

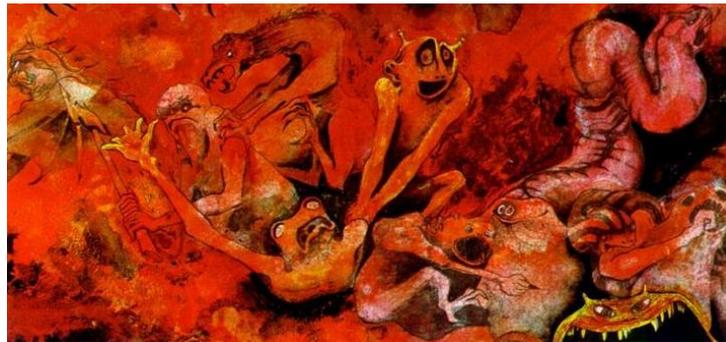
BARBARIC PSYCHEDELIC PSIONIC CATAclySMIC 4E D&D

By Ron Edwards

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 some surviving strongholds and holdouts. Forget all canonical D&D cosmology and imagery. I'm talking about 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.

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.

ADVENTURES AND GOALS

I've built a constellation of encounters and quests across a landscape of environments, tribes, and monasteries. It's full of situations concerning different social groups, vivid characters, newly brewing vortices, and mind-trips.

It's also full of threats both immediate and impending, using mostly primal and aberrant creatures, re-skinning the Monster Manuals freely. Crucially, the array of potential foes includes a variety of conflicting interests. Therefore, which of these actually get addressed, and when, and which "side" you're on or goal you'll support, is left up to *your* decisions and role-playing. It's not about being in fights so you can proceed through the canned "story," it's about creating a story so you can get into fights.

Therefore all is for naught unless you embrace your character and run with what he or she experiences, and how he or she changes. Add to and develop what you have. Don't be an insincere thespian. Trip out and be intense, make decisions that matter, so the fights do too.

CHARACTER CREATION

Starting characters are assumed to be members of the same monastery or of a nearby tribe with a vested interest in the monastery's well-being.

Races

These are the only player-character races in the setting, using little or no content from canon. No other canonical 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)
Living crystalline remnants of destroyed cosmic order, 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, literally or 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. Through amassing power and consequences, 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.

Who are you? What do you want? We play to find out.

Classes

All of our characters are hybrid class.

Choose ONE:

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

Hybridize with ONE:

Barbarian (Striker): Strength, Constitution, Wisdom

- Rageblood, Thaneborn, Thunderborn, or Whirling

Monk (Striker): Dexterity, Strength, Wisdom

- Centered Breath, Stone Fist, or Iron Soul

These are the only classes in the setting. 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 like the player-characters and relevant NPCs.

Backgrounds

Choose two or three, but only one from a given bullet point. One benefits you mechanically. Taking no background in a category is not "nothing," but simply the ordinary craziness of being a particular race and class.

- Geography: Blazestone, Bleakmire, Bloodtangle, Broken Lands, Frostfell, Howling Plains, Maelstrom, Sea of Dust, Thunderpeaks, Underwild, Wrathwood
 - Use, edit, or replace the textual descriptions as you see fit.
- Race
 - Githzerai: Cenobite Initiate, Warband Survivor
 - Minotaur: Clan Exile, Silenced Beast, Victim of Superstition
 - Shardmind: Thought Builder, God Shard, Shard Slayer
- Birth: Found in the Wild, Primal Omen, Refugee, Awakened, Calamity, Created
- Occupation: Renegade, Revered Elder, Sage, Wild Hunter, Astronomer, Seer, Con Artist, Wanderer
- Society: Disgraced, Failed Thane, Isolated

Alignment

4E alignment is not a metaphysical state, an aura, a magical force, or a language. It sets no hard limits upon what your character will do, nor does it limit classes, powers, feats, or skills. It's merely and only a character's default outlook and opinions.

- An unaligned person feels strongly about his or her ethics, whatever they may be, and favors utilitarian strategy – the ends always justify the means.
- Aligned characters rely instead on deontological directives, in which the means absolutely justify the ends. The aligned concepts are a linear list, not juxtaposed: *Lawful Good | Good | Evil | Chaotic Evil*. It's also meristic: there are no overlap zones.

