

# Ceres

Hail and well met! This RPG system is meant to be an easy way to both introduce new people to roleplaying games and offer a deadly challenge to RPG veterans — it's up to the GM to decide the appropriate challenge for their group.

More likely than not, you'll be playing this in settings you've written yourself or borrowed from other sources. If you need a bit of inspiration, I'll provide a few notes at the end of this document about my own setting (still in development) which I've named Ceres — hence the name of the game.

I hope this game provides some fun at your table, or at least some ideas to inspire your own games.

Cheers,  
Jonathan

## Playing The Game

- The GM describes a situation.
- Describe what you want to do.
- The GM determines whether the action requires a roll.
- If it doesn't, narrate your action to the table and the GM describes what happens next.
- If it does, the GM will give you a target number, usually from 2-6.
- Roll a number of d6s equal to your level in addition to any bonus d6s granted by your character's upgrades. (Minimum 1d6)
- If any of your dice meet or exceed the target number, narrate your action to the table.
- If they don't, the GM will describe the consequences.
- If a player is reduced to 0 hit points, they die.

Ceres does not include rules about the finer details of adventuring. Common questions such as how far a character can jump or how far they can travel in a day, or how long their rations last, or at what point enemies might flee, are left to the GM and the table to work out. When in doubt, the GM calls for a roll.

This game also does not include any currency or item costs. We can assume that capable adventurers make enough coin to pay for basic food, lodging, equipment and the occasional bribe. If the players want to try something that would require a substantial sum, such as buying a pub or a rare magical artifact, the GM may want to make acquiring that sort of cash its own quest.

## Combat

If the party comes to blows with an opponent, the players roll initiative against the target numbers among the enemy party. In order, each combatant takes one action. Creatures in the same initiative placing as their teammates can act in any order they choose. You can move a short distance as part of your turn.

When a creature attacks, it rolls a number of d6s as per its level and upgrades. If it meets or exceeds the target number, it hits and deals an amount of damage equal to the number on its highest attack die.

## **Regaining hit points**

Players regain up to 3 x their level worth of hit points after each battle, as long as they have a few minutes to catch their breath and patch up their wounds.

## **Making Camp**

When players make camp for a few hours, they regain all their hit points and recharge any daily use abilities. It is up to the table to decide how often it is reasonable to make camp. It's probably abusing the system to make camp to heal every nick and scratch. However, it's also possible that players endure a series of difficult obstacles that require frequent rests.

## **Target Numbers**

The GM can set target numbers based on the level of a creature or the environment. A creature is a broad term that includes everything from the local innkeeper to a bear to a lich.

In general, a creature's level is the target number for any interaction a player has with them: whether that's hitting them with an attack, persuading them to reveal sensitive information, or pushing them off a bridge. Some creatures may have upgrades that modify their target number for certain tasks.

The GM also sets the target number of each environment the players encounter, and that number applies to all actions the players attempt there. If a cave is a level 2 environment, that's the target number for identifying the properties of the moss on the walls, or finding your way to the treasure hidden inside. Like with creatures, some environments may have traits that modify the target number for certain tasks.

Players should rarely, if ever, encounter a level 1 enemy or environment, since their rolls would be automatic successes. A proper adventure requires venturing into more dangerous situations!

## ***Example Target Numbers***

- 1 - Easy. Tying a simple knot. Setting a mouse trap.
- 2 - Routine. Walking across a rickety bridge. Wolf.
- 3 - Standard. Picking a lock. Goblin shaman.
- 4 - Difficult. Sneaking past the castle guard. Skeleton knight.
- 5 - Intimidating. Spike trap. Evil wizard.
- 6 - Deadly. Acid pit. Dragon.

## **Character Creation**

Creating a player character takes two easy steps:

- Choose a motivation
- Choose three upgrades

At level 1, a character starts with one d6 hit die. Treat it as its maximum value (6) for your starting hit points. You have a Defense rating of 1. You'll roll 1d6 for most actions.

