

CYCLE

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Initial game version

INTRODUCTION

This is a game about ass-kicking and mad cosmic power. Each player represents a member of a highly trained secret society of martial artists and mystics known as the Brotherhood, trying to save humanity from the assemblage of mind-destroying alien horrors from beyond called the Drove. Reality pulses to the tick of a cosmic clock. Every eight hundred and forty-seven years the battle must be fought again, else reality as humanity knows it will slip away, to be replaced by something else. Now that the cycle is at an end, rumors have surfaced within the cloister that it is possible for one human, after surviving the battle, to sit at the throne and shape the cosmos for the next twenty-eight generations.

SETTING

The contemporary world, except weird shit exists behind the walls and happens, usually off-camera to the average person. The game reality is really one part *The Golden Child*, one part *Big Trouble in Little China*, one part *Dark City*, and one part each of Neil Gaiman and H.P. Lovecraft.

CHARACTERS

Each character is defined by seven chakras, spiritual energy centers located along the middle of the body. Each governs a distinct aspect of a character. From basest to highest, the seven chakras are:

Name	Color	Aspect
Root	Red	Physical
Sacral	Orange	Sexuality
Navel	Yellow	Social
Heart	Green	Love
Throat	Blue	Speech
Third Eye	Indigo	Intuition
Crown	Violet	Spirituality

All start at a rating of zero. You have a total of seven points to spend on a one-for-one basis to raise your chakras' ratings. If you really and truly want to spend all seven points to raise a chakra to the maximum of +7, feel free. You may be the bad-ass in one realm, but you'll suffer in another. Your GM will play to your weaknesses as well as your

strengths.

Speaking of weaknesses, you are allowed to steal points from other chakras to raise others. Any chakra rated negatively counts as a closed chakra; you are severely crippled in this area of life. Treat all difficulties as one ranking higher: a normally unrolled task becomes Simple, a Simple task becomes Complex, a Complex task becomes Extreme. You will always fail Extreme tasks. No character may start with a chakra rating less than -3, nor steal more than seven points from other chakras. Also, a chakra's rating can never go below -7.

Well, not really. So I lied. A single chakra rated at -8 is death.

Example: Jimmy Huan dedicates three points into Root, three into Third Eye, and one into Crown. He chooses to reduce Navel to -2 at the start of play and puts those two extra points into Crown, for a total of three. He also steals one point from Sacral and dedicated it to Heart.

Example: Tara Wu dedicates two points into Sacral, two into Third Eye, and three into Throat. She also steals one point from Navel and one from Crown, dedicating those two points into Root.

Finally, at the start of each session of play, roll two dice and take that many tokens. Each one lets you re-roll a die for any reason. Don't worry about the GM's side of things- the Drove are legion.

SYSTEM

Cycle uses only standard eight-sided dice.

The basic die mechanic is a die plus a modifier versus a target number. Higher is always better. Generally, you shouldn't have to roll if there is little or no chance of failure, or if failing has no negative repercussions: climbing a fence, walking, juggling koosh balls. If the GM really wants to roll for this kind of thing, go ahead- beat a two and you do it.

There are two standard levels of difficulty, and one uncommon level of difficulty: Simple, Complex and Extreme. The difference is a little nebulous, but instinctive: Shooting a pistol at a moving target is Simple. Leaping through a window while shooting pistols in both hands at two different targets is Complex. Extreme is doing all that while on fire and leaping out of a helicopter. Generally speaking, if you're attempting only one action, it's a Simple task. More than one action makes it Complex. Crazy shit pushes it up to Extreme.

For a Simple task, you need to roll a three or better. For a Complex task, you've got to roll a six or better. For an Extreme task, you need a critical success.

Whenever you roll, if you roll a one, roll again: you have a fifty-fifty chance of a critical failure. On the re-roll, if you roll a 5-8, you've lucked out and it's a simple failure. If, however, you roll a 1-4 on the re-roll, you've fumbled. The GM will inflict appropriate consequences. The same goes for critical success: If you roll a eight, roll again for your

fifty-fifty shot at a crit. If you roll a 1-4, don't be glum, you still succeed. If your re-roll is a 5-8, you go like gangbusters.

