Contests

Contests occur whenever a player wants their character to accomplish a goal, and the GM or another player decides that it would be potentially interesting for the character to fail for some reason.

Sides

A contest has two or more sides. A side is any group that has a goal that isn't compatible with that of at least one other side. If it is determined that no side's goal are incompatible with that of any other, then there is no contest, and everyone gets what they want.

Co-operation

Often two characters may wish to accomplish the exact same thing, and each strive to obtain it in a co-operative manner. For instance, if the goal is to wrest an object from a villain, and neither side cares who gets it away from the villain, they are co-operating. If, in fact, each character wants to gain the item for themselves, then they are not co-operating; each character in this case represents a side in the contest.

Each character co-operating in accomplishing a goal creates a die pool, per Player Dice below. Further each co-operating character is potentially subject to accumulating penalty dice as a result of the contest.

Assistance

Instead of co-operating to accomplish a goal, a player may have their character assist another character. The goal is understood to be the goal declared by the player whose character is being assisted, and the assisting character's goal is simply to give the assisted character a condition die to accomplish it. See condition dice below.

Assisting does have the advantage that the character doing the assisting is not subject to accumulating penalty dice.

Creating Die Pools

The GM and players work out together what assets can be brought to bear in any contest. The assets that are selected for the contest each provide their associated die to the die pool.

All involved players create dice pools per Player Dice below. If a PC or PCs face opposition other than each other, the GM creates the opposition die pool.

Player Dice

The player gets the following dice that they can add to their die pool:

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One attribute
One background
One relationship
One tech
One asset of the opposing side (usually a penalty die)
One temporary asset (not from an opponent)
As many aspects are being touched on by the conflict
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Aspect Bonus Dice

For each aspect involved in the contest, the player may add one additional die for an asset that they select, subject to approval by the GM. This makes aspects very powerful as not only do they add their own die, but they allow a player to add yet another additional die.

Selecting Assets

The GM will often select assets to be used to speed along play, but should also ask for suggestions, especially when he's not sure what's most interesting. If the player has a good idea for an asset to be used in the conflict the GM should take it under advisement, and allow it if it seems understandable and interesting. If the GM isn't sure, they should ask the player to explain their rationale for its inclusion in the contest… sometimes a seemingly odd aspect make sense once its role is explained. If the player has no explanation, or the inclusion still doesn't seem entertaining after the explanation, the GM should rule it out, and carry on with the resolution.

It is the GM's job to try to assure that the assets that are most fun are included in the contest. The GM is given final authority on this simply for purposes of being able to move play on if there are disagreements.

Missing Assets

One Attribute should always be chosen, representing the default ability of the character to get the task done, and they also always may roll their destiny die. But if the character has no appropriate background, or if no relationships are involved, they don't have any gear that applies, the opposition has no assets that work in favor of the character, the character has not generated any condition dice, or the PC has no aspects that pertain… then these dice are simply unavailable.

Note that rolling just the two minimum dice vs. a full load of opposing dice is risky, since there is a good chance for a tie (or worse, all of the opposition dice are higher), which means that the opposition will win, and win with many successes. This is the risk one takes for attempting difficult actions for which they are more or less unprepared.

There are some cases where missing assets can be replaced by other means, however…

Improvised Assets

Certain types of assets can be improvised.

Substituting Backgrounds for Relationships

If the character is missing a relationship die in a contest, a background may be substituted under certain limited circumstances. Usually this involves the target of a persuasion attempt having a similar background, such that the characters have a bond of common experience. If the target is a Scout, for instance, and the character has a Scout background, the player can bring in the d3 for the background. Once again, this is no substitute for even a casual actual relationship, but can help out in a pinch.

Random Tech

When faced with a contest where the character has no gear die, and if it the GM agrees that it is reasonable to do so (they haven't been strip searched or something), the player may invent gear that pertains to the contest. These should be described as being of limited usefulness, or of unfamiliar use. The player gets a d3 for the contest to represent this gear.

Opposition Dice

If a PC or PCs face opposition, the GM creates the opposing die pool by selecting dice that he feels accurately represent the difficulty of the conflict for the character in question.

Non-player Character Opposition

If in fact, there is a NPC involved as the opposition, the GM should estimate levels of attributes, skills, relationships and gear to come up with the opposing pool. If the opposition is a key villain or the like, the GM may even assume that they have something like aspects, and activate more dice as appropriate.

