

HEROES OF CTHULU



PATRICK GAMBLIN

DESIGN ELEMENTS:
SHARED NARRATIVE CONTROL
DAMNATION METER AND ALL DECKED OUT
PERSONAL HORROR AND HOT BLOODED ACTION
SUPERHEROES WITHOUT COSTUMES AND MYTHOS WITHOUT INSANITY

This is my first attempt at a shared narrative sort of game. The idea is similar to the resolution of John Wick's Blood and Honour (which I think was based off of his Houses of the Blooded). The character's abilities give a bonus to trying to do something, but what playing a card really does is decides who gets to narrate the results of an action. Playing the highest card may let you narrate, but you can narrate failing if you want. In fact, you can narrate whatever you want as long as it fits the current situation and doesn't require negotiation with whoever is running the game (who is hereafter called the GM).

Other than that, though, it's intended to run much like most other 'traditional' games. The GM sets up the situations and scenes, runs the NPCs, and can veto descriptions that are too far out there (keeping in mind that the nature of this game is pretty far out there to begin with). As long as the GM and the players are in relatively similar frames of mind, the game is intended to be heavy on description and fun, and light on specific damage effects.

Welcome to Heroes of Cthulu, a game of going out in a blaze of glory fighting the good fight against evil cultists and the monsters of an uncaring universe.

APOLOGIES

First off, an apology to Rob Donoghue. One of his recent posts inspired part of this system, so I kinda borrowed the idea, though I mutated it quite a bit. Any problems in this system are doubtless from my mucking about with it, not from his original idea.

I should probably apologize to H. P. Lovecraft as well. I enjoy the setting he created, but he probably didn't envision someone doing this to it.

Lastly, I apologize to anyone reading this. It's very rushed and not fully fleshed out. I make no promises as to the quality of the writing.

THE IDEA

I've always wanted to do something involving superheroes and Cthulu. While reading through the contest rules, I saw several things that reminded me of this, so I decided to go for it.

THE SETTING

The setting can be any one where Cthulic horrors are appropriate, but the pulp era is what I was thinking of while working on this. Whatever creepy situation the GM and players would like to use, go for it. Have some fun.

The world is being invaded by otherworldly entities intent on turning it into their own private buffet and torture park. It's up to the heroes to keep this from happening, any way they can.

THE CHARACTERS

But who are the heroes? They're people who have had an encounter with the Mythos and come away... wrong. They have been tainted, corrupted by something from beyond. They escaped, but the corruption is with them still. The bad news is that the corruption will eventually take them over, turning them into the very monsters they fight. The good news is that until that happens, they get to use powers gained from their corruption to fight back. The more they use the powers, the more they draw upon their corruption, the quicker their doom comes. They could hide and avoid

it, but there's no cure, so why not try to take something evil with you?

You may notice that there are no character creation rules in the system section. They are written onto each character sheet instead. Just pick a type of Cthulic minion you want your character to have been corrupted by, and follow the rules written on the bottom left of the character sheet.

THE SYSTEM

The base resolution system uses cards to determine who gets to narrate the effects of a character's attempt to affect the scene. When a character attempts something their controller (player or GM) plays a card from a small hand of them that they draw at the beginning of the session. If no-one can oppose them, or chooses not to, they succeed and narrate the effects of their action. If someone does oppose them, and plays a higher-value card, that person is now in control of the narration. Each time someone takes over narration of the action, any other player (or the GM) may oppose them and take control by playing a higher card. When no-one can (or does) play a new higher card, the person who played the highest one narrates what happens.

When you go to take an action, or to react to an action of someone else's, you declare what you want to do and pick a way of doing it from your character's stats (Enduring, Smart, Forceful, Sneaky, and Charismatic). You may also pick a drive that is appropriate to the action. Draw a number of cards equal to the stat score and the drive score. You may draw an additional card if the character's occupation is appropriate to the action. Also, if you are reacting to someone else's action and the stat you chose is directly connected to the stat they used on the Elder Sign diagram (ie: Smart is directly connected to Charismatic and Sneaky, but not to the others), draw an extra card. After drawing these cards, play one. The rest stay in your hand for now.