Our characters begin Unaligned; assign an alignment when and if you feel like it.

Refining and finishing

Review your character's race, class and class specification, and backgrounds to get his or her appearance and attitude percolating. Choose all the following based on expressing it colorfully..

The hybrid class design provides a very broad skill range, even more so using Backgrounds. Only three are Trained, so this is a strong character-defining step. Don't take powers that grant similar bonuses, as they do not stack. We're also using the Skill Powers rules, emphasizing that all "powers" are really psionic skills anyway.

All our characters' starting feat is Hybrid Talent. Choose which class it favors.

Starting equipment is constrained into categories by class, but you have plenty of finer-grained choice among weapons, armor, and other gear. Choose things that you like from the right categories, don't worry about paying for it. Everyone begins with a Level 1 "magic" (i.e. psi-augmented) item – choose it with an eye toward upgrading it into something beefier later. If you play a psion, don't forget your Rituals.

Choose an array (build) of score values and assign them relative to race bonuses to support your powers. This application favors width, as the hybridized classes do not clump up on one or two abilities, but you are free to play with the options.

Standard Build

16 14 13 12 11 10

More Extreme Builds

16 14 14 13 10 8

16 16 12 11 10 8

18 14 11 10 10 8

More Even Builds

14 13 13 13 13 13

14 14 13 13 13 11

15 14 13 12 12 11

15 15 13 12 11 10

Starting magic items

Starting at second level, so they already have their starting +1 items and two items at Level 3 and Level 5

The default hybrid characters max out at hide armor, but with the Hybrid Talent Armor Proficiency, ardents can use scale and battleminds can use scale and chainmail.

Armor

- Level 3: defensive (any), ironclad (scale/plate), thought-eater (leather/hide), shaper's (cloth/leather), life vine (hide), predator (hide), curseforged (chain/scale), delver's (any), eladrin (chain), fireburst (cloth), sylvan (cloth/leather/hide)
- Level 5: quicksilver (chain), panther spirit (leather), barkskin (hide/scale), battleforged (plate), bloodthread (cloth), deathcut (leather/hide)

Weapon

- Level 3: anathema (any), inertial (flail/hammer/mace), ki (any), eager (lt blade/spear), duelist's (lt blade), flameburst (ranged), frost (any), thundering (any)
- Level 5: mindcrusher (hammer/maul), thoughtspike (hvy/lt blade, spear), flaming (any), lifedrinker (any melee), lightning (any)

Ki focus

- Level 3: blazing arc, death strike, impeding, windsoul, cascading strikes, four winds
- Level 5: blurred strike

Orbs

- Level 3: frustrated recovery, mental constitution, nimble thought, psychic conversion, inevitable continuance
- Level 5: life conversion, unfailing concentration, stored energy, sanguinary repercussions

Staffs

- Level 3: evader, impregnable mind, punishing thoughts, war mage
- Level 5: harvester's, psicraft, renewing source, traveler, scourging revelation, storms

Consumables

- Level 3: talent

Arms

- Level 3: bracelets of subtle defense, psyweave cloak, bracers of the perfect shot, shield of protection
- Level 5: bashing shield

Feet

- Level 3: catstep boots
- Level 5: spider climbing boots

Hands

- Level 3: gloves of piercing
- Level 5: gauntlets of ogre power

Neck

- Level 3: amulet of health, safewing amulet

Waist

- Level 5: ironskin belt

Thoughts on the hybrid character class

There isn't a neat match-up of racial attribute bonuses to class-favored attributes. We're killing the long-standing obsession with 4E character optimization, thoroughly and precisely, and disposing of the corpse. That obsession was always simple-minded anyway, focused as it was on attribute values, which when all is said and done merely provide a few scattered +1's.

The Hybrid Talent Feat allows further options for *one* of your character classes. If you want to draw upon the nifty features of both, you need this Feat twice.

- Its phrasing doesn't quite permit taking the Feat more than once *per* class for classes that subdivide the Hybrid Talent further (e.g. Barbarian: you get either Armored Agility or Feral Might, not both).

- If you don't take it at all, then the Feat you start with better be something you really want, and for a good reason.
- This makes a good argument for starting at 2nd level.

Right at 1st level, you make a crucial choice: either take two Power Points, or take an Encounter power for the non-psionic class – deciding for the moment to forego either the Augments or a significant single-fight power.