The GM may, if they wish, actually create important villains and such using the character creation rules, but often it will suffice simply to make up the stats and skills on the spot. Don't worry if they conform to the character creation rules, simply try to make their assets dramatically appropriate.

Static Opposition

For more "static" difficulties, the GM should consider how difficult they want to make the contest for the character, or how difficult it appears, given the circumstances. If the character seems just skilled enough to deal with the circumstance, then the opposition should have a high die equal to the

player's high die. If it is something that is somewhat beyond their normal capacity, then the high die should be even higher. If the activity is somewhat closer to routine (actual routine tasks should not often be Contests), then a lower die may be selected as the high die. Modify the difficulty by comparing the character's other dice in a similar fashion.

Example: a character is trying to convince a crowd of rioters to disperse. The character's Oratory d8 is being used, along with the character's Charisma of d8, and a bullhorn gear d3 (unfortunately he has no relationship to anyone in the crowd). The GM figures that this d8 is mostly used on similar sized crowds as this, but mostly against ones that are far less unruly than this one. So the GM selects a d10 difficulty for the task. In addition he selects a d8 to match the social standing die, and a d6 to oppose the bullhorn… that gear is unequal to the task at hand, and a public address system would have been much more effective.

Generally three dice should be selected for opposition unless the situation presents exceptional risk, and potential loss, in which case more dice should be added (not necessarily higher dice). High risk actions may include up to 6 dice or so, while something crazy risky might include up to ten dice.

Example: continuing with the example above, unlike most crowds, this one looks like it might turn violent, and the stakes are high. The GM assigns two more d6 to the contest to represent that the results of this contest might turn out very bad for the orating character.

Multiple Opposing Sides

The GM should generally make only one opposing pool, even if there are multiple opposing sides. If there are, indeed, multiple characters run by players going up against separate oppositions, then this constitutes separate contests. And if there actually are more than one side opposing a single character or group of co-operating and/or assisting characters, a GM may select to roll multiple pools against the players. But it is just as valid (and much simpler) to increase the difficulty of the one pool slightly. If the GM wins in this case, he should simply select which of the opposing sides he feels would be more interesting to have win, and narrate that happening.

Doing this takes the focus off the contest being about which opposition wins, and makes it again about how the characters lose in these circumstances. The characters should always remain the center of attention in resolving contests, win or lose.

Comparing Rolls

Each die pool is rolled, and the result of the highest die rolled is announced. If any pool's highest dice are tied with those of another pool (and the pools represent characters who are not co-operating), then these tied are dice discarded, and the highest die in each pool is announced again. If the player has more than one die with the tied result, he discards only one of them.

This continues, with tied high dice being discarded until one pool's highest die is higher than that of all other sides (they can tie with co-operating pools, who are on the same side, and still win). When this happens, the side with the high die wins the conflict. Count the number of dice from all pools on the winning side that are higher than the highest die of all the losing sides' high dice; these are "success dice."

These dice are set aside.

Out of Dice

If all of one side's dice are discarded due to ties, then that side is considered to have a zero as its highest die.

Concessions

After the winner sets aside their success dice, the pools are checked again, each side announcing its high die. If there is a tie, then resolution ends between the sides that have tied, and these dice are discarded. For those that continue to be in conflict, continue to compare their highest dice discarding ties. When there is a case where one side has high dice higher than an opponent, they may take these dice as concession dice against that opponent.

Concession dice do not represent the side in question gaining their goal, but instead being able to get something out of the conflict other than the goal. These are spent to gain temporary assets (see below). Frequently they are spent to create penalty dice to impose on the winner… the price of their victory.

Three or More Sides

This is just to note the effects of multiple sides and pools. As ties are discarded often between just two pools this means that third parties can benefit from these ties, by having dice higher than theirs discarded, while they retain their highest die. This is one benefit of co-operation (tying players on the same side do not discard dice). In narration this can be described as one character distracting the opposition or otherwise engaging some part of the difficulty, while another character moving to accomplish the goal.

True Ties

Rarely all sides are rolling the same number of dice, and they get the exact same numbers on the dice, which results in all dice being discarded. When this happens, the contest is a true tie. The narration should include the contest going on until all sides are exhausted, all decide to retreat, some other event occurs to interrupt the contest, or some other description that explains why neither side gets their goal.