If you want to play a non-human race such as an elf, halfling or dwarf, feel free! The choice only matters for your character's backstory and perhaps motivation. Mechanically, it makes no difference.

## **Motivations**

Your character's motivation describes why they began adventuring and what they want to accomplish. It should be heroic, or at least ambitious — no edgelords allowed!

In addition to providing a guide to how to roleplay your character, motivations provide a mechanical benefit: Once per day when you take an action that expresses your motivation, you can choose to roll double the amount of d6s as you normally would.

Examples include: preserving nature, smiting the wicked, protecting the helpless, finding lost treasure, evangelizing your god, restoring order, entertaining the masses.

## Character Advancement

When the party has done something to help their community — usually along the lines of saving someone from certain death or worse, or making a major discovery — the GM awards a level up. When you level up, you gain the following benefits:

- Choose another ability.
- Gain a 1d6 hit die. Unlike your first hit die, all hit dice gained from leveling up or character upgrades use their combined average value, rounded up.
- Add 1d6 to all actions you attempt.
- Gain 1 Defense.

## Character Upgrades

Some equipment, combat, exploration and social upgrades provide passive bonuses to characters' rolls. Others are powers you can use once per battle or once per exploration or social challenge.

Equipment upgrades replace the original version; chainmail, for example, costs two upgrades.

Spells cause automatic effects that don't require a roll. You can cast them once per day. Each spell costs one ability. You can spend multiple upgrades to be able to cast a spell that many times. (Some people just want to watch the world burn!)

This list is meant to provide meaningful options without stretching till the end of time. If you think of an ability or item you would like to add to the list, feel free to pitch it to your group.

## *Equipment*

Longsword (or battle axe, longbow, etc.): Roll +1d6 when you attack with this weapon.

Fine longsword: Roll +2d6 when you attack with this weapon.

Masterwork longsword: +Roll 3d6 when you attack with this weapon.

Leather armor: Gain 1d6 hit dice.

Chainmail: Gain 2d6 hit dice.

Full plate: Gain 3d6 hit dice.

Buckler: Increase your defense by 1.

Round shield: Increase your defense by 2.

Tower shield: Increase your defense by 3.

## ***Combat***

**Backstab:** When you attack a creature who has already been attacked by an ally, roll +2d6.

**Intercept:** When a creature makes a melee attack against one of your allies, you can move to take the attack instead. Damage you take this way is halved.

**Knock down:** If you hit a creature with this attack, deal damage as normal and they are knocked to the ground until the beginning of their next turn. Until then, all melee attacks against them roll +1d6.

**Poisoned blade:** The first creature you hit in this battle takes damage equal to 2 x your level at the end of each of its turns.

**Rage:** For the rest of the battle, roll double the d6s on your attacks.

**Situational awareness:** +2d6 on initiative rolls.

**Tactical strike:** Roll +1d6 on this weapon attack. If you hit, one of the enemy's unused upgrades is disabled for 1 minute. The GM chooses which ability based on your description of the attack.

## ***Exploration***

**Navigator:** +2d6 to actions to choose the correct path.

**Spy:** +2d6 to actions to find hidden entrances.

**Stealth:** +2d6 to actions to move a short distance undetected

**Survival:** +2d6 to actions to find food and water and find a safe place to rest.

**Trap expert:** +2d6 to actions to set, detect or disarm traps.

## ***Social***

**Charming:** +2d6 to persuasion actions.

**Deceitful:** +2d6 to deception actions.

**Intimidating:** +2d6 to intimidation actions.

**Insightful:** +2d6 to actions to discern truth.

**Performance:** +2d6 to actions to entertain.

## **Spells**

**Blink:** Teleport to a nearby spot you can see.

**Drain:** Deal damage equal to 2 x your level to a creature, then heal that many hit points.

**Fireball:** Deal damage equal to 3 x your level (rounded up) to all nearby enemies.

**Force cage:** A creature is trapped in a cage of energy for a number of minutes equal to your level.

**Heal:** Restore all of a creature's hit points.

**Invisibility:** For one minute or until immediately after you attack with a weapon or spell, you are invisible.

**Magic Missile:** Deal damage equal to 6 x your level to one creature.

**Mirage:** Create an illusory image that lasts for one minute. Creatures your level and lower will treat it as real until they have an obvious reason to disbelieve it.