- At 3rd level, you'll do the opposite and thus even the character out, but the first couple of levels will feel the burn of whichever you choose not to do.
- Which makes a good argument for starting at 3rd level.

Monks are possibly disadvantaged at the lower levels, because the Flurry power can only be used with Monk attacks, and all Monk attacks are disallowed from the heavier weapons available to the Ardent and Battlemind – i.e., attack strengths of these hybridized classes don't blend like they do with Barbarian.

- It's not clear whether taking the Expanded Tradition option (from the Hybrid Talent Feat) expands the Flurry's usage to hitting with any weapon, i.e., attacks from your other class. It doesn't say it *doesn't* ...
- The implication is that either you specialize in the Flurry, with the above option as just a start, or you leave it as a minor feature of the character.

Either you use a monk weapon for Monk fighting plus a heavier weapon for Ardent or Battlemind fighting, or you get really, really good at the spear. Either of these benefits greatly from the proper feats, which arrive slowly.

- Monk hybrid heroes therefore are strongly recommended to seek Item bonuses via Boons and Training, since these tactics and the various ways to boost AC will eat up feats.
- Ki Focus items are practically obligatory. Setting a Minor Quest to get an interesting one is a natural opening move for a starting monk, and the Superior Ki Focus feat should always be considered, especially since it may be taken multiple times.

STRATEGY AND SURVIVAL

Playing D&D 4E *well* means managing several resources through separate encounters and the passing of days. Here are the units of events and in-game time.

- Encounters: Skill Challenge, Fight, or any combination of the two
 - By definition, every encounter is consequential for the player-characters – at the very least, in terms of risk – and for other characters' goals and circumstances. Skills are just as important as the chance to hit with an attack.
- Rests
 - Short rests: about an hour of relative inactivity.
 - Extended rests: at least six hours of actual sleep and no less than twelve hours afterwards before doing anything interesting.
- Days
 - Taking an extended rest obviously means the passage of a day, but the converse is not true, e.g. if you travel all night or are chained to a wall or something like that.

The strategy lies in how you choose to pace encounters relative to the rests and days. Here are the variables you have to watch.

- Powers usage. All powers are rated by their usage relative to the fictional time-units.
 - At-Will
 - Encounter
 - Daily
- Hit points, obviously. You have a value called the Healing Surge, which is how many points you get back if a healer-type character zaps you, and you also have a set number of Healing Surges.
 - Once per encounter, you can spend a Healing Surge yourself as an action.

- During a short rest, you can spend as many Surges as you want.
- With an extended rest, you get all your hit points back and all your Surges.
- Action Points. You have very few, usually just one.
 - During an encounter, you can spend an Action Point for a free action.
 - With an extended rest, you lose your current Action Points but begin the next unit of play with one.
 - If you choose not to take an extended rest after an encounter but rather press on to another, then you resume with one Action Point. (This is called a Milestone.)
- Power Points. You have very few, usually two.
 - During an encounter, you can spend one or more Power Points to augment a psionic ability.
 - With a short or extended rest, Power Points are fully refreshed.

You decide at the end of each encounter whether you want to take a rest, and which kind, trading off lost hit points and remaining Healing Surges with the in-game situation and time.

The game relies on the players exercising their agency over these choices, so the DM cannot have any say in whether characters can or should press on, or over how many encounters they'll have relative to resting and days. The players have to decide whether their characters' current status justifies pressing on.

These choices also significantly affect in-fiction time and the course of events. The DM, me, has set up the landscape of dangerous, touchy, reactive, and flexible circumstances, but it's not my problem to decide how much you're going to take on relative to your Extended Rests. By definition, I'm always willing to keep going, and it's up to you to strategize your characters' resources. And I will always bring in the consequences of what everyone and everything else was doing while you snoozed.

Remember the role-playing? These decisions rely on your passions and strategy, blended to become one thing.

Tactics and rules to know

The essence of *good* play in D&D 4E is skillful rules use – that you do not just sit and wait for "your turn to go," and then look up and down your sheet for a "thing to do." The hybridization rules are not kind to character defenses, and our characters will be easier to hit than typical D&D 4E characters. Play tactically and creatively regarding player-characters' abilities and options. Plan-B thinking is recommended.