Modifiers from one and only one chakra's rating applies to the die roll. The player and the GM agree on the appropriate chakra to use. If the modified roll goes over eight or under one, shift the chances of a critical result appropriately.

Example: Several embarrassing scenes later, Jimmy finds himself with a Navel chakra ranked at -5. In the next scene, he finds himself in a bar needing to apologize for spilling his entire pitcher of beer over his contact's escort. Normally, this might be an unrolled task, but with a negative Navel chakra, the GM rules that Jimmy needs a Simple success here- a three or better. With his -5, he'll need to roll an 8 to succeed. Unfortunately, he rolls a 3. This is a failure. Since this brings his total to -2, Jimmy's chance of a fumble increases by two- on his re-roll, a roll of a 1-6 is now a critical failure.

Example: Tara is trying to crack the crime boss' safe in order to retrieve the scroll containing the ritual she needs. Her Third Eye chakra is rated at +4. She rolls an 7, for a modified roll of 11. Since this is 3 more than 8, Tara's chance of a critical success increases by three- on her re-roll, she will now crit on a roll of 2-8!

That's all said and done for regular everyday tasks, assuming nobody wants to stop you.

In combat, you have a number of actions equal to the average of three chakras: Root, Third Eye, and Crown. For kicks, go ahead and round up. For each combat round, roll initiative as a die plus Third Eye.

The combat round is simple, consisting of a series of attack and defense moves. Any attack- Simple, Complex, or Extreme- must be successful to land. A defending roll may be made, but it must be made at the same level of difficulty. You can't defend an Extreme attack with a Simple defensive maneuver. A failed attack means no defense is needed.

Then, if they have actions, it's the next person's turn. Throw in as much description as needed- bring in props, new characters, fruitcarts, any aspect of the environment can come into play. Note that combat doesn't have to just be the Root chakra- the Drove will attack on any front. Once everyone is out of actions, re-roll initiative and keep at it. Eventually, someone will yield, run away, fall unconscious, or die. You call it.

All members of the Brotherhood have training to open their chakras and heal themselves- this generally takes a few hours, though, and may require proper herbs or incense or peace and quiet. Also, no fair healing above the chakra rating you started with. At the end of the session, if you *directly* defeated any Drove or thwarted any Drove plots, you're doing good. For whatever chakras you defeated the Drove, pick one. You may raise that particular chakra's rating by one.

THE DROVE

The Drove are literally the stuff nightmares are made of. Basically anything that scares or

weakens humanity- it's all fair game. The Drove can influence a judge as lightly as needed to allow a criminal to run free based on a technicality, or the Drove can appear as a slathering mass of teeth and eyes and maggots in broad daylight at crowded shopping market. It all depends on the Drove focusing on a particular chakra of the world.

A creature of the Drove, an extension of the Drove, or a puppet of the Drove are mechanically represented the same way. For all their power, the Drove do not have the ability to fracture their being into multiple facets as humans do. A single-minded Drove's chakras are rated at a single number, usually 1 or 2 for a lesser Drove on up to 6 or 7 for a major Drove event.

Play sessions will generally be the players attempting to overcome the Drove and their schemes. However, the rumors within the monastery are correct- one human person will sit at the throne and shape the cosmos' next cycle. The Drove know this and will attempt to influence one of the Brotherhood as their tool for the next chapter of history. Should this plan be discovered or somehow fail, the Drove are patient, deceptive, scheming, and vicious. Play will inevitably come down to a fight pitting brother against brother, with the entire cosmos as the purse.

DESIGN INFLUENCES

Both nature and game designers abhor a vacuum. This path began under the auspicious, although unwitting, oversight of the following games:

D. Vincent Baker's *Kill Puppies For Satan*; Ron Edwards' *Sorcerer*; Robin D. Laws' *Feng Shui*; Cynthia Celeste Miller and Eddy Webb's *Cartoon Action Hour*; Chris Pasquarette, et al's *Pacific Rim Sourcebook* for Mike Pondsmith's *Cyberpunk*; Kevin Siembieda's games published by Palladium Books, notably *Rifts*; Gareth-Michael Skarka's *Hong Kong Action Theatre*!

Please send any comments to `rossum at gmail dot com`.