# The RPG Mechanics Grab-bag (long version)

Compiled by Kaj Sotala
Contributors: [your name here?]
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## Basic resolution mechanics

### Dice-based

**Dice pool (ORE style)**
Roll a certain number of dice, and look for matches - dice that turned up the same number. If you roll 1,1,1,5,7,7 you have two matches: 3x1 and 2x7. The amount of dice in the match is the *width*, while the number on the dice is the *height*. Width indicates speed and competence, height indicates how favorable the circumstances were. In combat, for instance, the width would indicate how much damage you did and whether you hit the opponent first, and the height would indicate what part of the enemy you hit.

Examples: *Godlike, Wild Talents, Reign*.

**Dice pool (Sorcerer style)**
Roll a certain number of dice. The GM also rolls a number of dice, depending on the difficulty of the task or the skill of the opponent. Take the highest single values rolled by both and compare them: if your highest die shows a larger result than the GM's, you win, and vice versa. In the case of a tie, go to the next highest pair and compare them. The winner's degree of success is determined by the number of dice that show a higher number than the highest of the loser's dice.

Example: You roll five 20-sided dice (4, 7, 9, 11, 12) and the GM rolls four 20-sided dice (6, 12, 15, 18). The GM wins, with 15 and 18 being successes (since they're higher than 12, your highest result).

Game examples: *Sorcerer, Donjon* (using 20-sided dice)

**Dice pool (Star Wars style)**
Roll a certain number of dice and sum their numbers together. If the sum exceeds the target number, the attempt is a success.

Example: You attempt a task for which you have four six-sided dice. They come up (3, 2, 4, 4), which totals 13. The target number for this task was 15, so you fail at the attempt.

Game examples: *Star Wars* by West End Games.

**Dice pool (WoD style)**
Roll a certain number of dice. Compare each die to the target number of the task: if the number on the die is equal to or higher than the target number, it contributes one success.

Example: You roll five ten-sided dice, which come up (4, 6, 6, 8, 9). The target number was 7, so you get two successes.

Game examples: The *World of Darkness* games.

**Number * die vs. target number**

Roll a die, and multiply your result with some number. If the total is over the target number, the attempt succeeds.

Example: Your skill is 2, and you roll a six-sided die. It comes up with a 3, so the result is 2 * 3 = 6, which beats the target number of 5.

Game examples: *Maid.*

**Number + die vs. target number**
Rolls a die, and add your result to some number (typically, your skill or your attribute + skill). If the total is over the target number, the attempt succeeds.

Example: Your skill is 3, your attribute is 2, and you roll a 6 on a 10-sided die. Your result is 3 + 2 + 6 = 11. The target number was 12, so the attempt fails.

Game examples: *Ars Magica.*

**Roll under number**
The player rolls dice. If the sum is under a certain number (typically a skill or attribute), the attempt succeeds.

Example: You roll three six-sided dice. They come up 3, 2, 4, which sums to 9. The target number was 12, so the attempt succeeds.

## Dice types

**EON style**
As explained by quoting_mungo.livejournal.com: ”*Essentially, you roll three dice. Let's say you get 5,2,6. Remove the six. You have a total of seven. Now roll two more dice since you removed a six. Get 4 and 6. You have a total of eleven after you remove that six. Roll two more dice. Etc until you get no more sixes.*”

Game examples: EON.

**Single die**
Roll a single, specific die. The number it turns up is your result.

Example: You roll a d10. It comes up with a 6. Your result is 6!

**Skill-based (Earthdawn)**
Roll a combination of dice depending on your skill.

Example: For instance, with skill 7 you roll 1d12, with skill 8 you roll 2d6, and with skill 9 you roll 1d8 + 1d6. With skill 100 you roll 4d20 + 6d10 + 4d8.

Game examples: Earthdawn.

**Median dice**
Roll three or more die. Use the median as the result.

**FUDGE dice**

## Minor variants

### Accumulating bonuses
On a successful roll, you may choose to let the roll contribute a bonus to your next roll, instead of having an immediate effect.

### - Extra bonuses
In a number + die system, the contributed bonus is the amount by which you succeeded. In a dice pool system, it is the number of successes.

Example: Your skill was 4, and you rolled a 3, for a total of 7. The target number was 6, so the roll would succeed, but only barely. You choose to roll again, taking your margin of success as a +1 bonus to the next roll, and hope to do better.

