

Reality Cops

Karma.

Yin and Yang.

“You hurt the ones you love”

Love/Hate.

Each of these is like a little tiny window into the truth.

You're like a house with the doors blown off.

Phase Theory

On March 6th, in the year 2217, Martin Thompson applied a revolutionary combination of mind theory and chemical science, to discover that ours is not the only world. He learned that certain minds, under certain conditions, can be made to shift their perception into other realities. Other worlds. Some of these worlds are much like ours, some are very different. He called these alternate realities *phases of existence*, and proposed that when a mind transitioned between them, the phases met and touched at that single point, much like soap bubbles floating in air. And like those bubbles, they proved fragile, some more so than others. In early experiments, three volunteers were driven insane when the communal phase they occupied broke under the pressure.

On December 9th 2219, Martin Thompson died, went insane, and disappeared, in approximately that order. This was the first recorded incidence of reality subversion.

Transition Threat

From the very early phases of Thompson's investigations, it was clear that minds in transition could influence, to varying degrees, the phase they moved to. Investigation of his death and subsequent insanity showed that minds in transition *and only minds in transition* could also influence this reality. Assimilating known history with Thompson's model showed clear mathematical indications that, at various points through recorded history, reality had been warped. Sometimes it gradually returned to its "normal" shape, sometimes the change became permanent.

Work in other phases had already shown that a strongly focused mind could cause shifts in the structure of that phase. It was theorized that a sufficiently focused individual could, through the connection between the alternate phase and reality, cause shifts in the structure of reality.

Panic spread. In some places, phase researchers were hunted by mobs, blamed for every little thing. In others, they were lifted up like gods, and viewed as the only ones who could save reality. It is from the seeds of this second set that the awareness of a moral imperative to maintain our reality arose. This awareness, combined with a fluke discovery, are what led to the eventual formation of the Phase Research and Reality Maintenance Division, commonly known as Reality Cops.

The Burke Dynamic

In the chaos and panic following widespread awareness of reality subversions, many of the organizations researching phases of existence no longer had the luxury of carefully controlled experiments and volunteers were less carefully screened. In late 2223, this resulted in Davey Burke entering transition while suffering from acute appendicitis. His account of how simple it was to affect the phase was initially discounted as simply a misconception, but mathematical models and later, further controlled experimentation bore out his testimony.

A mind that entered transition while experiencing pain was better able to affect the phase it entered.

This was the breakthrough that allowed the Reality Cops to effectively carry out their mandate.

Strictly voluntary, the Division gained in credibility and effectiveness until it was an accepted and necessary part of life for more than a generation.

It had been more than twenty years since the last reality subversion.

The Second Thompson Subversion

July 12, 2262. A deranged man breaks into Division Headquarters and transitions illegally. The man dies moments later, without leaving the phase of existence he had transitioned into. Phase researchers become aware that another reality subversion has occurred. As best can be determined, the subversion had two main effects. First, and most obvious, entering transition no longer required complex equipment. Second, and more complex in its effects, was that the Burke Dynamic no longer applied solely to individuals.

Post-subversion DNA testing indicates the man was, in fact, Martin Thompson. This is not, however, viewed as conclusive evidence.

The year is 2265. You are a Reality Cop.

Chapter 1: Character Creation

You start by creating a Rookie Cop. Or more technically, a Junior Phase Researcher. But everyone calls them Rookie Cops.

What's their name?

Choose one of the following Archtypes:

School of Hard Knocks – The Rookie didn't get here on the easy road. Maybe they grew up on the street, maybe they were a rich kid that fell in with a bad crowd, that part's up to you to decide. The important part is that they've got real and personal experience with the fact that life will fuck you up.

Pain Threshold: 3

Mental Stability: 5

Connections: 3

Academy Boy – This one took the high road. Maybe they were born with a silver spoon, maybe they worked three jobs to get here, but they come with an education and the lack of real life experience that comes with it.

Pain Threshold: 1

Mental Stability: 7

Connections: 4

Buddy! – Don't let the name scare you off. This is the guy who gets where he is by knowing people. Maybe he's a brown-noser, maybe he's just one of those guys that makes friends easily, but this Rookie is all about the people he knows. Why work for something, when you know someone who can do it better anyway?

Pain Threshold: 1

Mental Stability: 6

Connections: 6

After picking an archetype, you need to determine your Burke Dynamic.

