

CHAPTER TWELVE

On Dice...

Dice – those oddly shaped little lumps of hard impact plastic found scattered about the gaming table. Who can resist them?

Also known as polyhedrons, these trusty gems do one thing — generate random numbers on demand. Even with the odds behind him and the modifiers stacked, the roller can never be sure of the outcome. That's what puts uncertainty into the game and creates the suspense players thrive on.

The tools of the trade for player and GameMaster alike, dice are to the gamer what the assault rifle is to the combat soldier. Often they're only things standing between you and character death. And like a soldier's weapon, they demand your respect as well as your utmost attention.

This chapter is devoted solely to the topic of dice – yes, they are *THAT* important. It would behoove you to read this section thoroughly and refer to it often. And really, why wouldn't you? When you become intimately familiar with your dice and learn to use and care for them properly, they will serve you well.

Die Nomenclature

Before any further discussion on dice can take place, let us define the proper nomenclature for the various forms they take.

HackMaster utilizes several different dice. The 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and last, but not least, the 20 sider.

In the rules each die type is symbolized by “d”, and its number of sides is shown immediately thereafter. A six-sided die is therefore ‘d6’, ‘d8’ is an eight-sided die and so on.

Two four-sided dice are expressed as 2d4, five eight-sided dice are 5d8, etc. Any additions to or subtractions from the die or dice are expressed after the identification, thus: d8+8 means a linear number grouping between 9 and 16, while 3d6-2 means a bell-shaped progression from 1 to 16, with the greatest probability group in the middle (8, 9). This latter progression has the same median numbers as 2d6, but it has higher and lower ends and a greater probability of a median number than if 2d12 were used.

On a d10, a zero result (0) is read as a result of 10. The d20 is the most versatile die in your dice arsenal. It can be used as d10 and d20. Two d20s can also be used to simulate a d100. More typically, however, rolling two ten-siders of different colors generates percentages (numbers ranging from 1 to 100). Before rolling, the player announces which color is high (tens) and which color is low (single digits). When percentage dice are to be used, it is indicated by d100 or d%.

Sometimes you will need to use various dice to simulate dice of another type. For example a d6 can be used to simulate a d3 (generating a random number from 1 to 3). In this case the result of rolling a d6 would be read as follows; 1-2 = 1, 3-4 = 2, 5-6 = 3. Likewise, a d10 could be used to simulate a d5 (1-2 = 1, 3-4 = 2, 5-6 = 3, 7-8 = 4, 9-0 = 5) and a d4 could be used as a d2 (1-2=1, 3-4=2).

A d1000 is a die roll used to generate a random number between 1 and 1000. The most common method is to roll three differently colored ten-sided dice, where each color has been designated to represent one of the three digits, i.e. hundreds, tens and ones. So rolling a 3, a 4 and a 0 would mean 340. A result of 000 indicates 1000.

A d10,000 is a die roll used to generate a random number between 1 and 10,000. This method requires rolling 4 differently colored ten-sided dice. So rolling a 5, a 3, a 4 and a 0 would mean 5,340. A result of 0000 represents 10,000.

Note: Some specialty dice companies actually produce d1000 and d10,000 sets with each 10-sided die appropriately marked as to avoid any confusion.



A penetration roll (rolling the maximum number on the die, allowing you to roll the same die again with a modifier of -1) is symbolized by “p” after the die type. If the rules call for a d6 and you roll a 6, that’s it - you got a 6. *However*, if the rules call for a d6p and you roll a 6, you get to roll that die again and add the result minus one. If you continue to roll sixes, you add 5 (6-1=5) each time until you stop rolling sixes.

Dice Etiquette

There are a few very important rules of protocol concerning dice. The sooner you learn them - and put them to use - the better. Your GM and fellow players will expect you to know and practice proper dice etiquette. Those who don’t (or who take such things lightly) are often mercilessly shunned by other gamers and end up wondering why they’re suddenly not invited back to the table. Don’t be that guy.

Hands to Yourself

Do yourself a favor: take a highlighter and mark this section. Most experienced gamers are somewhat possessive (even superstitious) when it comes to their dice. Perhaps one of the greatest offenses a player can make at the table is touching another player’s dice.

As a general rule, one player should never, ever touch another player’s dice. Ever! It just isn’t done - at least not without the shedding of blood. The surest way of ostracizing yourself from the fellowship of other gamers is to be a dice-squirrel and put your paws on dice that don’t belong to you.

You don’t put your hands on another man’s wife... and you sure as hell don’t touch his dice.

A Moment of Silence, Please!

When a player is in the actual act of rolling his dice, shut the hell up. Even a sworn nemesis deserves a chance for an honest unimpeded die roll. Before a player rolls, feel free to cheer him on, hex him or whatever, but when his arm begins that forward motion and the die is about to meet the battlemat, you’d better pipe down. Muttering phrases like “jinx! jinx!”, “You’re gonna miss!” or even supposedly ‘helpful’ cheering like shouting “Boom baby, BOOM” or “Go Dave!!” as the dice start their tumble is extremely bad form.

So remember - as the roller’s fingers glide open and the die springs free, the table should hush and watch and listen.

There’s nothing like the drama and expectation of an important roll rat-a-tat-tatting across the table and tumbling to a stop. Trust me. You don’t want all eyes turned on you as a player accuses you (and rightfully so) of ruining his concentration.

Speaking when someone is rolling, even to root for him, is the poorest of etiquette. They may tolerate such nonsense in Iowa but don’t let it happen at your table.

High Color Convention

Some old school gamers still like to use the antiquated twenty-siders which were made in the 1970s and ‘80s. Often called “Mud Dice” (due to the edges of the soft plastic rounding off with use) such dice were manufactured with no distinction made between results of 1-10 versus results of 11-20. They were simply numbered 1 to 10 twice. It is perfectly acceptable to use such out-dated dice, but you must colorize half of the numbers on a die of this type, usually with a colored wax crayon or a mascara pen.

