

BARBARIC PSYCHEDELIC PSIONIC CATAclySMIC 4E D&D

By Ron Edwards, Adept Play – this version created for Con4eR, July 2021

THE SETTING

It's a physically and metaphysically shattered cosmos: not holding together, and not really meaning anything. Imagine wilderness, ruins, voids, wastelands, ancient battlefields, crystals, vortices, with communities scattered throughout. Forget all canonical D&D cosmology and imagery. This is serious Moebius-art landscapes and mind-shattering voids with barely cohering floating fragments of worlds, phase-isolated echoes of the past or future, and the occasional inability to tell whether you're in reality or trapped in someone's mind.

There's no magic at all - just forces of nature and disciplined minds. The limitations apply to everything, including monsters and especially items. The gods: there are no gods. Even the primal powers are manifested only through the agency of characters. The vortices provide the "dungeon" in the game title, freaky three-D spherical manifestations – they grow, therefore getting more and more levels/interiors, which is awesome.

Tripping yet? Good. This is raw psycho-savage fantasy at the edge of hallucination – or enlightenment. Your characters are primal, tribal barbarians, with a few monastic citadels here and there. Painted faces, spattered gore, and psionic blasts! I expect them to get naked sooner rather than later.

CHARACTERS

Races

These are the only player-character races in the setting, using little or no content from canon. No other D&D races exist, significantly, no humans and no githyanki.

Githzerai

(Wisdom, Dexterity/Intelligence)
Ascetic, ruthlessly practical, forged in resistance and suffering, free at last, craving order, new to trust



The githzerai were eternal slaves before the universe was destroyed. Their harsh and meditative customs founded tribal and monastic culture.

Minotaur

(Strength, Constitution/Wisdom)
Bestial yet introspective, struggling to reconcile ritualized logic with powerful urges



The minotaurs emerged from the vortices, whose logic they worshipped, to join tribes and create their own. They have found joy and shame in savagery.

Shardmind

(Intelligence, Wisdom/Charisma)
Crystalline remnants of destroyed cosmic order, new to selfhood, bursting with passion and intellect



The shardminds quickly joined and adjusted to the tribes and monasteries. They idealize and fervently display their newfound individuality.

All the races are effectively newborn. Ideologically they are poised to discover and shape a new cosmos, or to disintegrate with it as reality fragments further into complete entropy. Every player-character is a challenge to that entropy: a purpose coming into view. They must choose, not to be good or evil, but what those things actually are. Their personal histories and passions become cosmic order – or fall into personal and cosmic devastation.

Classes

All of our characters are hybrid class, at level 3. These are the only classes in the setting.

ONE of:

Ardent (Leader): Charisma, Constitution, Wisdom

- Enlightened, Euphoric, or Impetuous

Battlemind (Defender): Constitution, Charisma, Wisdom

- Resilient, Quick, or Harrier

Psion (Controller): Intelligence, Charisma, Wisdom

- Telepathic, Telekinetic, or Shaper

Hybridized with ONE of:

Barbarian (Striker): Strength, Constitution, Wisdom

- Rageblood, Thaneborn, Thunderborn, or Whirling

Monk (Striker): Dexterity, Strength, Wisdom

- Centered Breath, Stone Fist, or Iron Soul

Provide a name and gender for your character. They begin Unaligned; assign an alignment when and if you want.

STRATEGY AND SURVIVAL

Review the units of events and in-game time: Encounters, Rests (Short vs. Extended), and Days. The DM has no say in whether characters can or should press on, so risk your resources and upcoming effectiveness as you choose.

Skill Challenges

An encounter can include both a Skill Challenge and combat, or either. The permutations of which prompts the other, or which ends the encounter, are almost limitless. They can be initiated through players' announcements, although you can't dodge around fictionally-legitimate fights with them. If you're trying to escape a combat, then the two run parallel until one is completed.

They are not much safer than combat. Failing them or even at steps within them is going to hurt: lost HP, suspension of item or other bonuses, and imposed limits or extra requirements on the next round of Rests.