### - Extra dice
In a dice pool system, each success contributes one extra dice to the next roll.

### Bonus numbers
Certain numbers on the dice contribute extra successes, or are considered to be higher than what they really are.

Examples: On an attribute + D10 roll, a roll of 10 is considered a 12. In a WoD-style dice pool mechanic, each dice turning up a number above 6 contributes one success and each dice turning up a 10 contributes two successes.

### Bonus / penalty dice
Roll more dice than usual. Keep the normal amount, choosing only the best (bonus dice) or worst (penalty dice).

Example: In The Shadow of Yesterday, you'd normally roll three dice and sum up their result. If you had two bonus dice, you'd instead roll five dice, and keep the three best. With two penalty dice, you'd roll five dice and keep the three worst.

### Critical success / failure
If a certain number is rolled, the task automatically succeeds or fails (often in a spectacular fashion), regardless of any other considerations.

Examples: On a D100 roll, 1-5 are critical successes and 95-100 critical failures. On a 2D6 roll, two ones is a critical failure, with two sixes being a critical success.

### - Botch dice
Rolling a "failure number" does not automatically cause the attempt to fail. Instead, a variable number of dice are rolled - the worse the circumstances, the more dice. If any of them turns up the "failure number", the task fails. The more failure numbers, the worse the failure.

Example: The failure number is 0. On an attribute + D10 roll, the player rolls a 0, indicating a possible failure. The circumstances give her three botch dice, so she rolls three D10s, which come up (4, 3, 0). Since the botch dice produced a single 0, the attempt is indeed a critical failure, but only a mild one.

Game examples: *Ars Magica.*

**- Confirm the critical**

A critical success must be "confirmed" by making another roll. If the result of that roll would have been an ordinary success, the roll was a critical.

Example: On an attack bonus + D20 roll, you roll a 19, indicating a possible critical. You roll again, getting a 13. Combined with the attack bonus, this is enough to hit the enemy. The attack roll is thus elevated into a critical, dealing extra damage.

Game examples: *Dungeons & Dragons*, 3rd and 3.5th editions.

**Exploding dice**
**- Roll again**

On rolling a certain number, the dice may be rolled again, and re-rolled for as long as the "exploding" number keeps coming up. Each roll contributes more to the total.

Examples: On an attribute + D10 roll, you roll a 0. You add 10 to your total and roll the dice again, coming up with another 10, after which you gets a 3 - netting a total sum of 23.

In a WoD-style dice pool roll, you roll two 0s, which net you one success each and allow you to reroll them in the hopes of getting more successes.

**- Roll again and multiply**

As above, but the "exploding number" itself isn't added to the total - instead, each time it is rolled, it increases a multiplier that will be applied to the final roll.

Example: On an attribute + D10 roll, you roll a 1. You roll again, and get another 1, and another. Then you get a 9. Since you rolled three ones, the 9 is multiplied by 3 (or, as in Ars Magica, by 2^3 = 8).

Game examples: *Ars Magica*.

**Extra effects**

If a certain number is rolled, you manage to do something extra on the side, though the roll itself may still be a failure.

Example: On a D100 roll, 11s, 22s, 33s and so on produce an extra effect.

Game examples: Unknown Armies.

**Flip-flopping**

If using a method that generates a number with two digits, the digits may be exchanged, with 64 becoming 46 or vice versa.

Game examples: Unknown Armies.

**Roll and Keep**

Used for systems where you roll a dice pool combined from two different sources (for instance, attribute + skill). You roll the amount of die given by the total pool, but only get to keep an amount of dice determined by one of the subpools.

Example: Playing a character with Dexterity 3 and Firearms 4, you player roll 3 + 4 dice. Of the seven dice rolled, you gets to actually keep four of your choice.

Game examples: *7th Sea*.

**Wild die**
When rolling multiple dice, designate one of them as the "wild die". The highest number on the wild die works as an exploding die. The lowest number either works as a critical failure, or cancels out the effect of the highest-rolling other die.

Example: You have a pool of four six-sided dice, one of which is designated as the wild die. If it comes up as a 6, treat it as an exploding die. If it comes up with a 1, ignore the highest-rolling die in the rest of your pool.

Game examples: *Star Wars* by West End Games.

## Diceless

**Audience judgment**
The participants describe their actions, after which the other players vote on whose description deserves to win. Can be a straight vote, or as in *Mist-Robed Gate,* in which every player places stone representing their vote in a bag. One of the stones is then drawn at random to determine the winner.