When a player uses a die of this type, it is essential that the

DICE RECOGNITION CHART

The players first line of offense/defense - his dice arsenal.

four sider (d4), six sider (d6), eight sider (d8), ten sider (d10), twelve sider (d12), twenty sider (d20)





A proper Dice Rolling Zone with adequate rolling space. Notice how this player has cleverly laid claim to his zone by marking the boundaries with pencils and a soda can.

color of the higher numbers be declared publicly and agreed upon for that session (and recorded in a verifiable place, such as on a character record sheet). Under no circumstances are players to be allowed to “call” the color of the higher numbers after a roll has been made.

It is considered poor etiquette to switch the convention of high color once a gaming session has begun, though breaching this etiquette is acceptable in extreme extenuating circumstances - such as when your character is getting decimated and you're rolling consistently bad all session.

If color convention is in question after such dice have been rolled, the GM should evoke the ROY G. BIV rule with the color for the lower numbers being the first color to appear on the color spectrum. Always assume black is the lowest color in such cases.

A final way to use these dice (or a 10-sider) in order to generate rolls of 01-20 is to roll a d6 along with the d10. On a result of 4-6, you add 10 to the d10 result. This method eliminates the color issue, and is an alternative for those who have lost their d20 or were too dim to use two different colored crayons on their d20.

Open and Closed Rolling

All rolls required of players during a HackMaster game session must be made publicly, such that all other attending players and the GM may view the roll. Under no circumstances shall a player be allowed to hide his dice rolls.

Note that an ‘open roll’ means the die must be under full observation by those looking on from the moment the die leaves the roller's hand to the moment it comes to a full rest. Rolling the dice in a cup and turning it over, cupping the dice under one's palms after it's been rolled to hide the result and so on, invalidate the roll.

The GM, on the other hand, may use “closed” die rolling at

his discretion. In fact, it is the normal procedure for a GM to secretly make die rolls from behind the safety of his GM shield. The GM is also allowed to intrude upon any other die rolling zone on the table at will (this is the only exception to the normal protocol) with no penalty. This is often done during those dramatic moments when letting the players see the fearsome result of a 20 coming up on a to-hit roll is just too much to pass up.

Under no circumstances should the GM be compelled, cajoled or pressured into rolling in the open *even when his dice are so hot the players question whether he's cheating*. It's solely his call.

Let the Dice Fall Where They May

Dice rolls are sacred. In my campaigns, I let the dice fall where they may – period. I don't cotton to fudging die rolls and other such nonsense, and I despise those who practice such foolishness or allow it to take place at their table. Once a GM begins fudging the dice the game is diminished and he has tarnished his shield. The *only* exceptions are dice that roll off the table, come to rest in a cocked position or fail to hold up under the guidelines of this chapter as a ‘legitimate’ roll.

Dice Rolling Zones (DRZ)

This is a big one. A player must have adequate room to roll his dice properly. Dice need room to move, bounce and ‘play’ in order to yield the desired results. If such room is not available it is a player's right, nay his responsibility, to inform his GameMaster so the situation can be remedied immediately. In-house studies have clearly shown that ‘stifled’ dice rolled in a confined space and deprived of a proper movement/play area perform subpar.

The minimum area for a dice rolling zone is 17½ inches wide and 11½ inches deep (note: these dimensions have been slightly decreased since the last edition, taking into account new die manufacturing techniques and polymers that give dice more ‘bounce’). Note also that all “public table areas” are officially free rolling zones (FRZs). These are the battle/minatures area and free spaces between zones. Using an FRZ is the only way to create the Distance-Dramatic Roll (such a roll being made famous by little Isaac Goldstein while slaying the Swack Iron Dragon with a desperate crit in the closing seconds of the HackMaster World Championship at GaryCon '82). However, you should take care not to disturb any miniatures when rolling in the battle area. Again if you find your assigned DRZ at the gaming table insufficient you should bring it to the attention of your GM.

When establishing your DRZ there are several things to look for:

- Enough space must be provided so when the dice are rolled, none of them touch each other.
- The DRZ should be free of obstacles so that the dice get plenty of tumble-action, and roll freely without interference or

inhibition. Don't let another player's elbow, a poorly placed can of soda or a pencil rob you. Players should actively police/maintain their DRZ's during a game.

- Clear DRZ boundaries are necessary to avoid disputes between players. It's always a good idea to 'announce' the demarcation of your zone to other players before the game as a reminder. This is critical for those who believe in the possible transference of (bad) luck between dice in close proximity to one another.

- Remember it is always bad form to invade another's dice zone with a poor roll of your own. It is akin to the infraction of touching another's dice (as described hereafter). Because some players don't respect the DRZs of other players, it is within the GM's power to apply a penalty to any die/dice that violate another player's zone.

Note however that during those rare moments where Player vs. Player actions crop up, invading your opponent's DRZ is a valid strategy to throw him off his game. Just remember that turn about is fair game.

Designated Dice Rolling Zones (DDRZ)

Now for a bit of backtracking from the previous edition. For years there has been speculation that 'training' a DRZ will result in higher numbers and better roll control. I've hotly contested this assertion since no substantial proof had ever been offered up (other than Norman Bowzer's popular articles in *HackJournal* which were flawed by personal bias and fudged numbers, in my opinion).

Recently, however, our own in-house tests have demonstrated that there may be something to it. Therefore, I'm now officially backing the HMA's move that DDRZs (Designated Dice Rolling Zones) be officially addressed.

I believe the effectiveness of DDRZs has more to do with the roller's confidence level and attitude than the trained zone itself, but at the end of the day we live or die by the results of our dice so it's worth mentioning here.