THE HAND

At the start of each session, each player draws a hand of 3 cards. The GM draws 3 cards, plus one more for each player. At the end of each round (rounds are described in the next column), each player with less than 3 cards draws back up to 3. Each player with more than 3 discards down to 3. The GM does the same, but to (3 + the number of players) instead.

INITIATIVE

If more than one person wants to do something, each may let the other go first, if they wish. If they don't, they must each play a card from their hand. The highest card goes first. In case of a tie, discard the previous cards and play a new one for each.

ROUNDS

A round ends once each character in the scene (whether controlled by the players or the GM) has had a chance to attempt an action or pass.

UNOPPOSED ACTIONS

Meaning situations where a character is attempting something that is not opposed by another character, such as climbing a wall. In most cases, I'd suggest just letting them do it and move on with the more interesting stuff. If the action is dangerous or difficult, though, have them take the action as normal. Then you draw 2 cards if it is an average kind of action, 4 if it is difficult/dangerous, or 6 if it is very difficult/dangerous. If you have a card higher than theirs you can play it to take over narration if you want. Or you can play nothing, let them narrate it, and keep any high cards for later on.

MULTIPLE REACTIONS

If someone attempts an action and more than one person wants to oppose it, they all play a card to oppose. The one with the highest card wins. If there is a tie, use the suit to break the tie. Spades is best, followed by Hearts, then Diamonds, and lastly Clubs. If the suit is tied too, each flips a random card off their deck until the tie is broken. Only the original card played for the reaction is used for the winner.

TAKEN OUT/DEAD

Damage in Heroes of Cthulu is based solely on what the narration says and what makes sense for the situation. There are no wound levels or hit points. If you shoot someone and win narration, you choose if they are winged, knocked out, or killed, as long as one criteria is met. If an action is an attempt to knock out, capture, or kill a target, the card used to win narration must be a face card or else the attempt only stuns or shocks the target, causing them to only lose their next action. Characters who are Taken Out cannot take actions or defend themselves for the rest of the scene. If a taken out character is attacked, their player can play a card from their hand to represent the attack not hurting them as badly as intended, but they cannot draw on

any stats or drives. They can use the effects of powers that represent armour or similar things.

Characters who are killed are done. No more actions for them unless some powerful entity turns them into a minion or something like that, which is basically down to the GM and what's going on in the game. Player characters cannot be killed easily, as their corrupted essence protects them, even if they don't want it to. A kill result causes them to take 2 Stress points and get taken out for the scene instead.

POWERS

Powers put the characters on much more even footing with the monsters they face. If a power is used as part of an action, or comes into play in some way (such as a night gaunt's rubbery skin stopping an attack) just follow the rules listed with it.

DRAWING BEFORE AND AFTER

If a power says to Draw X Before a certain action, then draw X cards before you play one for the action. If it says Draw X After, then you draw X cards immediately after you play one for the action.

RUNNING OUT OF CARDS

If you want to take an action or reaction, but have no cards left and you have no stat, drive, occupation, or power to let you draw cards first, you automatically fail. This is a pretty unlikely situation, however.

STRESS AND CORRUPTION

Corruption is a measurement of how far gone the character is. It starts at a minimum of 1, and possibly much higher (though not higher than 9). During character creation, found on the character sheets at the end of this document, each player picks one or more powers for their character. Each power taken starts them off with one or more levels of corruption.

During play this may increase in one of two ways. One, if they character ever decides to give in to the corruption to get more power, they just decide which power they want and check it off. They now permanently have it, though they also immediately gain permanent corruption levels from it as if they had taken it during character creation.

Secondly, if the character ever has 10 stress points, erase the stress points and increase their corruption level by 1. Then give them 1 point to put toward a power. If they have enough points to get a new power, they get it without further corruption gain (they've

already gotten the corruption, they're just getting the power that goes with it).

Corruption levels never go away (with the exception of one negative power for ghosts). Stress only goes away if it is converted to corruption. This is why the characters are on borrowed time.

SPECIAL CARD DRAW

If a player has a crappy hand of cards, they can give their character 1 stress point to immediately draw 2 cards.

A QUICK SAMPLING OF ENEMIES

I'd like to have more here, as well as more detail on them, but time is a limited commodity. The various Cthulu-based rpgs should have plenty of useful information.

Cult Leader

Charismatic: 2
Enduring: 1
Forceful: 2
Smart: 3
Sneaky: 2

Abilities: May have one or both of the following rituals (plus any you want to make up).