**Necrotic cloak:** For one minute, when you are struck with a melee weapon deal your level in damage to the attacker.

**Purify:** A creature is cured of all poisons and diseases.

**Sleep:** A creature of your level or lower falls asleep for a number of hours equal to your level. They wake up if they take damage.

## **Creating Creatures**

This rules booklet does not include a full bestiary — but the rules to make your own creatures, from friendly merchants to evil vampires, are simple.

- Give the creature a level, type and motivation.
- Give the creature a number of character upgrades equal to their level. Since the character upgrades are written from the player's perspective, you may need to reverse the bonus for a creature. (See the Bandit example below.) You may also want to rename the upgrades to better describe the creature; a longsword on a dragon could be razor-sharp claws.

A creature's statistics are based on its level: hit points (the average of its number of hit dice, usually its level in d6s) the target number to hit it with an attack

(Defense) or affect it with some other action, and the number of dice it rolls for attacks and other actions.

Unlike the player characters' motivations, creatures' motivations can be more varied. A merchant might want to get rich; a king might want to retain power; a vampire might want to turn innocents; a troll might want to destroy civilization.

Here are two examples:

<p><b><i>Bandit (2)</i></b></p> <p>Attack: 2d6 Defense: 2 Hit points: 2d6 (7)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> Human. <b>Motivation:</b> Get rich or die trying. <b>Longsword:</b> Roll +1d6 when you attack with this weapon. <b>Intimidating:</b> -1d6 to player rolls to intimidate the bandit</p>	<p><b><i>Goblin Shaman (3)</i></b></p> <p>Attack: 3d6 Defense: 3 Hit points: 3d6 (11)</p> <p><b>Type:</b> Goblin. (Traps) <b>Motivation:</b> Summon the old gods <b>Drain:</b> Deal damage equal to your level x 2 to an enemy, then heal that many hit points. <b>Mirage:</b> Create an illusory image that lasts for one minute. Creatures your level and lower will treat it as real until they have an obvious reason to disbelieve it. <b>Necrotic cloak:</b> For one minute, when you are struck with a melee weapon deal your level in damage to the attacker.</p>
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## Example Creature Types

A non-human creature's type provides an additional ability or attribute.

**Abberation:** Each environment this creature is in gains Maze as a temporary free trait.

**Beast:** +1 to the target number to find or track this creature.

**Dragon:** This creature can fly, though it's not nimble.

**Elemental:** This creature can appear or disappear via its element. (Such as a campfire or a fire elemental, or a river for a water elemental.)

**Fiend:** Gains Fireball as an extra upgrade.

**Goblin:** The first time a goblin is attacked, it can trigger a trap on the attacker. After the attack is resolved, the attacker takes damage equal to half the goblin's level, rounded up.

**Plant:** Regains its level in hit points at the start of each of its turns.

**Undead:** The first time this creature is reduced to 0 hit points, roll 1d6. If you roll equal to or below its level, the creature gains hit points equal to its level.

## Environments

Creating an environment works like making an Creature:

- Step 1 - Give the environment a level.
- Step 2 - Give the environment a number of traits equal to its level. These traits don't have to be negative. A mix of danger and opportunity creates an interesting place for adventure!