Fighting tactics

Our characters are easier to hit than typical D&D 4E characters, and Ardents don't quite emulate Clerics' healing presence. On the plus side, this range of builds permits amazing battlefield positioning. Therefore, play tactically at the full range of your characters' rules, or I will butcher you.

First, mess with the order of action. The rolled initiative order sets a unique constraining feature for each fight. You can alter the order into a more optimal sequence by choosing to go later than you rolled.

- Readied actions allow tactical and reactive targeting.
- Delaying the whole turn allows someone else to set you up for maximum advantage.
- Both changes permanently change the order, but if everyone does so, then the original order can be restored if desired.

Sometimes, changing the order can extend positive conditions and help to manage negative ones. It also allows you to take tactically-sound second winds without being a sitting duck.

Second, within your turn, you choose one from each column, and perform them in any order.

1	2	3
Standard	Move	Minor
Move	Minor	
Minor		

Don't waste a chance to act. Spend Action Points and Power Points. You'll always have your starting number of each per encounter, so use that extra action judiciously, but use it ... and keep an eye on how to alter the current initiative order to optimize it.

Review how your own abilities interplay: the bonuses within categories do not stack! The categories are: *armor, shield, enhancement, feat, item, power (class, class feature), proficiency, race*. The typeless bonuses are infinitely stackable, so seek them out, especially combat advantage, flanking, and marks.

Third, know how everyone else's abilities may affect yours, and vice versa. Bursts, zones, and triggers set up temporary fields of effects and tactics for allies, so a given character can end up doing a lot throughout a round.

Fourth, all of the above are profoundly influenced by proximity and sudden movement. Your characters are very good at maneuvering, so review how these differ and how they affect your options:

- Shifting, running, moving twice
- Terrain: blocking, challenging, hindering, difficult

Don't take turns to attack in isolation – *deploy*. Coordinate your tactical movement with full-defense actions, aiding allies, and advantageous positioning; use abilities which set up actions for your allies throughout the round.

Finally, look out for surprises and be ready to adapt.

- Recognize and know the rules-effects of line-of-sight, cover, and concealment, and use them against foes as they will certainly be using them against you.
- Use actions for active perception checks and communicate about potential sources of trouble.

REWARDS

As we are playing for a single session, experience points are not relevant. Fights and Skill Challenges matter for their consequences in the situation. The setting includes no coins or gems, so our version of monetary treasure is abstract. For single-session play, it will not be a limiting resource and only applies to gaining rituals.

Rituals: The equivalent values of treasure may “buy” rituals from *PHB 1-2* and *Primal Power*, at the sum of the basic and component costs. All rituals are eligible; they are conceived as primal, mostly, or psionic in some cases. “Books” are tattooing or similar, and “scrolls” are consumables such as weird herbs or a dedicated dream-activity.

As rituals require skill rolls, consider group participation and helping-rolls, as well as the required time relative to encounters and rests.

Quests: Quests are named during play, whether offered by the DM or introduced by anyone else through role-playing. The former cannot be imposed and the latter cannot be denied. The only requirements are that the quest's outcome is ambitious and consequential for other, non-player characters. Since experience points are not involved, Quests' reward lies in their outcomes and in gaining Boons. The DM may offer Boons, or you may suggest they exist and act upon it via a Minor Quest. Boons are similar to magic items, but they are more temporary.

Magic items: The DM will sometimes announce that a magic item at a specific level is available. A character may craft the item he or she wants at that level, from the following list, with a Short or Extended Rest. Do it with symbolic action, e.g., soaking your spear in an aberrant creature's blood to turn it into a Vicious weapon, or using the relevant parts of a primal beast to make Horn Tusk armor.