Protection: The cultist can only be killed by red cards. Draw 2 After defending against an attack.

Pain: Affects one target. Draw 2 Before. Target is paralysed with pain (Taken Out) if successful.

Cult Follower

Charismatic: 1
Enduring: 1
Forceful: 2
Smart: 2
Sneaky: 1

Deep One

Charismatic: 0
Enduring: 2
Forceful: 3
Smart: 2
Sneaky: 1

Abilities: Can breathe freely underwater. Swims faster than any human. Hops as fast as a horse runs.

Draws 1 Before if taking an action in or from the water. advice, examples, probably things I haven't thought of.

Ghoul

Charismatic: 1
Enduring: 2
Forceful: 3
Smart: 2
Sneaky: 3

THANK YOU

To anyone who has decided to take a look.

Mi-Go

Charismatic: 0
Enduring: 2
Forceful: 2
Smart: 3
Sneaky: 1

Abilities: Flies as fast as a human walks/runs.

Nightgaunt

Charismatic: 0
Enduring: 1
Forceful: 2
Smart: 1
Sneaky: 4

Abilities: Flies as fast as a fast car.
Tickling attack: Draw 1 before. Cannot kill.

Serpent-People

Charismatic: 1
Enduring: 2
Forceful: 2
Smart: 3
Sneaky: 2

Abilities: Many can cast an illusion spell that makes them appear human.

Average Human

Charismatic: 1
Enduring: 1
Forceful: 1
Smart: 1
Sneaky: 1

STUFF NOT YET DONE

Larger/more detailed bestiary/enemies list, list of rituals, the influences of the elder beings, more GM

NAME:

OCCUPATION:

WHAT DRIVES ME:

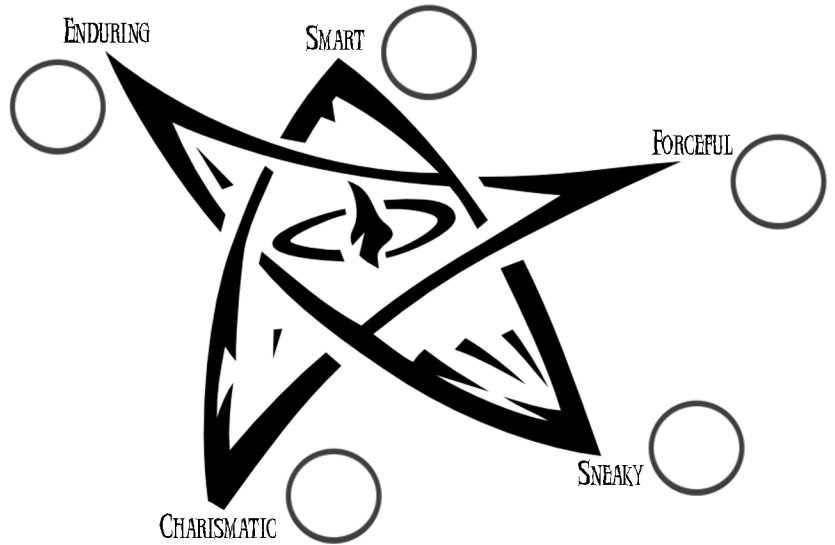
- ADRENALINE:
- CURIOSITY:
- PROTECTIVENESS:
- REVENGE:

DEEP ONE ESSENCE

POWERS:

- CLAWS AND TEETH (2): DRAW 1 BEFORE TAKING A CLAW OR BITE ACTION.
- GILLS (1): CAN BREATHE FINE UNDERWATER.
- HOPPING (2): CAN HOP ALONG AS FAST AS A HORSE CAN RUN.
- SCALES (3): CAN ONLY BE TAKEN OUT OR KILLED BY RED CARDS.
- WEBBED HANDS AND FEET (2): CAN SWIM FASTER THAN ANY HUMAN. DRAW 1 BEFORE TAKING AN ACTION IN THE WATER.