The first step in establishing a DDRZ is to stake your claim. Pick a spot or seat at the table you roll dice at and make it known it is YOUR territory. If this is not possible (for example your game rotates locations or other players simply refuse to recognize your claim), then try placing your character sheet (or a fame rub card) in your DRZ where the dice first strike the table. This will often (but not always) compensate. Having a DDRZ however is ALWAYS preferable.

The Nature of Dice

In order to properly use your dice and to get the desired performance from them, you must first understand them. For many gamers dice are mystical things akin to the Fates of mythology. You might as well know one sad fact up front – like the Fates, dice can be fickle.

They are friends to neither GameMaster nor player. The player who appears to be on a lucky streak one week, rolling one critical hit after another, is often the same guy rolling an endless stream of fumbles the next session.

There are misguided individuals out there who would have you believe the outcome of any given roll is governed by the cold, blind tenets of probability. "There is no such thing as luck!" they assure you as they go on and on about bell curves, the law of mathematical averages, and other such nonsense in an attempt to hammer their point of view into your skull.

To be honest, they are partly correct; dice are designed to do one thing – generate truly random numbers that dictate the outcome of various actions during the course of the game in a fair and impartial manner. The random numbers they generate are ultimately what keeps the GM's power over his players in check. He may design the adventure and chart the course of the action, but at the end of the day it's the dice that decide the outcome.

That does not mean, however, that dice can't be coaxed or encouraged to do the roller's bidding on occasion. Most gamers inherently know this as if by instinct. They talk to their dice. Praise them (when the roll well). Curse them (when they fail). They blow on them. Rub them on others for good luck. They even name their dice.

To say there is no 'luck' involved when it comes to dice is just plain silly. Ask anyone who has bellied up to the game table and they will swear that this die or that favors (or disfavors) them. If you press the subject, most gamers will produce one or more of their lucky dice. (I myself had a blue benzene polyfibre d20 model 5 called 'Nat Faithful' which served me well for twenty-nine years. It eventually failed me during a hobgoblin uprising at Frandor's Keep and was disposed of with full honors.)

We've all witnessed the player on a 'hot streak' who inexplicably pulls nat' twenties out of his butt like some Easter Bunny doling out eggs to a schoolyard full of preschoolers. There's little doubt that luck exists, and to say it doesn't simply reeks of denial. The notion of luck (and bad luck) is very real to most players, and they take it seriously. You'd be advised to do the same.

Having said that, let me warn you not to fall into the trap of attempting to live by the good graces of Lady Luck. Those who use luck as a crutch soon find themselves falling flat on their faces. Lady Luck has a wandering eye and she dances with many partners. One moment she may be at your side, and the next moment she's nowhere to be found (kind of like an ex-girlfriend I once had). When it comes to hacking it's best to rely on your own wits and mettle.

Still, there are a few things you can do to encourage luck (or to stave off bad luck):

- Never EVER use a new unproven set of dice in a game without first breaking them in and/or determining their quality (see *Dice Priming* hereafter).

- Never let another player use and/or touch your dice. It's just a bad idea. I keep an extra set of cheap dice (throw away dice) handy just in case some moron shows up sans dice and asks if he can 'use' my dice. You should do the same. Just slip them your throw-away dice and when they offer to return them at the end of the game (yeah, like that'll happen) just tell the ingrate to keep them.

- Likewise never borrow another player's dice. Be prepared. Show up for the game with properly tested/battle primed dice. Would you show up at a knife fight without a knife?

- If a die rolls off the table, hits another player's arm or requires any sort of reroll be sure to 'roll off' any bad luck it may picked up by rolling it as many times as it takes to come up with a positive result.

- When your dice are not in use but sitting out on the table at the ready it's a good idea to turn them so the highest numbered face is showing. This is akin to having them stand at attention and geared up for battle.

- If you feel a die isn't performing up to snuff don't be too quick to retire it or pull it out of the line-up. Sometimes putting an errant die back in the dice bag and shaking it will rally it. Dice can hold grudges. If you're too quick to act or judge they can turn on you.

Choosing/Purchasing your Dice

Great care and attention should be taken when purchasing/selecting your dice. I cannot stress this enough. Would you buy a pistol without doing your research? A car without test driving it?

I recommend going with dice produced by a reliable manufacturer. Examine each die for imperfections such as misshapen appearance, flawed edges or mold marks/extra material which protrudes. Ask the shopkeeper if you can test-roll your dice selections prior to purchase. Any die that rolls a "1" should be returned to the dice bin on the spot (unless you're actually looking for a low roller). If a die can't be bothered to put on its best face for you at such a critical moment how can it be expected to perform for you when you're facing down a free range minotaur? Doesn't mean it's a bad die. Sometimes a player and die just don't take to each other. It happens. If you do run across a die that doesn't cut the muster, you may want to refrain from buying any other dice from that same bin since unlucky dice usually come in groups.

Pay special attention to the numbers/pips on each face of the die. Are they clearly legible? Is the die made of high impact plastic? Is it used? Don't be afraid to ask questions. The better game shopkeepers understand the importance of dice selection and will cheerfully cater to you. You may also want to ask what the store's policy is on returning dice that fail to perform properly.

Don't overlook aesthetics. Nobody wants an ugly die (although I've known many ugly dice that have been superb



performers). The die should be pleasing to your eye. Color, contrast and good lines are all very important.

Now there are exceptions to this rule. Unusual dice and dice with character (due to some perceived flaw for example) just might be standouts and worthy of some extra scrutiny before dismissal. A friend of mine once had a d10 with an illegible "1" face that served in stellar fashion for many years.

Speaking of legibility – use the six foot rule when selecting your dice. You should be able to clearly read a die's result at six feet away. This ensures everyone at the table (GM and other players alike) can see your result and avoid disputes. To each his own but I would avoid 'rune' dice and other fancy schmancy dice with illegible characters/patterns which make reading a result difficult.