## Example environment traits

**Arcane secrets:** Strange and powerful magic is present here.

**Fortress:** Characters roll -2d6 to enter.

**Headquarters:** A deadly enemy lurks here.

**Inhospitable:** Characters regain one fewer hit point after a battle or when making camp.

**Maze:** Charterers roll -2d6 to find their way.

**Patrols:** At any point, the characters could be discovered.

**Riches:** This location contains a treasure.

# **The World of Ceres**

The world of Ceres probably consists of one major continent, a massive sea and a few prominent islands. Your version of Ceres might be different. It's a land with one major city state, Ember City, and a dozen or so locations that only the bravest or most desperate adventurers would visit. Here they are, along with a brief description.

## **Ember City**

Ember City is the largest settlement on Ceres and is the closest thing Ceres has to a dominant political power - though no other community formally recognizes its authority.

The city state earned its name from a terrifying arcane fire that swept through it decades ago. Some say it was caused by a great, evil dragon; others say it was the fault of a wizard whose experiment went terribly wrong.

In any case, some blackened patches of the ground continue to smolder to this day, producing a grey, smokey and inescapable haze that afflicts rich and poor alike.

## **The Ghost of Medina**

The Ghost of Medina is a massive galleon sailed by a crew of spirits. No one knows how long it has been sailing the seas and no one knows its purpose. More often than not, it's a harbinger of destruction - the last thing many a pirate has seen before a storm destroys their galleon. However, its pale blue lantern has also led innocent merchants and explorers to safe harbour.

## **The Crystal Skull**

The Crystal Skull is a gargantuan, 500-foot tall skull made of one impossibly large diamond. It lies on a tilt, with the lower right jaw buried in the ground. Scholars believe it must belong to a titan who lived during a far-gone age - though research is difficult, since anyone who ventures too deep into the skull is beset by horrific psychic pain.

## **Andromeda**

For centuries, the asteroid named Andromeda was the brightest light in the night sky. Just a few weeks ago, it plummeted and crashed into the ground. Scholars, merchants and local nobles, along with some curious adventurers, have flocked to the impact site to learn more about the universe and harvest strange, alien metals.

## **Emerald Falls**

If you've every heard a tall tale about a faun, fairy or talking animal, it probably happened near Emerald Falls. The falls are imbued with a light green-gold hue and are located within a bright, airy meadow, where the weather never gets worse than a warn sunshower. People who are down on their luck, feeling unloved or seeking good fortune will often travel to the falls and make a wish. Sometimes they get what they ask for - and sometimes far more, for good or ill.

## **Dry Bone Valley**

A vast canyon connected by a centuries-old wooden bridge. Fossils of long-dead monsters half-buried in the sand. A few scattered oases that provide the only water for miles. A choice between working in the blistering daytime temperatures or braving fearsome nocturnal wildlife. And somewhere, roaming in the wilderness, an ancient monster that has survived for eons. This is life in Dry Bone Valley.

## **Orion's Grove**

Orion's Grove is a dense, dark forest ruled by the elusive Orion, King of Thorns. No one besides his most trusted rangers ever see him in person. Navigating the forest is tricky - every vine seems to have more thorns than it should and every animal seems a little bigger and meaner. But those people who do manage to navigate those dangers and establish communities within the forest are rewarded with the safest haven in Ceres.

## **The Memory Palace**

The wizard Adrimir welcomes you to his humble home, where the staircases might just lead to nowhere and the faces on his ancestors' portraits seem to follow you. Adrimir is a master illusionist and delights in entertaining and confounding his guests. It's not clear just how large his palace even is - the rooms will often shrink, expand or even disappear at any given time and without apparent cause. Adrimir also manages to never quite give a direct answer when asked how or when he built the palace.

## **Tower of Telos**

Lightning crackles and wind howls around the Tower of Telos, a gleaming obsidian spire which rises up into the clouds. An arcane relic from a lost age, the tower is now under the control of a secretive order of sorcerers who seek to harness its power to further evolve humanity. Their efforts have been unsuccessful (as far as anyone knows) so their meddling in powers greater than they can fathom goes unopposed, for now.