I AM BEING:



CORRUPTION: ○○○○○○○○○○○○

STRESS: ○○○○○○○○○○○○

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OCCUPATION:

WHAT DRIVES ME:

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GHAST ESSENCE

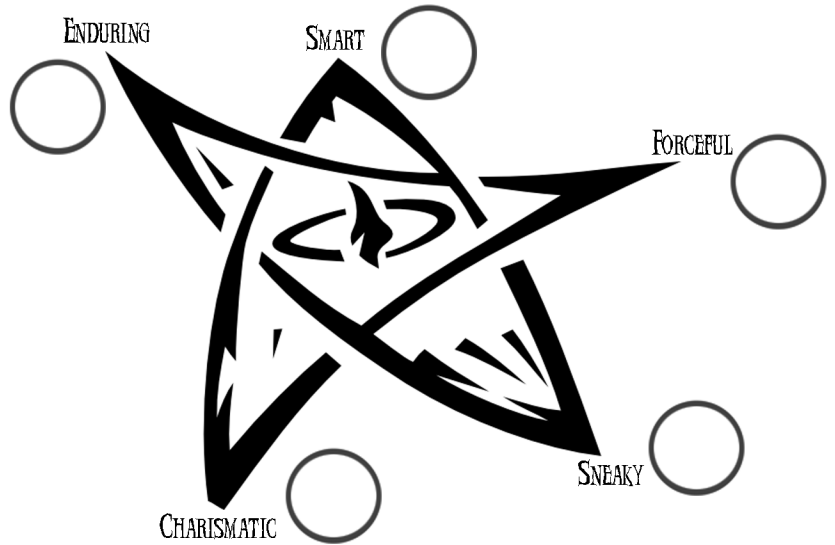
POWERS:

- ACUTE SENSES (2): CAN SEE IN THE DARK. DRAW 2 BEFORE MAKING A PERCEPTION CHECK.
- HUGE (2): AS BIG AS A HORSE. DRAW 2 BEFORE ANY ACTION WHERE BEING BIG IS GOOD. DISCARD 1 CARD AS A COST TO TAKE ANY ACTION WHERE BEING BIG IS BAD.
- ROUGH KNOTTY SKIN (2): DRAW 1 BEFORE REACTING TO A PHYSICAL ATTACK.
- AGILE (4): DRAW 2 BEFORE TAKING AN ATHLETICS OR FIGHTING ACTION.
- SWIFT (2): DRAW 1 BEFORE TAKING A CHASE ACTION.
- KILLED BY THE SUN (-2): REDUCE CORRUPTION LEVEL BY 2. EXPOSURE TO DIRECT SUNLIGHT INSTANTLY KILLS THE CHARACTER.

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GUG ESSENCE

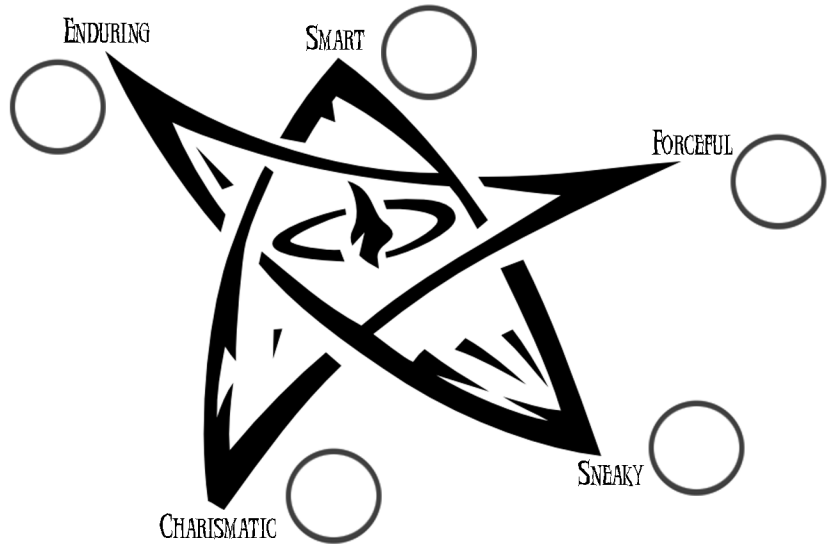
POWERS:

- HUGED (2): AS BIG AS A HORSE. DRAW 2 BEFORE ANY ACTION WHERE BEING BIG IS GOOD. DISCARD 1 CARD AS A COST TO TAKE ANY ACTION WHERE BEING BIG IS BAD.
- TALONS (2): DRAW 1 BEFORE MAKING A CLAW OR GRAB ACTION.
- THICK BLACK FUR (1): DRAW 1 AFTER BEING HIT BY AN ATTACK.
- YELLOW FANGED VERTICAL MOUTH (2): DRAW 2 BEFORE TAKING A BITE ACTION IF THE TARGET IS HELD.
- GIANT (3): MUST HAVE HUGED FIRST. AT THE START OF ANY ROUND, THE CHARACTER MAY TAKE 1 STRESS TO GROW AS BIG AS A SMALL HOUSE. DOUBLE THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF HUGED DURING THIS PERIOD. ENDS AT THE END OF THE ROUND.