Finally, you should avoid buying or using flippity-floppity dice. You know the kind. The ones that have excessively rounded edges so that the six-siders roll like a wheel instead of, well, a die. Mud dice gain their unique rolling characteristics from years of use and have a certain old-school appeal and usually a special emotional value to the user. Flippity-floppity dice are just irritating to everyone. Only rookies, wannabes and losers rely on flippity-floppity dice.

Note: Special care should be taken with virgin dice (new dice that have never been used in a game). Would you go into combat with a non-zeroed weapon? Of course not. Know your dice. Whenever you buy new dice, be sure not to mix them with your battle-hardened dice until you've properly primed them (see hereafter). Otherwise, any bad luck may be transferred to your battle-hardened dice arsenal.

Assembling Your Dice Arsenal (Battle Line Dice)

When you first begin playing you'll probably be content just to buy the basic dice required to play, and throw them in a dice bag without much more thought or consideration. This is typical for the neophyte.

As your gaming experience grows, however, you should give more serious thought to maintaining and building a proper dice arsenal. This involves weeding out dice that under-perform or that show the slightest signs of becoming under-performers (or perhaps unlucky). You'll also want to begin taking note of any dice that demonstrate the early signs of being a 'lucky die' (a very rare thing indeed).

For example, over the course of several game sessions you may notice that one 20-sider seems to be rolling more than its share of high numbers. It's entirely possible you have a 'lucky' one in the making. You may want to consider assigning this die a specific task/purpose (such as only making backstab rolls).

Finally, let's not forget the ever-important Honor Dice (used in Advanced HackMaster). It is of utmost importance that you purchase a separate set of dice for Honor rolls. Remember that it is a dishonorable act to use a die not designated as an Honor Die. Dice should be scrutinized heavily (more so than usual) when being considered for use as Honor Dice. And once you pick your Honor Dice it's a very bad idea to swap them out with other dice (unless a die proves itself to be unlucky).

Dice Priming

You should never play with virgin (new) dice without properly priming them. The process is simple and, if you diligently follow it for every new die you purchase, you'll save yourself a world of headaches and problems.

When you purchase a new die it should be segregated from your active dice arsenal until it's properly primed and its status is known. Take the virgin die and roll it 25 times. Count the number of times you roll a maximum result, as well as those of a minimum result. If the number of minimum results is more than the number of maximum results, repeat the process. I use the 'three strikes yer out' rule. If the die fails this test three times in a row, throw it away. You could try to purge it of any bad luck but it's just a virgin die – why take chances? You could also attempt pawning it off on your GM (or another player you have a beef with). But be careful – karma tends to come back on you when it involves dice.

Once a virgin die has passed this test, you need to try it in active play. You should, however, still keep it segregated from your main dice arsenal. Wait until an opportunity comes up in the game when a *relatively unimportant* die roll of some type is needed. Then, and only then, produce the die and roll it. If the result is a critical failure (*i.e.* fumble), dispose of the die immediately.

If the die roll is a simple failure, try it again when another such opportunity arises. If the die produces a failed result a third time, toss it out.

If the die rolls a successful result, it shows promise, though you should still keep it segregated until it produces three successful in-game results; then, and only then, should you move it to your active dice arsenal.

Care and Maintenance

When not using your dice, you should keep them stored in a special bag (leather, neoprene, suede or vinyl bags are best). Take care that any suspect dice or untested dice are segregated. Studies have suggested that dice stored together tend to maintain their luck-levels for longer periods of time than dice stored individually or in open containers. These studies further suggest that low-rolling dice tend to benefit from being stored with more robust dice and that their luck-levels may actually be pulled up. However, it's also the case that a single unlucky die can bring down the luck-level of every die in the bag it's stored in. It is my recommendation that you take no chances. If the status of a die is in question – segregate it.

Lucky Dice

If a die in your arsenal has shown itself to be truly 'lucky' then you indeed have a rare gem. Such dice require special care in order to safeguard their unique properties.

First off, you should always name a lucky die. There is power in a name, as many cultures know, and this name should not be given lightly. You should never bestow a dishonorable name on it, as it may rebel. The name should reflect your hopes or the positive characteristics of the die. You may also want to name your die according to a specific task you assign to it.

One cautionary note: never name a die after a girl/boy friend or an old flame. Nothing good will come of it. A proper die name should inspire. Devin the Slayer. The Sisters (a pair of lucky percentiles I once owned).

Once a die is found to be lucky, you may want to assign it to perform some specific task. For instance, a die that consistently rolls high numbers might end up being your attack or damage die. An appropriate name will seal this deal. A ten-sider that consistently rolls low may be useful for skill checks.

Whatever happens, use lucky dice wisely. Don't overuse them. Don't abuse them. Don't use them for trivial rolls unless you absolutely have to. And never take them for granted. Treat them with respect and they'll rarely let you down.

It's good practice to always talk to a lucky die when taking it from the bag, before rolling it and before putting it back in the bag. I like to congratulate a lucky die for a job well done when a much needed result is yielded. But be careful. Know your dice. Some lucky dice don't like a lot of fuss and fanfare. They

just want to do the job at hand and return to storage so it can concentrate on the next required task.

It's also a good idea to keep a lucky die segregated from your main dice arsenal by keeping it in a smaller pouch, a pill bottle or some other small container that you can stow in your dice bag with your other dice. This is your way of making the die stand out and signifying that it's special. It also encourages your other dice to perform better as they strive to reach such esteemed status. A jealous die is a die that never tires of trying to step up.

Attitude

Although this chapter is about dice, let's take a few moments to talk about you as the roller. As you have seen, getting good results from your dice is as much about attitude and faith as it is about that simple bit of plastic in your hand.

When rolling the dice always do so as if your character's life depends on the result. The best dice rollers know that a proper dice toss is only as good as what the roller puts into the roll. You and your dice are a team. You should expend a little bit of yourself into each roll. Like a good race horse, the die must never feel like you're simply along for the ride and that you have nothing vested.