Game examples: *Mist-Robed Gate.*

**Drama deck**
**FLOW**
**Fortune deck**
 **- Fortune cookies**
**Mikado**
**Physical challenges**
**Poker hands**
**Resource-based (bidding)**
**- Points**
**- Dice (DitV)**
**Resource-based (fixed cost)**
**Riddles**
**Roleplaying**
**Roulette wheel**
**Skill/target comparison**

# Resolution style
**Action (static difficulty)**
**Conflict (stakes)**
**Conflict, with option to deepen (TSoY)**

## Minor variants

**Balanced system**
A resource-based resolution system, especially one which pits the players and the game master on opposing sides, can be balanced by different ways - for instance, the game master only gains the extra resources that the players lose from their pool and gains nothing otherwise (Fastlane), or the game master's available resources may be determined by how much resources the players have at

their disposal (Primetime Adventures).

A more extreme version is to make a partially **closed** system - for instance, all the participants start with a certain amount of resources at their employ, the total sum of which can never go up, only down. This guarantees a certain maximum length for the game.

**Extended conflict**
**Narrative facts (Donjon)**
**Narration rights**
**Remote conflict (TSoY poisoning)**
 **- Physical**
 **- Temporal**

# Statistic style

**Abilities (OtE style)**
**Abilities (UA style)**
**Advantages**
**- Feats**
**Age**
A character's age is often just a cosmetic stat, but very young or very old characters typically face penalties. Age is also important in games with aging rules where very long periods of time pass, or in games where the characters are children.

Game design challenge: Create a game where a character's age is used as a statistic directly, where even a single year's difference of age can be important, and which allows a very wide range of character ages (such as 20-80 years old).

**Alignment**
D&D's twin axes of Lawful/Chaotic and Good/Evil are the most famous example of this, but the Humanity rating in the Vampire games also qualifies.

**Attributes**
**- Add to skill**
The most typical use for attributes - you roll your attribute + skill.

**- Determine skill starting level**
Attributes aren't added to the roll, but instead they determine the starting level of the skills based on that attribute.

Game examples: *Star Wars* by West End Games, *GURPS*.

**Attributes (reversed)**
An attribute variant used in the *Star Wreck Role-Playing Game*. All the attributes are actually negative ones, such as stupidity or clumsiness. These increase during play, so the more experienced (and high-ranking) a character becomes, the more incompetent he gets.

**Background**
**Beliefs**
*Burning Wheel* requires each character to have 1-3 different beliefs. These help define a character's goals and a player's interests, and help the game master craft an interesting story. Acting in accordance to them also nets mechanical benefits.

**Circles**
**Class**
Fighter, Mage, Rogue, Cleric, Psion, Astronaut, Tourist...

**Clones**
As used in *Paranoia*: each time your character dies, one of his clones eventually shows up to take his place, with nearly identical memories and skills. Subtract one clone for each death.

**Demons**
**Destinies**
**Disadvantages**
**Equipment**
**Family**
A character's family may be given its own statistic in games where the players have the option to switch to a related character. Keep track of your children and siblings, so that you know who'll be your successor when you die.

**Followers**
**Hit points**
**Honor**
**Goals**
**Innocence**
*Little Fears* keeps track of a character's innocence rating. It goes down as the character ages, experiences horrible things or realizes that magical thinking doesn't actually work. When you have no innocence left, you become a grown-up, blind to the Other World.

**Instincts**
*Burning Wheel* has each character mark down three Instincts, things the character will always do without the player needing to specify them. They can work as scripts for automating certain actions ("when surprised, always draw my knife"), ensuring the character won't get in trouble ("always have enough ingredients for noodle soup") or hints about the kinds of situations the player wants to end up in ("if there's a cave-in, then I push the youngest to safety").

**Karma**
**Kickers**
**Memory**
A robot character may have a limited memory storage, only allowing ver to have a certain number of programs or skills loaded at a time.

Game design challenge: Alternatively, an interesting game could be built around a system that kept track of a character's most important memories, and those had a game effect.

**Oaths**
Either ones your character has sworn, or oaths that others have sworn and that affect you. Characters typically receive bonuses to rolls made in an attempt to fulfill their oaths.