- Level 4 (+1): **armor** [ectoplasmic, flowform, adaptable resistance, phrenic, bold victory], **ki focus** [abduction, elusive action, mighty strike, quick strike, hurricane strike, thunderfist], **orbs** [psionic recovery, canny liar, deft negotiator, furtive mind, menacing impulse, peerless artist, sympathetic eye, unstoppable decline, aggressive thoughts], **staves** [forceful rebuking, psychic knives, adaptable mind, temporal juggler, third eye], **totem** [winter's grasp]
- Level 5 (+1): **weapon** [mindcrusher, thoughtspike], **ki focus** [blurred strike], **orbs** [unfailing concentration, stored energy, scourging revelations], **staves** [harvester, psicraft, renewing source, traveler], **totem** [pure spirit, spring renewal]
- Level 6 (+2): **ki focus, totem**
- Level 7 (+2): **armor** [eyes, awakening, elusive, panther spirit, horn tusk,], **weapon** [manifester], **ki focus** [cobra strike, ghost strike, hunting strike], **staves** [aversion, insightful detection, discerning watcher, tongues, unfailing talent, bitter dismissal], **totem** [autumn harvest]

THE BIG PICTURE

Although this event is only a single session, I use Barbaric Psychedelic for long-term play. Describing it is a big job, so here I'll just show you how nicely it comes together by listing the Paragon and Epic Tier options.

The hybrid-class characters access the options from both classes, subject to individual prerequisites. For example, a githzerai Ardent-Barbarian chooses one of twenty-three Paragon paths (githzerai, Ardent, or Barbarian) – let's say, Incandescent Champion. For the Epic path, he or she chooses one from Ardent, or one from the eight Primal options, or one from the eleven "everyone" options – and in this case, let's say, Reincarnate Champion. The options allow many similar cross-category but very coherent combinations.

Ardent	PARAGON: Argent Soul, Psionic Binder, Stygian Adept, Talaric Strategist, Anarchic Adept, Awakened Visionary, Catalyst, Incandescent Champion, Phrenic Invader, Siphon
Battlemind	PARAGON: Eternal Blade, Iron Guardian, Steel Ego, Zephyr Blade, Blackstone Guardian, Quicksilver Demon, Storm Disciple, Talaric Ironjack, Unbound Nomad
Psion	PARAGON: Cerulean Adept, Dreamwalker, Time Bender, Uncarnate, Alienist, Anathema, Firestarter, Master Summoner, Thrallherd
Barbarian	PARAGON: Bear Warrior, Fearbringer Thane, Frenzied Berserker, Wildrunner, Ancestral Weapon, Building Thunder, Calm Fury, Death's Thane, Stonefire Rager, Twinclaw Slayer, Winter Fury
Monk	PARAGON: Ghostwalker, Initiate of the Dragon, Mountain Devotee, Radiant Fist, Basilisk's Fury Adept, Four Winds Master, Soaring Blade, Tiger Claw Master, Transcendent Perfection, Unseen Hand
Githzerai	PARAGON: Rrathmal
Minotaur	PARAGON: Blooded Champion
Shardmind	PARAGON: Shard Disciple
Ardent	EPIC: Warmaster
Battlemind	EPIC: Invincible Mind
Monk	EPIC: Diamond Soul, Grandmaster of Flowers
Primal	EPIC: Glorious Spirit, Primal Avatar, Fang of the World Serpent, Fury of the Wild, Honored Ancestor, Mythic Spirit, Reincarnate Champion, World Tree Guardian
Everyone	EPIC: <i>Psionic:</i> Godmind, Cosmic Soul, Demiurge, Eighth Seal, Master of Moments, Topaz Crusader; <i>Generic:</i> Deadly Trickster, Demigod, Eternal Seeker, Harbinger of Doom, Lorekeeper

For this game, Epic Tier means the characters are potentially the actual gods of the new world they may forge from the wreckage. Our own original pantheon with detailed origin myths – how cool is that?

INVITATION



To see plenty of D&D 4E in action, as well as interviews, discussion, and perspectives on the game, please join us at adeptplay.com. You will also find the celebration of many, many role-playing games and thoughtful, supportive dialogue about them, including seminars and classes.

The site is free, although Patreon-supported, and includes an active Discord channel. In case you're wondering, I am a role-player who has published multiple games, with some credit for inspiring and affecting the hobby.