Sometimes it only requires a little vocal encouragement. "C'mon, boy. High number!" Other times it's the lucky kiss, the blow or the triple-shake.

When Good Dice Go Bad

Sometimes, despite all your precautions and after many campaigns of faithful service, a good die starts rolling badly. You can never be sure just why. It just happens. Perhaps you angered it when you started to favor another die. Or maybe it's just tired of the fight. When it happens you will know.

Now some players are quick to simply toss the offending die in the trash and write it off, lest it infect the rest of the dice

arsenal. Understandable. But dice that have served long and faithfully deserve better, at least a second chance.

Face it, it's tough turning your back on a die that has served you so well for so long. In cases like this, you might attempt to purge it of the tainted influence of bad luck.

Dice Cleansing and Other Rituals

There are hundreds of dice cleansing rituals out there being promoted by every two-bit hack jockey and dice shaman in the gaming world. Some of them work, but most don't and are unproven. We support only the following proven methods.

The Fame Rub

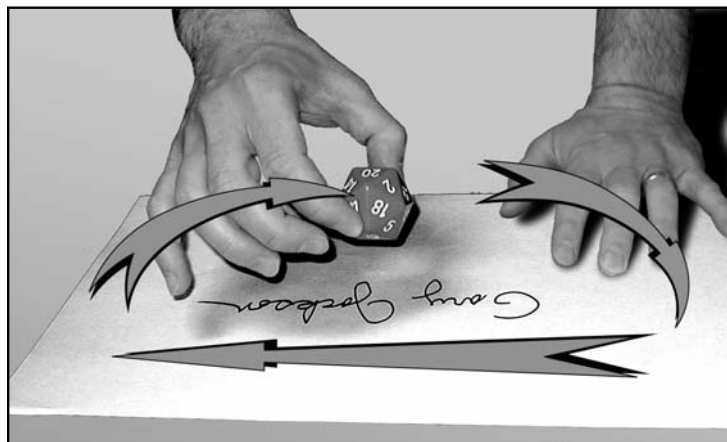
The fame rub is a tactic with incredible merit and some eight years of proven field experience to back it up. A person who wants to quickly transfer good luck into his dice can do so by rubbing the dice on the person, or some personal effect, of a popular game designer. **Remember: always rub left to right for higher numbers, and right to left for lower numbers.**

This practice can also be used to prime new dice, and most all game designers worth their salt at conventions and store signings are more than glad (eager even) to oblige fans. In fact, if a game designer refuses to let you do a fame rub, something is amiss and that designer's products should be avoided at all cost. I'm just saying...

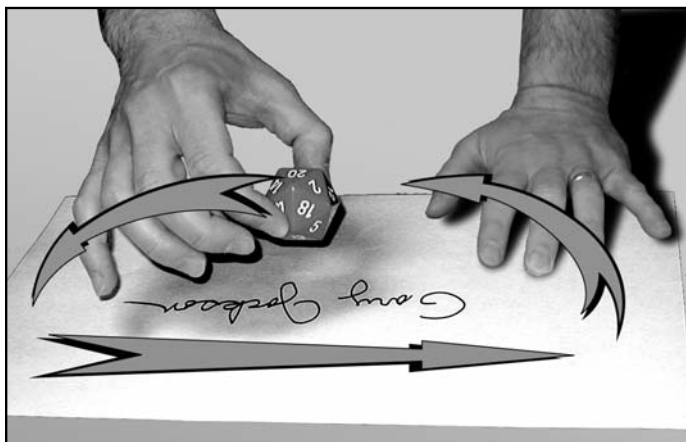
As a rule of thumb, you should do a minimum of 12 swipes of the die across the signature (but no more than two dozen as that can sometimes have the opposite effect of what is desired). Note that based on intensive research I have doubled my recommendation since the last printing of this chapter.

You can also gather something a game designer has used, such as a napkin, paper cup, soda can, and so on, and rub your dice on it. If you're lucky, you might even be able to rub your dice on the designer himself or even get one kissed or blessed!!! You should check the game designer's credentials before going this route, however. Has he had any hit games? Has he won

THE FAME-RUB



Left to Right = Higher #s



Right to Left = Lower #s

at least three Origins Awards? Make sure his stuff is up to snuff before rubbing your dice on him.

There are even those who suggest that if you rub a die on a dead game designer's tombstone, the bad luck will immediately be discharged only to be replaced by good luck. Such a charged-die is said to be the luckiest of all dice (other than those made from the bones of a hall of fame game designer).

According to Norman Bowzer, who has tried this approach on numerous occasions, it simply doesn't work. He recommends leaving the die on the tombstone for two nights under a full moon in order to give the bad luck time to dissipate. Since this particular method is the subject of dispute we present it here with proper notice that it may or may not be useful.

Warning: At GaryCon a few years ago I witnessed a well-intentioned gamer rubbing his dice on Tracy Lords. Do not—I repeat DO NOT attempt to get a fame rub from anyone but a published game designer. SciFi guests, comic artists, former playmate models...don't waste your time. It's like licking the drip pan under your refrigerator. Sure you're going to get a little taste of something – but gawd knows what.

Isolate the Offending Die Immediately

If you have a die that starts rolling badly, you need to quickly get it away from all your other dice. I cannot stress this enough. Don't, under any circumstance, place it back in your dice bag with the rest of your dice. Such an act is sheer folly. You need to keep it sequestered from the rest of your dice or you're just begging for trouble. Until you have been able to purge the bad luck from a die and instill it with good luck, there's no use taking any chances.

Emergency Purge

As a player there may be times when the status of your main line dice suddenly come into question. A sudden streak of failed to-hits. A fumble at a most inopportune moment.

Or what if you're in the middle of a tournament and you feel your luck has dropped out of your dice bag?

Well, there's one way to infuse a little luck back into your dice bag that may just save your game. First, empty out your dice bag. Roll each die until it yields a maximum result. Set it aside.

