

Hespera 2e

An occult sci-fi RPG by Julia Pitts, with art by JEShields

100 years after all contact with the rest of humanity was cut off, and 70 years after the brutal civil war sparked by the ensuing power vacuum, the few million people who live on the planet Hespera are looking towards the future. As tensions rise between Hespera City in the southern plains and the territories ruled by the city Hephaestus in the north, and the ancient stone gods that predate humanity's arrival on this planet by tens of thousands of years become more active, everyone must decide for themselves whether to rebuild this world... or burn it.

Characters

Characters in Hespera are represented by two sets of stats: attributes, of which there is a fixed list, and specialties, which are freeform descriptions of the character's history and life. Correctly managing your attributes and specialties in the face of danger is a crucial part of surviving in the dangerous future.

Attributes

Each character in Hespera has access to the same four attributes: Physique, Intellect,

Charm, and Ritual. Attributes determine not only your character's baseline effectiveness, but also how much damage they can take before being incapacitated.

Characters with at least one point in the Ritual attribute are referred to as witches, and carry the brand of the theolith they are sworn to. Witches must take a specialty referencing both that they are a witch and which theolith they're branded to. Put a little star next to that specialty. It's that character's *witchery specialty*.

The Ritual attribute is not directly rolled, but instead modifies the witchery specialty.

Specialties

Specialties, meanwhile, have no fixed list, and function as general purpose descriptors. *Grizzled train guard one day from requirement* and *Football expert* are both perfectly valid specialties. Specialties grant bonus dice and help insulate your character from the full effects of failed rolls, so making sure that they're relevant is an important part of character building.

Playing the game

As an RPG, Hespera follows the same cycle of "the GM and the players collaboratively tell a story until it's unclear whether a player

character could succeed at something, and then they roll dice."

Each roll begins with the GM choosing a difficulty number (DN) representing the number of successful dice necessary to pass the roll, as well as an attribute (other than Ritual) it will be based off, depending on how the player narrates their character approaching the problem.

To make the roll, the player grabs a number of d10s equal to the given attribute score (minus damage), as well a number of dice equal to a single relevant specialty, if any. Specialties add d10s, unless they have taken stress.

Once the pool is set up with attribute and specialty dice, the player rolls all of them at once. Any individual dice that land on a five or higher count as a success, and if the number of successes equals or exceeds the difficulty of the roll then the roll is successful, otherwise it fails.

Any dice that land on their highest possible value grant a bonus die of the same size, which is rolled immediately. If that die rolls its maximum it generates another, and so on.

A roll of average difficulty requires three successes, with difficulties usually ranging from 2 to 6.

To the limit

Before a roll, a player may declare that they're pushing their character to the limit, which lets them roll an additional number of d10s equal to their lowest non-Ritual attribute, before damage penalties.



If the roll still fails, the character immediately suffers one point of damage, in addition to the usual effects of failure.

Witchery

Witchery specialties *must* be pushed to the limit when being used to invoke a supernatural effect. This also grants the player a number of bonus d10s equal to their Ritual attribute, in addition to the usual bonus dice that are granting from pushing to the limit. On a failure, the player may choose Ritual as the attribute to take damage from pushing to the limit.

Failed rolls

If a roll is failed, the GM chooses whether the character takes damage or gets a twist. A twist can be any interesting failure that moves the story forward, but damage is a little more complex.

If they take damage and were using a specialty on the roll, the player may choose to have the specialty takes one point of stress instead. Each point of stress lowers the die size of the specialty by one step. If a specialty drops below d6, it cannot be used until it heals by at least one step.

If the damage is not soaked by a specialty, the attribute they were rolling takes damage directly, which lowers it by one. If a non-Ritual attribute hits zero, the character is out of action until healed back to at least one.

Once per session, and again at the very end, a character may take downtime. This lets them heal every specialty and one attribute by one point.



At the GM's discretion, medical aid, inspiring conversations, or the passage of time can also heal attributes and specialties during a session, on top of the downtime limit.

Creating a character

New characters start with Physique, Intellect, and Charm at 2, Ritual at 0, two specialties at 1, and have four raises. A raise can be converted into one attribute point or two specialty points. Spending an attribute point increases an attribute by 1, to a maximum of 4. One specialty point can add a new specialty at rank 1, or increase an existing one by 1 rank, to a maximum of 2. Unused raises are lost.

Character advancement

Each attribute and specialty tracks XP separately.

Attributes only gain XP at the end of a session, and increase by one when they reach an XP value equal to their rank. After an attribute increases in value, its XP resets to 0.

Specialties gain 1 XP every time they're used in a roll that fails. A specialty increases by one when its XP reaches its current value plus 3, and its XP resets to 0. Any extra XP is lost.

At the end of each session, each character may either give one attribute a single point of XP, open a new specialty at rank 1, or may spend two XP among their existing specialties.

Sample characters

Helena the Traveling Witch (she/her)

Attributes

Physique 3, Intellect 3, Charm 2, Ritual 1

Specialties

Wandering witch of The Wind 2, Has friends everywhere 1, Dedicated syndicalist 1

Richard de Icaza (he/him)

Attributes

Physique 3, Intellect 3, Charm 4

Specialties

Grizzled private eye 1, Never met a drink he didn't like 1