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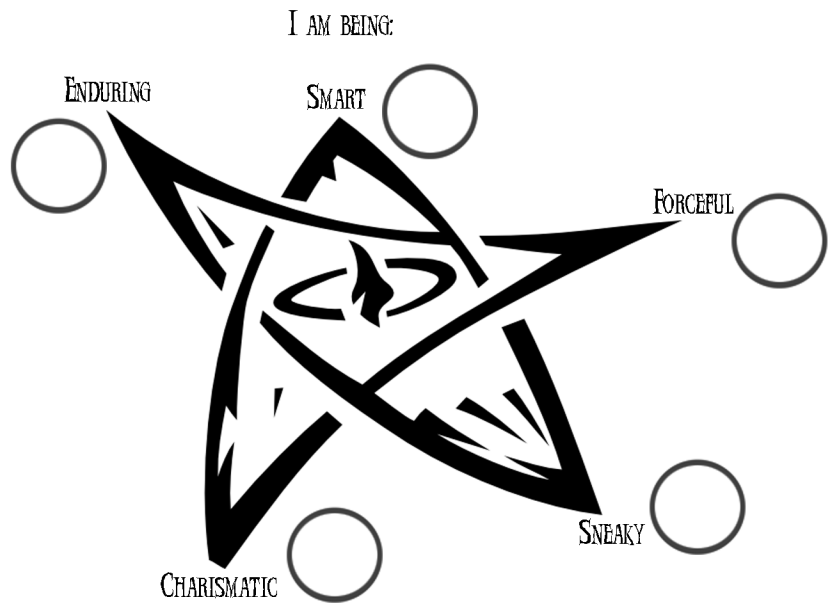
NIGHTGAUNT ESSENCE

POWERS:

- BARBED TICKLING TAIL (2): DRAW 1 BEFORE AN ATTEMPT TO INCAPACITATE.
- BLACK RUBBERY SKIN (3): CAN ONLY BE TAKEN OUT OR KILLED BY RED CARDS.
- FACELESS (1): CAN SEE IN THE DARK. CANNOT BE BLINDED OR CHARMED.
PERMANENTLY REDUCE CHARISMA TO 0.
- WINGS (4): CAN FLY FASTER THAN A HORSE CAN RUN. CANNOT FLY IF WINGS ARE INJURED OR BOUND.

CORRUPTION: ○○○○○○○○○○○○
 STRESS: ○○○○○○○○○○○○

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INITIATIVE: IF MORE THAN ONE PERSON WANTS TO TAKE AN ACTION AT THE SAME TIME, EACH SPENDS A CARD FROM THEIR HAND. THE HIGHER CARD WINS. IN CASE OF A TIE, NEITHER WINS. THEY MAY EACH SPEND ANOTHER CARD TO BREAK INITIATIVE IF THEY WANT TO.

MULTIPLE REACTIONS: IF MANY PEOPLE WANT TO OPPOSE AN ACTION, EACH SPENDS A CARD. THE ONE WITH THE HIGHEST RESULT WINS.

ROUNDS: ONCE EVERY PLAYER AND THE GM HAVE EACH TAKEN AN ACTION OR PASSED, THE ROUND ENDS. EACH PLAYER THEN DRAWS CARDS UNTIL THEY HAVE 3 IN HAND, OR DISCARDS DOWN TO 3 IF THEY HAVE MORE THAN THAT. THEN THE NEXT ROUND STARTS, IF THE SCENE STILL HAS THINGS THAT NEED TO BE RESOLVED, DISCOVERED, OR TOLD.