Example: a player states that his character's goal is to wrest an ancient artifact from the grip of an enemy, and escape with it. The enemy, similarly, wants to retain the artifact and get away from his assailant. Both pools come up with 2, 4, 4, 7 as a result… a tie! The GM narrates that, as they struggle, the cave that the characters are in has a tremor that causes it to begin to collapse. Both are forced to run, with the enemy dropping the artifact to be buried in the rubble. Neither gets their goal of escaping with the item. Now the race begins to be the first to dig it out!

Occasionally it is fine to allow the same contest to occur again, but generally forcing some sort of new action and decision-making to occur is preferable to simply re-rolling.

Narrate Outcome

The GM selects either himself or the rolling player to narrate the outcome. For inspiration, players may wish to keep track of which dice represent which asset, and emphasize the assets that resulted in successes. This is not necessary, and the narration may go completely against this if it is more interesting, but it can sometimes provide a good stepping off place to get into narration.

Spending Success and Concession Dice

The outcome of a contest may be the creation of temporary dice of various sorts. The player spends his success dice on some combination of the below.

Basic Goal

If the basic goal of a contest was something other than to gain a condition die, one success die must be spent to accomplish this basic goal. Note that a player may forgo this, to gain other benefits below, but then their character wins only a pyrrhic victory, unable to achieve whatever they were attempting. If this happens, it doesn't mean that the other side gets their goal… they have no success dice to spend on this either. Often this outcome will resemble a tie.

If the results seem mutually exclusive… one side must get their goal or the other, then the GM may require that the winner spend one success die on gaining their basic goal.

Condition Die

This is the goal of a contest when one character helps another (see Assistance above), or when a planning contest is done before another contest to get a die to help accomplish the latter contest. The player of the character attempting to gain the die selects a target die type representing how hard they're trying to help or how grand the plan, and how much aid that may actually potentially deliver. The opposition may automatically replace three of their dice with the target die type if it is advantageous to do so (including any missing dice). Obviously it is more risky to attempt to obtain a larger condition die.

For each success die spent, the player may obtain the target die for one roll. Again, if assisting, this die is obtained for another player to use. Set this die aside with it set to the value of the number of uses it has remaining, or record this somewhere to keep track.

Reward Die

A reward die is simply a condition die that the GM chooses to award after a roll (players should suggest reward dice if they have good ideas for them), representing an unexpected ongoing benefit. As the player did not elect to attempt to create a condition die, the opposition gets no replacement dice, of course. The size of the die should be one that is third largest of those rolled by the opposition.

For instance, if the opposition rolled d8, d6, d6, d4, then the reward die should be a d6.

The nature of a reward die should be appropriate to the contest, similar to how a condition is appropriate to the contest that creates it. The player must have unspent success or concession dice for the GM to award a reward die. For each unspent die, the player gets the reward die for one roll. The GM might choose to split multiple success dice between multiple reward dice if it seems appropriate.

Penalty Dice

Penalty dice are essentially condition dice bestowed upon the opposition (with a notable difference in duration). The size of the penalty die is the size of the success or concession die used to pay for the penalty die, or a lower size if desired. So if a player had a d12 success die and a d6 success die, he could give a member of the opposing side a d12 penalty die and a d6 penalty die, or any two dice less than these.

Removing Penalty Dice

Unlike condition dice, penalty dice are less temporary. They remain until some contest is performed that is designed to remove them. The opposition die pool for removing a die may replace up to three dice with dice the size of the penalty die being removed (often these three dice can simply be the difficulty in static situations). Note that losing a penalty die removal contest can well result in acquiring more penalty dice.

Real Dice vs E-dice

There are many technologies available today that provide simulated dice… scripts on IRC, dice on interactive play platforms, dice applications on cell phones, etc. etc. These allow the creation of dice such as the d11 without resorting to methods that involve rolling more than one die or rolling dice and ignoring results out of range. If not playing with electronic dice of some sort (which is recommended), often a die is not available that matches the die type that is associated with an activated asset. In these cases the player instead gets the nearest available lower die type. As compensation, if their high die ties with the opposition’s high die, they win the contest with one success die.

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