Rub each die across a game designer's signature (or, for a less effective option, across the credits page on any rpg product) from left to right as stated earlier. Put all the dice back in the bag and shake it 100 times to redistribute the luck.

Cocky Dice

Sometimes a die simply rolls badly because it's gotten a bad attitude. Some lucky dice suddenly become cocky and think they can't roll a bad number. Then Lady Luck steps in and

demands alimony. Or perhaps the die is angry you used another lesser die and felt snubbed. Again dice can hold grudges.

In such instances, it may be in the best interest of that die, your other dice and your game if you make an example of this particular bad apple. An attitude adjustment could be just what the dice doctor ordered. There are several methods of punishing dice, but the best ones are the simplest. Simply refuse to use the die or even touch it. Ostracize it. Ignore it. This is usually enough to do the trick and bring the die back in line.

If that doesn't work you may have to escalate things. Punish the die. This can involve throwing the die against a hard object (such as a wall or floor). One trick I've used with great results—actually tossing the die into a trash can and leaving it there for several minutes (or hours) before retrieving it. Nothing like that Lazarus-out-of-the-grave moment to make a die see the error of its ways.

And if that doesn't work...? You may have to take more drastic action to keep the insurrection from spreading. Simply throwing it away may not be enough. It needs to be made an example of. Destroying a rebellious die in full view of its peers is good policy. I keep a ball-peen hammer in my workshop for such dice. A friend of mine 'cracks' his in a vice and spreads the shards before his other dice to put the fear of gawd into them. Another friend of mine curses and hurls them in a red-faced fit of rage into a dark and dingy crawlspace.

Bottom line, GMs and players alike need to keep a close vigil on their dice arsenals. Bad luck has a nasty ability of spreading and spreading quickly. It needs to be nipped in the bud as soon as it rears its ugly head because if that happens, chaos could soon ensue.

Players should be aware that if they don't deal with their bad luck issues on their own, their GM will be forced to intervene.

Retiring a Good Die Gone Bad

If a die stops performing, rolls substandard and fails to rally after some maintenance you may have to face facts. The die has gone bad and it needs to be retired.

Don't pass it on to a friend (or enemy). It's like offering a carton of spoiled milk to somebody.

There are three acceptable ways of disposing of a die when you retire it.

1. Utter Destruction: This method is reserved for only the worst dice. Those that let you down in a moment of need or turned on you causing harm to your character or a trusted ally. It deserves to be destroyed. Smash it with a hammer, attack it with a blowtorch, microwave it until it becomes a molten lump of goo.

2. Common Burial: If a die is simply mediocre and has a history of being neither a stand out nor a 'bad' die then it deserves



better than simply being heaved in the trash bin. Place such dice in a bag or cup until you've accumulated a dozen or so and give them a common burial in the yard. It might be a good idea to give each die slated for such a ritual one or two last rolls – just in case one rallies when confronted with its fate.

Just be sure you bury dice in groups. Never bury a die alone.

3. Burial with Honors: This ritual is reserved for only those dice that served you long and well before losing their mojo. Named dice. Lucky Dice. Or simply dice that had special meaning to you. Perhaps it's a mud die whose edges have worn off so smoothly that your GM refuses to let you use it.

Many gamers have their own take on what constitutes a burial with honor. My personal ritual is this – I bury the die with 13 virgin dice of the same type at a depth of 12 inches and pour a libation over it before filling in the hole.

Dice Rolling Procedure

Every gamer has his own approach when it comes to rolling the dice. Some gamers take it in stride, content with tossing the dice and accepting the results. Most gamers, however, take the rolling of dice very seriously. The act of rolling dice is crucial to such people. It is the one aspect of the game where you, as a player, have some power over how the game is played and its outcome. The more energy and focus you put into the process of rolling dice, the better your chances of success.

Over the years I've seen hundreds of gamers toss the bones. It seems every individual has his own technique but here are a few tips to getting the most out of each and every die roll.

First off, NEVER roll the dice cold in a gaming situation. Before each gaming session each die you intend on using should be rolled five or six times. Take them out of the bag. Let them breathe. There's a lot of energy at the start of a gaming session and dice benefit from it. It's a good way for them to release that nervous tension while waiting to be put to use.

There are three important steps to proper dice rolling.

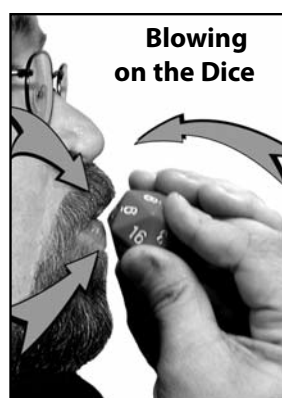
1. The Prep
2. The Shake
3. The Release

A good role-player learns to master all three (something that can take years but well worth the effort).

The Prep

When you call upon a die and bring it into play for an important roll (and all rolls are important, by the way) it is important to 'prep' it.

This is your way of letting the die know it's being sent in to do the job and that success is riding on the outcome. Think of it as the riding crop coming down on the race horse's hindquarter out the starting gate or the gentle nudge of the stirrup to the side (depending on the type of roll and result you need).



Every gamer has his own method of doing this. One good way to prepare a die to do its best is to simply kiss it. Yes, I said kiss it. Not a wet sloppy kiss, just a simple purse of the lips and a light peck (preferably on the high number). The transfer of psychic energy from this process can do wonders and often makes a nat'-twenty pop up just when you need it.

Others blow on their dice but the rationale for this is unclear. Some rub them between their palms creating friction, which may work if the person rolling the dice is a very lucky person; luck may transfer from the hands to the die. Other people talk to their dice, encouraging them to roll high. I've seen people who have had such a close relationship with their dice that they have been able to tell the dice what numbers they need and get them!

The Shake

The Shake is where the magic happens. Think of it as the flirtatious dance with Lady Luck. Some say this where the outcome of the roll is really determined.