TAKEN OUT/DEAD: IF AN ACTION IS INTENDED TO TAKE SOMEONE OUT OF THE COMBAT OR KILL THEM, YOU MUST PLAY A FACE CARD FOR THE ACTION. OTHERWISE THE TARGET IS ONLY STUNNED, UNABLE TO ACT FOR THIS ROUND. PLAYER CHARACTERS WHO ARE 'KILLED' INSTEAD TAKE 2 STRESS POINTS AND ARE TAKEN OUT INSTEAD.

POWERS: CAN BE USED ANY TIME THEY ARE APPROPRIATE

SPECIAL CARD DRAW: ANY PLAYER MAY TAKE 1 STRESS BEFORE PLAYING A CARD TO DRAW 2 BEFORE PLAYING ONE

NAME:

OCCUPATION:

WHAT DRIVES ME:

- ADRENALINE:
- CURIOSITY:
- PROTECTIVENESS:
- REVENGE:

POLYP ESSENCE

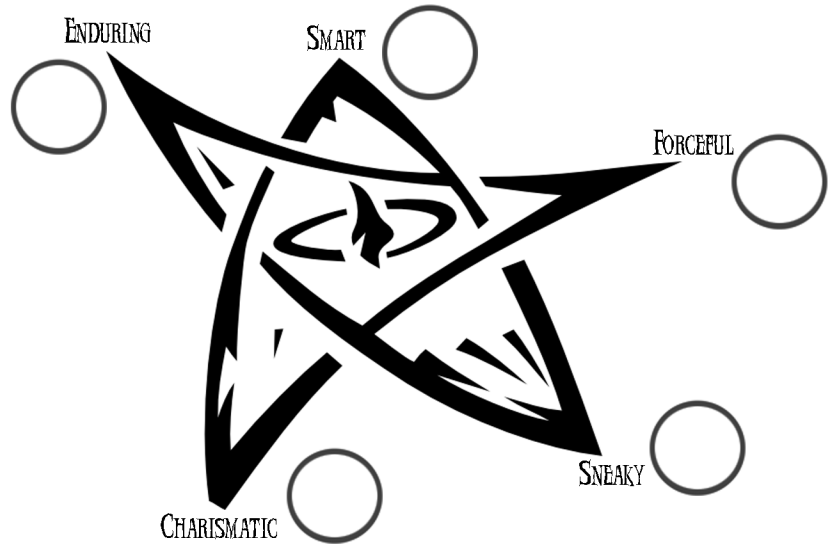
POWERS:

- INVISIBILITY (4): CANNOT BE SEEN OR ATTACKED. CANNOT MAKE ATTACKS.
- PLASTICITY (3): THE CHARACTER CAN STRETCH THEMSELVES OUT, BUT CANNOT GAIN MASS. DRAW 1 BEFORE ANY ACTION WHERE THIS IS USEFUL
- WINGLESS FLIGHT (3): CAN FLY AS FAST AS A HORSE CAN RUN.

CHARACTER CREATION:

- STEP 1) CHOOSE A NAME AND WHAT YOU CHARACTER DOES.
- STEP 2) TAKE THE NUMBERS 3, 2, 2, 1, AND 1 AND DISTRIBUTE THEM AMONGST THE STATS AROUND THE ELDER SIGN. 3 IS BEST, 1 IS WORST.
- STEP 3) SPLIT 3 POINTS BETWEEN THE DRIVES WITH NO MORE THAN 2 POINTS IN ANY ONE DRIVE
- STEP 4) CHECK OFF ANY NUMBER OF POWERS YOU WANT OFF OF THE LIST ABOVE. EACH POWER TAKEN ADDS PERMANENT CORRUPTION LEVELS TO THE CHARACTER. FILL THEM IN APPROPRIATELY. DON'T TAKE SO MANY THAT THE CORRUPTION LEVEL IS 10 OR HIGHER, OR ELSE YOU LOSE CONTROL OF THE CHARACTER.

I AM BEING:



CORRUPTION: ○○○○○○○○○○○○
 STRESS: ○○○○○○○○○○○○

THE CHARACTER'S CHARISMA STAT IS LIMITED BY HOW MANY UNCHECKED CORRUPTION CIRCLES ARE LEFT. PERMANENTLY REDUCE CHARISMA IF THE NUMBER OF CIRCLES LEFT IS LOWER.

RULES GUIDE:

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