Physical Pain = 20 - Pain Threshold

Emotional Trauma = (8 - Mental Stability) * 2

Inflicted Pain starts at 0.

For a strongly distopian style of Reality Cops, also give your Rookie Cop a Goal and a Motive, as per Chapter 4.

Chapter 2: Mechanics

A reality cop operates in two places, and has different aspects in each, although they inter-relate.

Real World Effectiveness (RE) is a pool of dice that is used to determine the success of actions in the real world. It is your Pain Threshold (d10) + Mental Stability (d8) + Connections (d6)

Whenever it is unclear if your character should succeed at a task, the GM will call for an RE check. Roll RE. Each die that rolls 4 or under is a success. There are two significant results to check:

Highest # of successes by type of die. This guides the narration as to the 'flavour' of the success. If d10's got the most successes, the task was overcome by physical effort or force. If it was d8's, it was mainly through personal (non-physical) means. D6's, the task was overcome mainly through the use of friends, connections and contacts. In the case of a tie, pick one.

Total # of successes: this determines the overall success of the action.

- A tricky task requires 5 successes.
- A difficult task requires 10 successes.
- A nearly impossible task requires 15 successes.

Burke Dynamic (BD) is a pool of dice used to determine the success of actions in phases of existence or transition. It is your Physical Pain (d6) + Emotional Trauma (d8) + Inflicted Pain (d10)

Whenever your character is attempting to affect the phase they are in, the GM will call for a BD check. Roll BD, each die the rolls 4 or under is a success. Unlike RE, there is no constraint on the flavour of the success narration.

Total # of successes

- 5 successes: tricky. Example: Defying Genre expectations/breaking causality (in a 'real world' genre, not needing to travel to get to another continent),
- 10 successes: difficult. Example: Briefly defying a Tag (ignoring a spell with the Tag of Magic Works)
- 15 successes: Nearly impossible: Creating a Tag, destroying a Tag
- 25 successes: Impossible: Creating or reversing a reality subversion, abandoning your ties to reality

If your character is attempting to accomplish something and is being opposed by another character (either another PC or the Villain), both roll the applicable pool, and whoever has the higher total # of successes subtracts the other's total and checks against the # of successes required to determine if they completed the goal. If there is a tie, roll again.

If a character is opposing multiple other characters, they must split their pool, in whatever proportions they like, between each of the opposed rolls.

Chapter 3: Phases of Existence

When a reality cop transitions into another phase, they do not go there physically. Their mind experiences it. Equipment in reality can monitor their brain patterns and also monitor the phase they have gone to, and demonstrate the relationship. However, they are undeniably still present in the real world.

To the cop who transitions though, this is completely subsumed by the experience of the phase of existence. For all practical purposes, the Cop is there.

Phases of existence cover the entire gamut of human experience. There are two schools of thought: one posits that the phases are created by the collective human subconscious, the other posits that there are an infinity of phases, but we can only reach the ones that resonate with us. Either way, if it lies within the range of human expression, then it can appear in a phase.

Early phase experimentation was primarily concerned with interaction and study. It wasn't until after the Burke Dynamic became widely practiced that phase researchers worked extensively with changing the phases.

Mechanically, a phase has three main features: Genre, Tags and Opens.

Genre is what it implies: the overall 'look and feel' of the phase. Modern world, high fantasy, twisted reflection of reality, and so forth.

Tags are absolute laws that apply to the phase. They are often aligned with the genre, but not necessarily. Examples of Tags might be Magic Works, People are Inherently Good, Racism is Scientifically Sound, No Good Deed Goes Unpunished, and so forth. Determining the presence of Tags requires no appreciable effort. Determining the exact nature is a 'tricky' task, and is usually opposed by whoever created the tag. Destroying a Tag is always opposed by its creator (unless they happen to be the same character)

Opens are places where the phase is mutable, and can be shifted by a concerted effort. If a phase has any Opens, they can be 'used' to create new Tags. Anyone transitioned to a phase will know automatically if there are any Opens. They can determine how many Opens there are as a 'tricky' task.

A phase will have a maximum number of Tags + Opens that can never exceed 5. If someone succeeds at creating a Tag when there are no Opens, the Bubble Bursts and the phase of existence is destroyed. Anyone transitioned to that phase has their consciousness destroyed along with it.