It's important not to mess this step up. If the dance is too short you may spurn her. Too long? She becomes bored and you've lost her. It's a fine line and knowing the difference and when to release is what separates the men from the boys.

Some misinformed individuals feel that rattling the dice for a prolonged period of time prepares them for the rigors of battle. They shake and shake and shake like a monkey angrily jostling a bottle of Yoo Hoo with no clue as to how to open it.

More enlightened gamers know that the longer you shake a die, the more random the result. If you want to control the dice results, I have a little saying that helps. "Hold 'em tight, the roll ain't right. Let 'em fly, the roll will be high."

When you shake the dice, shake them like your life depends on it. Upper arm at a 45 degree angle to the torso with the forearm and elbow doing all the work.

Some gamers like to keep the forearm still and do all the shaking with a rolling motion of the wrist.

I even know a champion role-player from Ohio who shakes his dice with the closed fist behind his back before winding up for the release – whatever works for you.



The Release

Finally, the all-important release, that moment when the die leaves the hand and tumbles across the table. This is your last chance to sway the fates. It's also a chance to put your own flare on your technique.

Some gamers like to snap their wrists at the last crucial instant giving the die some added momentum or a spin.

Others like to gently let the die roll off the palm.

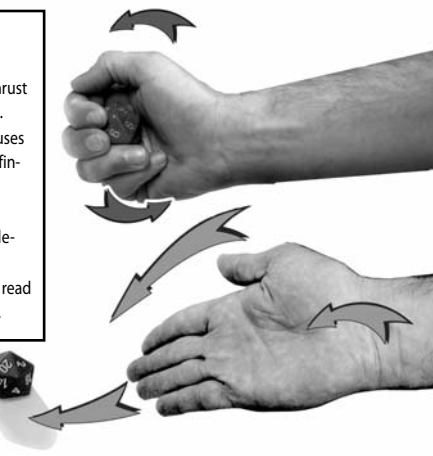
Dice Rolling Methods

Dice Rolling Methods are as varied and diverse as gamers themselves. It really comes down to personal style and preference. The following are some of the more effective methods.

The Standard Roll: Nothing fancy about this one. Just a simple prep, shake and release. The type of roll most people picked up playing board games as kids. Doesn't take much technique but it gets the job done.

The Standard Roll

1. After shaking the die vigorously in a clenched fist, the palm is opened and thrust toward the designated dice rolling zone.
2. The momentum of the open hand causes the die to roll forward off the extended fingers.
3. A slight twist to the wrist as the die is released gives the dice a bit more tumble-action.
4. The die is released and the results are read when the die comes to a complete stop.



The Back Roll/Spin: This seems to be the preferred method for most seasoned role-players and the mark of someone who knows his way around the table. There are a variety of embellishments to this particular method but it generally consists of putting "back-roll" spin on the die when releasing. This is a really good technique when the dice have been lukewarm and you're in a pinch.

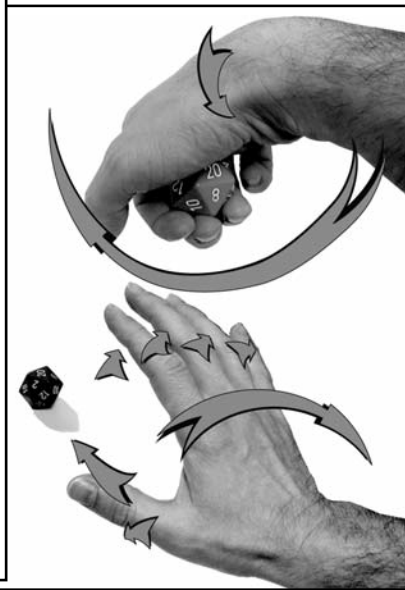
Some gamers prefer to save this technique for those really important rolls that make a difference. Don't attempt this roll in-game, however, unless you've mastered it. Nothing is quite as embarrassing as ricocheting a twenty-sider off an ally's forehead because of a badly executed backward spin.

The Open Palm Roll: Although I've taken a lot of grief for it over the years, I have great fondness for the open palm roll. Simply holding the die in a closed fist and then opening my fingers and allowing the die to roll off my palm and onto the gaming table—like a debutant making her entrance onto the ballroom floor. It's not for everybody. It's a confidence roll — usually reserved for the GM or that rare player who feels he's in control of his fate and wants to show it.

The Backspin Roll

The backspin is best left to veteran role-players. It takes years to master and doing it improperly could result in a disastrous die-roll or even invading the DRZ of another player. Still, it doesn't hurt to practice and some players do have a natural talent for picking it up.

1. After shaking the die vigorously in a clenched fist, the palm is inverted face down. The die/dice are cradled in the curl of the fingers and the wrist is snapped forward.
2. Just as the 'snap' reaches a point where the hand is fully extended, the fingers are straightened and waved/twirled away from the thumb to give the die a slight spin.
3. At the point of release the wrist is twisted in an outward motion to give additional spin to the die/dice.
4. The die is released with a combination sliding/tumbling action.



I have a modified version of the Open Palm Roll I like to call the "Ta Da! Roll". This is an open palm roll but as soon as the die rolls off the finger tips the hand is snapped and fingers curled as the palm is presented again as if to say "Ta da!" as the die result is revealed. It's especially pleasing when you're putting some smack down on some surly player who has been giving you lip.

The Top Spin: Another confidence roll, to be used only when your dice are already performing well and you're feeling cocky. Give some topspin as you push the dice forcefully from your palm in a violent manner. I usually preface this type of roll with an insolent statement directed at my foe, such as: "Okay, you scumbag! Wanna dance?!"

The cockier and more defiant the verbal attack, the better. Then rub it in real good when you roll the damage. A word of warning though - confidence rolls can raise your luck to an uncanny level, but they draw grudge monsters like you wouldn't believe.

