

SPECTER - Basics of Play

The rules for [Specter](#) are designed to be easy to understand, modular in nature, and complex in implication. This page describes the basic ideas of the game, and how things work in general. It is broke down into the following parts: [Numbers and Such](#), [Dice and Rolling](#), [Verbs and Context](#), [Character Definition](#), [System in Action](#). You can start with the last part and work backward if you'd like, links are provided to make that easier.



Numbers and Such

To maintain simplicity, this game uses the simple range of 1 to 10 for numbers. Like most situations using numbers, context is king. Specter uses numbers in a few different ways: **Effort**, **Blocks**, and **Thresholds**. Effort is primary here, and both Blocks and Thresholds work with Effort to determine what it means in play.

While I'm going to dig into the three values individually, if you've played games before and are ok with math, here is the system in a nutshell:

- $(\text{Effort} - \text{Blocks}) * > \text{Threshold} = \text{Success}$
- * if this is negative, throw a [Foul](#).

>> Effort

When your character is tries to determine the weakness of an attacking [Psi-snake](#) you will generate a number called effort. Effort tells us how effective they were at the task. The higher the number, the greater the effort and the more likely success. Looking at it this way, some assumptions can be made based on the number you end up with. An effort of 1 is weak sauce, you probably won't accomplish shit. Effort of 4 is ok, you did something, it might succeed. You managed a 7? **Now** we are talking. Things are looking good! A 10? **Goddamn right**. Pretty sure it is in the bag. **With few exceptions: effort results from [dice rolls](#).**

Note

It is important to note that Effort generates chance of success, not success. A result of 3 effort means your character was able to put forth some effort, but not much. A result of 9 or 10 is damn good and very likely to succeed. The easiest way to look at effort is likelihood of success and you want as much as possible. 10 is the gold standard, and while not 100% likely, is very close to that in practice.

The game makes it possible to actually reach effort of 11+ and that is by design. 11+ effort is considered transcendent. These are truly amazing shows of effort that defy human comprehension. For most of the game rules though, you count an 11+ as a 10 as that is the top of the scale. You'll have to trigger [Transcendence](#) rules to get more out of such effort.

>> Blocks

Blocks are the antithesis of Effort. While more Effort makes it more likely an action will succeed, more Block does the opposite. Here is how you apply a Block:

Is the Block rating higher than the Effort?

- **No:** Subtract the Block from the Effort, and what remains is the effective Effort.
- **Yes:** Throws a [Foul](#): *You can still keep the Effort, but the GM will add complications or you can choose to fail.*

>> Thresholds

A Threshold is the amount of **Effort you need to exceed** to earn success for an action. Since (with few exceptions) effort is always involved with actions, a Threshold or more than one Threshold is given. There are action specific Thresholds, and one implicit Threshold we just call Getting By.

Getting By has a value of 3. If you can't muster even 4 effort, you've done bad. You haven't even gotten by, as the name implies. Efforts of 3 or less just aren't going to get it done, and always fail. If the situation is [Risky](#), then a roll will be made to see if things go pear shaped.

Actions may have additional Thresholds. Usually one is given in addition, the Difficulty. This is how hard the action is to achieve. Here is a rough idea of the numbers and what they mean:

- **Difficulty 5:** This is difficult, and mostly impossible for someone who is unskilled, untrained, or otherwise incapable. Even if Trained and capable, the human will still often fail. Rough capable chance of success: 37%.
- **Difficulty 7:** A real challenge and something would not attempt lightly. No chance of success for the incapable, roughly 12% chance of success for the capable. Those with superior capability get about 30% odds.
- **Difficulty 9:** Nearly impossible task. No chance of success for the incapable and capable alike, but those of superior capability have 10%.

Note

As you can see from the Difficulty text, these are tough. Many (if not most) of the rolls you make will be just about Getting By, and that is often hard enough. If something is [difficult](#) the GM will let you know before you roll, though not the exact value.

The Arrow: Dice and Numbers



The graphic above is known as The Arrow, and is the core of Specter's dice and rolling rules. The center is an arrow, heading from left to right, punctuated by numbers. Those numbers are the Threshold values, as listed above. The green outlined dice on top are Plus dice, these generate Effort. The bottom red outlined dice (and initial number) as Minus dice, and they generate Block.

So in this way the Arrow works in steps, you start from the left, and have five steps:

1. 3, d6 /2
2. 5, d8 /d6
3. 7, d10 /d8
4. 9, d12 /d10
5. C, d12+1 /

Note that the last step is special. It has no minus die listed, as you can't have a minus die higher than d10 for any roll. Also the number needed to reach it is C, and denotes paying a [Clutch](#). You have effort above 9 and pay a Clutch to reach this level of result.