The foes are re-skinned from existing monsters, which are built presuming most player-characters to have higher hit points and to be wearing chainmail or heavier armor. The combat rules in general assume the presence of Clerics too, as a ready source of replenished hit points, which Ardents don't quite emulate.

Mobility is favored in our construction over armored defense, because every character presents a highly individualized spin on battlefield positioning. Stacking bonuses to AC across powers, skills, feats, items, and un-itemized combat options must be taken to a high art, both during character creation and development, and during distinct moments of play. Doubly so for optimizing cross-character effects at the right moments and proximities. (This is where the low-level monk shines, via the Full Discipline powers.)

Fights will be won most likely through second-order, cross-character thinking about abilities, not just taking turns having your guy point-and-shoot. There are wheels within wheels here, and with thought, you will be acting during almost every other character's turn in some way.

First, mess with the order of action. The rolled initiative order sets a unique constraining feature for each fight, albeit including free actions at any point and triggered actions like opportunity attacks.

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.

Although the ordering rules do not let you truncate your own negative conditions and extend positive ones, messing with the sequence can allow your allies to do so, powers permitting. Keeping your attention on the order 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		

Lay out all your power cards and organize them by standard, move, or minor; let the colors and the text categorize them further. 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.

Know how your 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, considering the same points mentioned above. Bursts, zones, and triggers set up temporary "fields" of effects and tactics for allies, so you can end up doing a hell of a lot throughout a round. See the multi-character handout page as an example.

Fourth, all of the above are profoundly influenced by proximity and sudden movement. Know how these differ and how they affect your options:

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

Don't take turns merely 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. Get good at it or I'll butcher you.

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.
- Go ahead and spend actions on perception checks, and communicate about potential sources of trouble.

REWARDS

Life and death

You have oodles of hit points, and each level-up gives you a set number more, not a dice roll. However, the character options we're using are probably going to get hit oftener than you want, so consider:

- Temporary hit points – add-ons during a fight, a feature of many powers.
- Healing surges – needed early and often, frequently provided by Leader powers; you also get one of your own once per encounter. Pro tip: *keep track*.
- Between-encounter healing is very generous, usually racking you right back up to full value.

If your character dies, make up a new one at [level-1], using some logical basis from the events played so far. The party's collective/average level becomes the gold standard for designing encounters, and characters level up independently.

Advancement

We don't need to count experience points; you gain a level upon completing a requisite number of encounters and for completing quests.

- One level = five encounters, with some encounters rated at ½ and some rated at 1½.
 - Encounters are built according to the XP system and rated as minor, standard, and major on that basis, to set the general currency stated above
- Skill challenges bearing significant risk count as encounters
 - In our application these apply especially to environmental hazards, including Arcana for navigating dimensions and hallucinatory locales, and Nature for dealing with untrammelled wilderness of all kinds.
 - The Skill Powers in *PH 3* provide a wider range and higher effectiveness for these challenges.
- A Major Quest counts as an encounter, and a number of minor quests equal to the number of players counts as an encounter.

Anything with consequential risks counts: foes, environment, social situations, and more. If you avoid it, i.e., find a way not to engage, then it doesn't count, but skillful evasion does, i.e., converting a fight into a skill challenge. Formal skill challenges use different rules from combat, but an encounter can shift from one to another depending on what happens in it, e.g., fighting as a tactical component of getting past and away from a foe.

Quests are characters' goals 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 drastically consequential for other, non-player characters and ambitious, i.e., doesn't look possible.

Mechanically, they represent both a way to get into a lot of encounters for a reason, and a way to get an extra encounter or fraction thereof from a series of combats or skill challenges. In other words, play passionately and proclaim lots of quests, and if one is offered, be sure you really want to do it.

Skill Challenges and Quests

These score an "encounter" in XP terms beyond a prepared fight on a skirmish map.

- They can be initiated through players' announcements rather than GM planning – in other words, have your characters do motivated and skillful things, especially big things, and you level up with less fights.
- Depending on the situation, they can also result in temporary Boons which permit enjoying magic items' effects, for a while, that you would otherwise have to sweat blood for.

This contributes in terms of fictional integrity too, as it permits the DM to build fights directly out of what's happening rather than making bottle fights as if they were located in a series of rooms.