If a character cuts their ties to reality (see chapter 2) and exists only in the phase, they are three immediate effects:

- 1) They die in the real world. There ain't no comin' back, this is the really real world.
- 2) They have a harder time defying genre. It becomes a 'difficult' task
- 3) They have an easier time manipulating the phase. All Tag and Open related tasks are one step easier. They can also change the Genre or destroy a Tag as an 'Impossible' task.

Chapter 4: Running Reality Cops

So now that you've got a group of characters that do seriously fucked up things to themselves and the people they love in order to save the world as they know it, what do you do with them?

Make them save the world.

Each session of Reality Cops will consist of these steps:

Problem discovery
Phase investigation
Real world investigation
Phase confrontation and/or Real world confrontation

If at least one of the last two steps does not occur, or the confrontation is not conclusive, then villain will be recurring, with more resources.

GM prep before play

Before getting to the table, there are a few things that need to be set up. You will need:

- A villain
- A reality subversion
- A phase of existence

These are the building blocks of a Reality Cops adventure. I would also suggest having a handful or two from the following list as well, but that probably depends on how well you improvise on the fly. If you're me, you suck at it.

- Phase descriptions
- Real word descriptions
- Phase people
- Real world people

The Villain

Lets get one thing clear: We're not talking Snidely Whiplash or Sauron here. This is not a cardboard bad guy. We're dealing with a real genuine person, who truly believes they're doing the right thing. If you've seen Serenity, I'm talking about The Operative. If you know Lord of the Rings, I'm talking about Boromir. The first two things you need to build are Goal and Motive. Everything else flows from that.

The villain has a goal. Something they want or need to see happen that is beyond their immediate means. Perhaps they want to cure world hunger. Perhaps they want to wipe out racism. Maybe they just want their wife to love them.

The villain has a motive. This is a deep-seated force that drives them beyond where normal people are willing to go. Perhaps they grew up in a poor neighborhood, and were surrounded by starving people as a child. They may have been on the wrong end of racial hate crimes. Possibly they are a zealot or idealist, that sees the world in black and white. They may simply be desperately insecure.

Finally, decide the means and the location of the villain. Are they in Reality, or have they cut their ties and now exist only in Phase? Are they doing this on their own, or do they have followers? Family? Friends? Finally, and most importantly, decide their Real World Effectiveness and where they sit on the Burke Dynamic.

The Real World

We need to know two things right away:
What reality subversion does the villain want?
Has it already happened?

Obviously the former is strongly informed by goal and motive. The later mostly affects what kind of pressures the PC's are under. If it hasn't happened yet, there's time pressure. If it has, there's going to be weird shit in the real world they have to work around.

A note about reality subversions: Only people who have the inherent ability to transition to other phases will be aware that things are “wrong”. Further, only people who have actually transitioned will retain an understanding of what “right” is.

Related to this, the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of the reality subversion need to be thought through as to what kind of consequences it will carry in reality.

The Phase

Decide on the genre of the phase the villain has chosen as his platform to attack reality with. Note any Tags they would have in place, and how many Opens are left. Again, these are going to be strongly informed by the goal and motive. It’s also likely to have a strong thematic connection with the reality subversion the villain wants to bring about.

During play.

Problem Discovery

This phase is the classic plot opening. Introduce the problem. Put the cops onto the assignment. You need to communicate if the reality subversion has already happened or not, and you need to give enough information for the players to start sending their characters after the bad guy.

Phase Investigation

This is where starting characters kick ass. Odds are that it won’t take very long for starting characters to figure out what’s going on, and get into opposition with the villain.

Real World Investigation

This is where starting characters suck. Let them know that a really common Reality Cop tactic is to engage in both the Phase and the Real world, thus ensuring that they’re running effectively unopposed in one of them. Given that the villain needs to be in the phase to affect reality, it’s usually the real world where they run free and clear.

Real World Confrontation

If the characters catch up with and deal successfully with the villain in the real world (kill him, lock him away, whatever) then the reality subversion will slowly fade and the world will return to normal.

Phase Confrontation

If and when the characters deal with the villain in the phase of existence, but not in the real world, then the villain ‘gets away’.

Chapter 5: Between Problems

After each adventure, any character that transitioned adds one to their Pain Threshold. Pain Threshold caps at 15.

They may then choose to reduce Mental Stability by one, but must add a brief description of what emotional/mental turmoil their character is enduring to the character sheet to reflect this.

They may add up to three points of Inflicted Pain, but must write who the victim is, and what they did on their character sheet.