Actions and Rolling

>> The Dice

When you roll dice in Specter, you'll be rolling a single die (*a plus die: d6, d8, d10, or d12*). In general this die will result in [Effort](#). usually you roll a die for your character's actions. When your character does something dramatic the GM will tell you one of three things about what your attempting:

1. **Futile** → No way. You get no dice. You fail. ← [Clutch](#) can Override
2. **Risky** → **Roll** and you'll need more than to just Get By. If you don't Get By, things will likely go badly. Risky actions always have a block.
3. **Solid** → Ok, **roll**. Let's do this. You'll have to see if you at least Get By on the roll. Solid actions might have a block.

As you can see these are progressively easier (or more likely to result in a success). The GM determines the situation above using the rules and their discretion. After the GM tells you the situation above, you can always back out of the situation. You have the right as player to [decline](#).

The GM has rules to determine the response to any dramatic action, see [Means and Risk](#).

When you roll, you roll a die and take the result as Effort. **If no rule tells you otherwise, you will**

roll a six-sided die (d6). Specter uses four dice in the game: d6, d8, d10, and d12. It is also possible to have a bonus to the roll itself. If so, that will be listed as +1, +2, etc. You just add that to the result of the die after it is rolled. **Gold** provides such a bonus to a roll.

Note

The die rolling is simple. You roll a die, you get that result. It is the interaction with the result and the rules of the game that can get a bit complicated. In general though, you are just rolling to meet or exceed 4 (getting by) or a Threshold higher for risky actions. In the next section, you'll see how I build on this simple system to give it some depth and complexity.

>> Boost

There are two currencies at play when you roll dice for your character, the first of which is **Boost**. You can spend these currencies to override the normal rules in specific ways. They are currencies, meaning you can have more than one of each for a roll. There are unicode symbols that represent them.

- **Boost:** ↑ (*Unicode Up Arrow*)

Boost↑ is the easy to understand. It is very simple: **Each boost increases anything in the Arrow one step.** This means one boost turns a d6 to a d8, level II to level III, etc. For rolls made for your character, each boost can also be used to reduce a block one step on the arrow (reducing the size of the minus dice). This reduces, but increases the change of success for your character, since blocks work against them. If a Block is reduced below 2 this way, it is simply removed as a Block at all.

Note

As you might be able to tell, Boost just makes your character more capable at something. If you have a way to get Boost for your action, you are more likely to succeed. The more Boosts the better. If you are using boosts to increase your die size for a **Solid** action, your chance moves up as so: 50% → 65% → 70% → 75% → 83%.

>> Clutch

The second of the two currencies in play for rolls is Clutch. This is a powerful force, and a little more tricky than a Boost. It also has a unicode symbol:

- **Clutch:** ↻ (*Unicode Clockwise Arrow*)

You can spend a Clutch in the following ways:

- Re-roll → **Exploit** an advantage: Introduce some kind of advantage for your character's action. Roll a die of one step larger than you just rolled (capped at d12) and keep the new result if it is higher. If the result is lower, disregard the roll and the GM will add a **Snag**.
- Re-roll → **Advance** the action. Describe in more detail or length your character's action. Roll a die of the same size you just rolled, keep the number you rolled in mind. If the new die is equal or under the last roll, add it to the total **Effort**. If it is higher, you can take a **Snag** to keep double

the previous roll or describe how your advance failed and keep the original roll.

- **Exceed** all expectations. Describe how your character attempts the impossible and turn a **Futile** situation into a Risky one.

Common sense advice: Exploit when you roll low, Advance when you roll high.

Note

These uses are very roughly described here, but you'll get a much better idea from the **Clutch Examples** in the **System in Action** section later. Basically keep in mind Clutch is very powerful. If you have Clutch for an action you are much much better off. More than one Clutch? You are kicking ass and taking names.

>> Gold

When you have Gold, you get a bonus to your die roll. 3 Gold, marked as g3, would add 3 to the roll of the plus dice. Gold is not cumulative, but additional Gold (after the first highest Gold) compounds like so:

- 1-3 additional: +1
- 4-5 additional: +2
- 6 or more additional: +3

Using the compound rules, if you earned g3, g2, and g2 for a roll: You have +3, 4 additional = +2 for +5 total.

The one rule of Gold: It may only ever double a die result. So if you roll a 2, you can only get a 4, even with +5.

>> Means

Means does not interact with dice like Boost, Clutch, or Gold, but instead acts on the initial type of roll. Here is how it works:

- You Lack Means: If you have no means for a roll, it is Futile.
- You have Means: The action is Risky or Solid, depending on the situation as the GM decides.
- You rock multiple Means: The action is Solid.