What you can't do is dodge "around" fictionally-legitimate fights via Skill Challenges – if and when an adversary decides you need to die, he or she or it will take action to make that happen. The context of Skill Challenges and/or Quests puts meaning into "fictionally-legitimate" which isn't merely "the DM scheduled this fight for this session."

Which is nested in which can get conceptually odd. It's easier for Quests, in that a Minor one is typically within an Encounter and a Major one typically contains Encounters, but a hefty Skill Challenge could go either way. We'll have to be clear about when an Encounter is officially over, which might not always be obvious as a fight can convert into a Skill Challenge or vice versa, or the two can run parallel until one is completed.

The Skill Challenges in the DMG2 tend toward soft outcomes for failure, generally oriented from the need to succeed in the Challenge eventually and to keep the party going to wherever it's supposed to go. For us, though, failing them or components within them is going to hurt: lost HP, temporary suspension of item or other bonuses, and significantly, imposed limits or extra requirements on the next round of Rests.

Streetwise and Thievery need some consideration in our setting; their use in most D&D fantasy doesn't fit at all. They aren't strongly represented in our classes but aren't wholly absent, and some backgrounds include them.

Leveling up

All the classes are alike in points per level and in how they improve, with the default being that all characters level up in lockstep. You follow a schedule of added powers and feats, and additions to saving throws and attribute scores, and that's pretty much it. The cool thing is that you're not stuck with the choices you make along the way, but can revise your existing abilities with each increase in level:

- Switch around your At-Will powers to the combination you want
- Retrain feats, replacing them with others, and skills, which receive full bonuses for this level
- Re-slot Encounter and Daily powers choosing from all levels accessible to you, including Skill Powers

Ongoing character build work is very dynamic! The psionic classes rely on constantly trading At-Will powers in-and-out, and that churns up the already rather flexible hybrid advancement rules too.

- After 3rd level, whenever your new level rules say you swap an Encounter power, you can swap a psionic At-Will power instead, as long as you maintain the at-least-one-of-each rule.
- Retraining becomes very tricky and important, because it means you can access those levels per class that you "skipped" throughout this process.

I'm considering allowing followers based on level – it can't be as simple as "as many levels as you have, in sum," tuned as necessary for elites and minions, can it?

Treasure

A given encounter is rated at a rules-specified parcel: coins, gems, and magic items a monetary amount divided in a certain way, with all the Parcels summing to a grand total specified for the current level.

The setting includes no currency in the ordinary sense, so our version is abstract. I will set the daily expenses of survival for your characters for any location, and the "money" gained through encounters can be spent to offset them as the players decide. Specific items listed in the rules may be "bought" in this fashion: light-sticks, rope, whatever. In the fiction, this represents the ordinary, non-problematic ways of the savage and apocalyptic life-styles which the characters consider normal, although at times relevant skills will be called into play as well.

Money does not appear as coins or gems at all.

- Coins represent the raw, immediately usable materials for food and shelter, or things suitable for turning into useful equipment. We'll have a list for such things that can be almost instantly "bought," i.e. crafted, during an adventure.
- Gems represent irreducible units, i.e., no "change," defined perhaps as items suitable for barter or as materials which can be purposed only toward one conceivable end.
- No conversions: you can't buy or sell magic items and/or potions.

Magic items are similarly discovered as potential rather than as existing things. Therefore they are effectively treated as permanent or nearly-permanent Boons, which is fine by the rules as the latter are supposed to be treated as magic items in the Parcels anyway.

When a magic item is announced, a character may craft the one he or she wants at the designated level, with no required game mechanics. Use the primal and psionic lists, or alter the concept for other items to suit those definitions.

- 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 integument of a powerful creature to make Skins of the Slain armor.
- The only "magic" in our game is psionic power, so there is no distinction between "+2 magic weapon" and "+2 ki focus" which happens to be a weapon.

- Since gear bonuses don't stack, think in terms of reinforcing different game effects, e.g., this item is all about how you interact with others, and this other one is all about AC, and this one is about critical damage, and so on.

Availability via the Parcels is very limited: per collective level, the number of characters minus one, period. This is the only hint of AD&D's built-in tensions concerning acquisition in the otherwise-egalitarian 4E. The only way to get "ahead of the game" is to get the Enchant Items ritual and start using it like gangbusters – and you can bet that's going to set up Skill Challenge and Quests of all sorts. On the plus side, those facilitate leveling-up.

