little more leeway in what pools can do, trusting that players will stick to the spirit of the original material. However, even if you think this is the case, stop and talk about it a little - even if everyone is a fan of the source material, there may be different expectations about what people want to try out. After all, one of the big appeals of playing in a familiar setting is trying out ideas that might shake up the setting.

5. Do you trust the player with the pool?

Look, there are very few powers or abilities that *can't* be playable, so long as you can trust the player to limit herself, then you can let your foot off the brake. Not sure? Talk to your player. Players are more likely to end up at cross purposes with you if you don't communicate what you expect. If you're clear, you'd be surprised how far you can trust your players.