Game design challenge: Create a game where a character's only statistics are in the form of several oaths - each sworn by someone *else* than the character but having to do with her, such as "I will mold my daughter into the most cunning rogue ever seen", or "I will make a blood sacrifice of my foe's daughter on her eighteenth birthday".

**Personality traits**
**Popularity**
( http://gregorhutton.com/boxninja/bestfriends/index.html )
**Race**
**Relationships (Dogs in the Vineyard)**
**Religion**
**Resources**
**- Fate points**
**- Roll boosters**
**- Roll determiners**
**Sanity**
**Saving throws**
**Sex**
**Skills**
**Story arc**
**Story importance**
*Universalis* and *Fastlane* have a "story importace" statistic, derived from the sum of resources that have been spent on a certain character or object. This influences how powerful the object can be in conflicts, and how hard it is to eliminate. Something that a lot of players have spent their resources on is important for them, and therefore difficult to just remove from the story.

**Trust**
**Virtue & Vice**
**Visibility**
In Primetime Adventures, a campaign's length is specified in advance, and each character's Visibility rating in each session ("episode") is determined when setting up the campaign, so that one character will always be the center of the episode with others getting less attention. Each character is also guaranteed to have the highest possible Visibility rating in at least one episode.

**Wealth**

## Minor variants

**Favored statistics**
**Open statistics**
**Secret statistics**
**Specializations**
You are given a set of generic statistics or skills, and tasked with picking a more narrow specialization for each one. If the specialization comes to play, you get a bonus.

Example: For your "body" statistic, you might pick "speed" as your specialization. You would then have a bonus in situations involving speed.

**Unique statistics**
As above, but the specialization *replaces* the generic statistic/skill. Thus you can *only* use the skill in situations where the specialization is relevant.

Example: There is a generic "Academics" skill, which has to be replaced with some narrower specialization, such as "Physics".

# Personality traits
**Ars Magica style**

**Keys**
**Pendragon style**
**Under the Bed style**
**Unknown Armies style**


# Sanity

**Call of Cthulhu style**
**GURPS style**
**Unknown Armies style**


# Wealth

**Bookkeeping style**
**Wealth levels (Burning Wheel style)**
**Wealth levels (Donjon style)**
**Wealth levels (GURPS style)**


# Experience point sources

**Advantages / disadvantages**
**Attendance**
**Keys**
**Metagame**
**Roleplaying (general)**
**Studying**
**Thematic**
**Things learnt**
**Vote**


# Character creation

**Bidding**
**Character cards (Under the Bed)**
**Character cards (Zombie Cinema)**
**Conflict (Dogs in the Vineyard)**
**Heroic event**
**Lifepath**
**Point-buy**
**Prequel**
**Random**
**One-roll**


# Damage style

**Critical table (Rolemaster)**
**Post-conflict fallout (DitV)**
**Roll determines damage**
**Separate damage roll**


# Tracking damage

**Health levels**
Characters have several health levels, such as Healthy - Lightly wounded - Heavily wounded - Incapacitated - Dead. Typically, pushing the character to the next wound level requires an attack to exceed a certain threshold of points. Each wound level causes different kinds of penalties.

**Setting / story consequences**
This form of "damage" is often pretty straightforward - if you lose the conflict, then the setting or storyline is affected in some way that you didn't want to happen. It's possible to make this more formalized, however. A character in a debate may need to make concessions each time he takes damage (*Burning Wheel*), or a god's realm may be transformed for the worse each time the god is injured. In *Universalis*, the winner of a conflict gets points which she can then use to add, remove or alter existing story elements.

**Statistic damage**
Some of the character's attributes are increased or decreased (depending on which one makes them worse), either temporarily or permanently. Some statistics that typically take damage are: hit points, attributes, experience points, clones.

**Wounds**
Each attack may cause different kinds of wounds, each causing separate penalties (a wound on the right harm harming attack rolls and a wound on the leg slowing movement, for instance).

# Player characters

**Bloodlines**
**Individual characters**
**Nations**
**Troupes**

# Misc. rules

**Making propechies**
**Possession / mind control**
**- Complete**
**- Partial**
**- Roll to overcome**
**Wittiness**
As used in *Reign*: for each point in the wittiness skill, the GM will tell you one insult that your character will hear during that session. This way, you can think of a witty response in advance.

# Off-time rules

**Aging**
**Asset-building**
**Family rules**
**Item creation**
**Laboratories**
**Libraries**
**Research**
**Travel**