- The Minor Quest + Skill Challenge + Enchant Item ritual, with helping, is perhaps the strongest direct player agency in the game, as it doesn't have far to expand to account for an entire level's advancement for the group.

Rituals

Rituals are the most valuable resource item in our setting. The game terms "books" and "scrolls" do not apply although the rules for them are retained as written. Think of books as tattooing or other inscribed work, and of scrolls as consumables such as psychedelic mushrooms or a dedicated dream-activity.

All the listed rituals are available, including the Practices from *Martial Power 2*, re-cast as either psionic or primal. Both mastering and performing them should be depicted in the most extreme manner possible for the chosen definition. As all rituals require skill rolls, group participation and helping-rolls are important components, as is the required time relative to encounters and rests.

To get rituals, roll the monetary reward into them, for both the basic cost to acquire them and the component cost to use them. The cost is the same for a "book" version which can be re-used but is limited by the character's level, and the "scroll" version which is one-use but usable by any character.

Acquiring the Enchant Item ritual is especially significant as it is the only way to get more magic items than the designated parcels described above, which are quite limited.

Others

Player and GM agency are also in play to acquire Boons and Grandmaster Training. I might offer such things or you might suggest they exist and act upon it via a Minor Quest.

- Boons are source of powers or features similar to magic items, provided as special rewards from powerful NPCs, or integrated with quests either at the beginning or end. They typically wear off after a couple of levels. "Littler" Boons are fair results for winning Skill Challenges and other successes at similar scope.
- Grandmaster Training introduces styles and schools to add unique options for existing powers, based on interesting NPCs and traditions of the setting. Freely conceiving of and inventing such things is recommended, especially since achieving them is obviously grounds for questing. The feat-based concept of Styles from *Martial Power 2* is especially suited to adapting into our hybrid classes.

You should be starting to see how NPCs, Major and Minor Quests, Rituals, and Boons might work – also that Grandmaster Training is very much a Tier issue rather than a one-time thing.

THE BIG PICTURE

Higher-level play focuses play into a heroic-mythic arc. 11th level puts your character at Paragon Tier, meaning you choose a specification or path for your character class. So one monk might become, for instance, a Ghostwalker and another, a Radiant Fist. The one you choose brings a whole raft of added-on powers and concepts. 21st level does the same again for the Epic Tier, much more profoundly – the characters become unique mythic heroes, like Godmind or Primal Avatar. If they make it to 30th level, only one more adventure remains, as the characters strive for one or another form of immortality.

For hybrid-class characters, all the options from both classes are eligible. A githzerai Ardent-Barbarian chooses any one of twenty-three Paragon paths (githzerai, Ardent, or Barbarian). For the Epic path, he or she could choose War Master for Ardent, or any from the nineteen options listed for everyone (subject to individual prerequisites).

The sweep of it all is impressive, especially for Epic level, which in our setting, basically means the characters become the actual gods of the new world they forge from the wreckage. Our own original pantheon with detailed origin myths – how cool is that?

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
Everyone	EPIC: <i>Psionic:</i> Godmind, Cosmic Soul, Demiurge, Eighth Seal, Master of Moments, Topaz Crusader; <i>Primal:</i> Glorious Spirit, Primal Avatar, Fang of the World Serpent, Fury of the Wild, Honored Ancestor, Mythic Spirit, Reincarnate Champion, World Tree Guardian; <i>Generic:</i> Deadly Trickster, Demigod, Eternal Seeker, Harbinger of Doom, Lorekeeper

Our plan

We'll play with full prep and experience as the rules decree, but eight-to-ten encounters per level for thirty levels is for younger people. The plan is snapshot oriented:

- Play at 2nd level, level up to 3rd, and play to level up to 4th
 - We're starting at 2nd rather than 1st in order to benefit conceptually from individualized feats from the start, as all characters must have the Hybrid Talent feat
- Upgrade the characters to 11th level (Paragon Tier), play to level up to 12th, and then to 13th to appreciate the Paragon-specific benefits at that point
- Choose one:
 - Upgrade the characters to 21st level, and play to level up once
 - Upgrade the characters to 26th level, and play to level up once
- Upgrade the characters to 30th level at the apex of Epic Tier, and play to level up to 31st and for the final quests