Verbs and Context

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>> Verbs

1. COAX: Convince, persuade, or otherwise influence.

2. DETECT: Sense, reveal, uncover, or investigate.
3. *FIGHT: Attack, defend, or intimidate.
4. *MOVE: Run, fly, dance or feats of dexterity.
5. *PROWL: Creep, Sneak, or Hide.
6. *SHOOT: Snipe, throw, or blast.
7. >RUN: Operate.
8. >LINK: Hack.
9. >DEBUG: Restore or shield.
10. >FORM: Create.

- * Usually considered physical verbs.
- > Usually considered Spark verbs.

>> Context (Method)

1. Humanoid (Spark)
2. Machine (Ant)
3. Alien (Crystal)
4. Ancient (Spirit)
5. Other (Unknown)

Character Definition

Creating one of the humankind in Specter is an easy process:

1. Choose(or [roll](#)) a [Heritage](#): Your human culture: [Hyperion](#), [Asterian](#), or [Hestian](#). *This is your human's culture and foundation.*
2. Choose(or [roll](#)) an [Age](#): Single, Double, or Triple digits. *The more digits, the older and more capable they will be (but less robust).*
3. Choose(or [roll](#)) one of the five [Contracts](#): A contract gives you abilities from your Spark. *Each culture has five contracts, each defining how they view their Spark and what they can do with it.*
4. Use the [Reactor](#) to generate 20 points of [Qualities](#). *The GM may allow you to override the reactor to choose one ore more qualities.*
5. Use the [Detailer](#) to create all the final touches of the human, see [Detail](#). *This final step will fill in little details and kickstart a scene to awake your human.*

>> Heritage

Your human's heritage is their culture:

- **Hyperion**: You are a scientist. Ultimately you want to learn everything and explore all of space and time. Hyperion do not reproduce, and your Spark will drop a seed for a new Hyperion upon their demise. You don't have family, but know and value friendship.
- **Asterian**: You are an architect. You build infrastructure, cities, and communities. Ultimately you want to make the stars glitter with communities across all space and time. Asterian reproduce by creating shadow copies of themselves, each a variant on their design. These shadow copies

expire unless Specter realizes them within a century. You have a large communal family, with many members.

- **Hestian:** You are an inventor . You shape machines into whatever you desire. Ultimately you want to see the stars enveloped in a coating of machines thriving, independent of humankind. Hestian reproduce by creating vestian fire, living machine with spark much like Specter itself. Each time they do so, they burn out one drain dot permanently. You have a small family of three to five members, all now memories living within Specter.

>> Age

Your human is:

- **Single** digits: Decades old, has 10 Drain/Harm dots, and one additional means in a verb (talent).
- **Double** digits: Centuries old, has 8/9 Drain Harm dots (your choice), and two additional means in verbs (talents).
- **Triple** digits: Millenniums old, has 7/7 Drain/Harm dots, two additional means in verbs (talents), and a secondary Contract from any culture.

>> Contract

The contract of a human is the bond they make with their Spark, the lite energy source tied to their very essence. The contract will give you an ability that you can use at any time, and a power you can use when fully charged from a Stardive. There are five contracts open to a human, based on their culture:

>> Hyperion Contracts

1. ? : (C) **Empyrean Turbine:** Take 1 Drain and earn d10 for any [Verb](#) for [Successive Actions](#). Power [Earn d12 for any [> Verb](#) until you take Harm or [Rest](#)]
2. ? : (U) **Celestial Core:** Put two points on this [Core](#) to remove 1 Drain at any time. On overflow, suffer 5 Harm. Power [You may take 5 Harm & Drain to earn a random [Upgrade](#)]
3. ? : (R) **Star Wings:** Take 1 Drain and earn [Clutch](#) for [MOVE](#) actions until you take Harm or [Rest](#). Power [Jump to any nearby station]
4. ? : (R) **Thought Cell:** Put three points on this [Cell](#) to earn [Clutch](#) for any [> Verb](#) for [Successive Actions](#). On Overflow, suffer 3 Drain. Power [Choose up to three Cores or Cells to empty.]
5. ? : (R) **Divine Archive:** Take 1 Drain and earn Means for any endeavor and its [Successive Actions](#). Power [Until you [Rest](#) earn Boost for any [> Verbs](#).]

>> Asterian Contracts

1. ? : (C)
2. ? : (U)
3. ? : (R)
4. ? : (R)
5. ? : (R)

>> Hestian Contracts

1. ?: (C)
2. ?: (U)
3. ?: (R)
4. ?: (R)
5. ?: (R)

System in Action

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