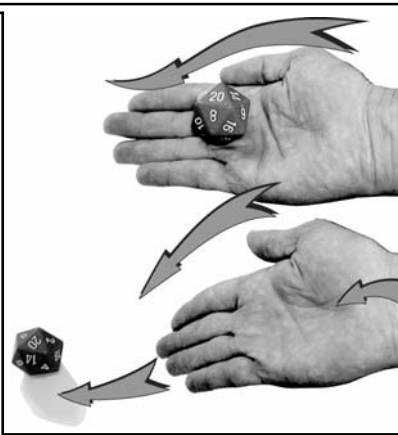
The Two Fisted Monkey Roll: This method is usually reserved for those do or die moments. You're outnumbered five to one. You should've run. The result literally means life or death. It's an attempt to put every last bit of umphhhh into the roll as you release them.

With this method the dice are cupped in two hands tightly clenched together—leaving a large enough cavity within for

The Open Palm Roll

Some gamers despised 'palm rollers' so use this technique only if you're comfortable with who you are and who you're gaming with. Although it looks simple the truth is it takes practice to perfect.

1. The die is placed in the up turned palm and shaken back and forth. A skilled palm roller will make it look like the die is teetering on the edges of the palm and about to roll off — only to recover.
2. At the moment of release the fingers are aligned to form a trough for the die to make it's exit and gently roll forth in the DMZ.
2. Just as the die is about to roll off the ginter tips the fingers are flipped upward giving the die a bit of bounce and some forward momentum.



The Confidence Roll

Some gamers find that having an attitude when rolling the dice works best for them. The Confidence Roll is just that – stepping up to the plate and letting the dice fly without any begging or tip of the hat to Lady Luck.

1. After shaking the die vigorously in a clenched fist, the palm is opened and tipped as it is thrust toward the designated dice rolling zone.
2. Just as the die is about to leave the hand the palm is inverted with a quick twist of the wrist for added thrust.
3. The die is projected toward the table at a sharp angle to give it a 'bounce.'



the dice to be able to audibly rattle. At the moment of release, the arms are brought down toward the DRZ and the hands/palms veer to the right and left as the dice are propelled forward.

Works best when a grunt, “Hoo Aaah!” or a “C’mon!!” accompanies the release.

The Two Fisted Monkey Roll

The Two-Fisted Monkey roll is one of the most impressive techniques and it gets attention. Especially when used to roll hands full of penetration dice.

1. Dice are cupped between the palms as they clasp creating enough of a pocket/cavity the dice to be able to shake and move.
2. Dice are then shaken vigorously in a jerking motion almost as if the roller were angry.
3. Upon release the palms and fingers are extended and thrust forward sending the die/dice shooting for into the DRZ.’



Good Rolls vs. Bad

Among gamers, there is some dispute as to what constitutes an official roll. Most groups have house rules that all players have agreed to comply with. Some groups consider a roll to be void if it leaves the table or playing surface. Other groups consider all rolls valid, including those that land on the floor, in the pizza, in a cup of soda, etc. I’ve even heard of a group of players that have a special ‘cat clause’ to their house die-rolling rules. If the family cat intercepts the dice during a roll, the cat is allowed to play with the dice until he’s bored and breaks off his attack. The results of the abandoned dice are considered official!

As for a die that lands in such a way that it is leaning [cocked] with only part of its surface on the table, the general rule is this: if you can insert two pennies underneath the cocked edge of the die, the roll is invalid and the die must be re-rolled.

Whatever the house rules, the GM has the final say on whether a die roll is acceptable or not. The important thing is that every die roll include the prep, the shake and the release yielding a clear result.

Dice Rolling Don’ts

We’ve looked at proper dice rolling. Now let’s take a look at some things that are just not permissible.

The Two Finger Drop: This technique apparently started in Europe where folks are a bit freer with the way they roll their dice. It doesn’t fly at my table and it certainly isn’t permissible in HackMaster. This method involves the roller holding the die above the table approximately 12 to 24 inches and simply letting the die drop and reading the result. This is a no-go. Dice must be given a good shake before being released.

The Toss and Cover: This method involves rolling the dice in the normal manner but then quickly placing your hand over the die to hide the result with the roller peeking at the result before revealing it to the GM and other players. What nonsense! Not permissible. Of course some players take the opportunity to tip the die to another result (if they don’t like the one they see) when pulling away their hand for the reveal. Such sleight of hand trickery has no place at the table.

The Shake and Slide: This annoying method is seldom seen but it does pop up now and then. It is the calling card of a nube or rank amateur. This method looks legit throughout its execution but at the moment of release the player lets the die fall ‘just so’ as to deny it a proper tumble. Instead the die slides across the table never changing its face and making the ‘roll’ look suspect. Every die deserves a proper tumble.

The Spin: This method involves grabbing the die between forefinger and thumb, barely raising it from the table and snapping the fingers to give the die a twist. Such a spin generally allows the die to stay one-side up or even one-face up, perhaps even not changing faces. Obviously, this technique is right out.

The Computer-Generated Roll: Completely against the spirit of HackMaster, anyone that insists on using a computer to roll dice is obviously an inexperienced rube. Such rolls are not allowed in HackMaster (even if the user is actually kind enough to show everyone the roll) and especially not the kind accompanied by an annoying, fake dice-rolling sound. You know the one. Don’t allow laptop or MID or phone rolling of any kind. Insist on real dice, anything else is OFFICIALLY against the rules.

A Final Word

Let me say this, as a personal note, on the importance of dice to HackMaster. Most gamers agree there’s nothing more beautiful than a handful of multi-colored, jewel-like dice glistening in the warm light atop the gaming table. There is no better sound than that of the hard plastic patter of dice hitting a gaming table. There is no greater thrill than having a character standing toe to toe with death and seeing that impossible number pop up on the dice to save him.

Treasure those little gems, my friends. Treat ‘em right, and you won’t be sorry.