

Karma Masters

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The Shadowrun Companion presents some pretty decent rules dealing with the conversion of Karma to cash, and visa versa. The primary problem I have with these guidelines is that they don't explain exactly how this transfer takes place. Karma transference isn't something that should be taken lightly - you're essentially exchanging part of your soul and past for money - and it definitely shouldn't be dealt with via rules that don't involve role-playing.

I've actually had a makeshift set of rules dealing with karma transference on the books for quite a while. For the benefit of those who wish to deal with the subject on a more thorough basis than that presented in the Companion, I present the following optional rules. I use the word 'rules' lightly; this is the kind of subject I deal with on a fairly informal and fluid basis.

The Basics

The key element that makes karma transfers possible in my games is a magician archetype known as a Karma Master. Karma Masters are usually shamanic due to the discipline's more thorough grasp of the ethereal, natural elements involved in existence, magical theory, and an individual's connection to the natural world in general. (Mages tend to view the world in a more concrete and calculated manner). Although shamanic Karma Masters are the most common, Masters that derive their skills from other orders also exist.

The thought patterns of a Karma Master exists in a way that they perceive all elements of past, present and future as being integrally intertwined, essentially existing as a single entity, usually referred to as 'what is'. This allows them to perceive the existence of Karma (i.e. the collection of experience) as a force that can be dealt with in the present tense as easily as it could in any other frame of time. To put it another way, a Karma Master who viewed a location with a high background count would not feel the echo of events that occurred before their arrival, instead feeling the events as if they were occurring in real time. In turn, a Karma Master doesn't view karma as a shadow of experience, they view it as a very real and tangible force that can be felt as easily now as it was when the events that generated the karma took place. An individual gifted with this philosophy is therefore able to grab these experiences before they become shadows.

Needless to say, such a philosophy makes living in any populated or active area of the world a bit difficult, (imagine seeing every event in the history of your life simultaneously). Thus, it is extraordinarily rare that anybody finds a Karma Master living outside of the most rural, remote locations on earth. (Antarctica is a favorite home of Karma Masters). An unfortunate side effect of living completely alone and being able to view the three time tenses as one is an almost unparalleled degree of insanity. Basically, Karma Masters are completely nuts and should be role-played as such.

The Exchange

Karma Masters find it incredibly easy to take and give karma, usually in a ceremony lasting only a few minutes. The ceremony itself has nothing to do with the karma exchange, varies from Master to Master, and is usually quite weird, as would be any ritual generated by somebody with no grasp of how 'normal' people perceive reality. It's not really known why Karma Masters even perform the ritual, although most people theorize that they do it because they have nothing better to do. Karma Masters don't go around promoting their skills, either, and it's probably safe to say that the first individual to undergo the

procedure discovered the existence of the exchange merely by chance.

Karma For Money

When it comes to payment, money is almost insignificant; a Karma Master is usually hundreds or thousands of miles away from so much as a Stuffer Shack. This is not to say that the ritual is free. In order to perform the procedure that gives an individual Karma, the Karma Master tends to demand some of the most extraordinarily weird forms of payment anybody can possibly imagine. Payment can range from items of subsistence (food, building materials, electrical generators, lights, satellite trids, fuel), to strange artifacts (antiques located in museums or personal collections), to favors (a run against a corporation or government), and so on. It appears that most of these requests are made on a whim, an example being a run to damage a corporation with whom the Karma Master has no connection whatsoever. Some argue, however, that these apparent whims may actually be important in some detached way since, although their perceptions are confused, a Karma Master can see into what we term 'the future'.

Money For Karma

When an individual gives a Karma Master karma in exchange for money, the payment they receive is only a bit less weird than what they would have to pay in order to do the exchange in reverse. The Karma Master may give them spell formulae, artifacts, valuable information regarding a corporation or invention, precious stones, and so on. Sometimes these forms of payment can get extremely strange, such as the time a Karma Master gave a runner the deed to a warehouse in Seattle which turned out to contain over 50,000 nuyen worth of fresh cupcakes.

Exchange Rate

This is pretty much up to the GM, although any rate you set should be approximately 50% more for mundanes than magicians. This is primarily because the exchange is easier to perform on magicians than mundanes, but also due to the fact that SR game mechanics usually require more karma from magicians than non. I generally use a rate of 2,500 nuyen per point for magicians, and about 5,000 for mundanes. The actual form of payment can vary dramatically (I don't want a sammy waltzing in with 500 grand, hoping to walk out with 100 points of karma), but all goods exchanged should basically equal the above amounts.

Side Effects

I occasionally introduce mild side effects which result from undergoing karma exchanges. Since giving or receiving karma essentially involves the exchange of aspects of a person's past, individuals undergoing the process may experience some problems with reality.

Somebody who exchanges karma for cash has the tendency to feel detached from some of their memories. They will always remember the events involved, but won't feel nearly as 'close' to the original experience as they were before the exchange. It is up to the GM to decide which events the PC loses emotional contact with, though these events should at least coincide with the time period during which the karma was received. For example: An individual who falls in love with someone, and then sells off the karma relating to that experience, may have problems recalling that emotional state.

When an individual receives karma for cash, he or she is essentially receiving part of the past of someone

else, usually a past visitor to the Karma Master. The individual may experience the feeling that they've done something or been somewhere without having any idea exactly what they did or where they went. If the emotional content of a past event was especially strong (i.e. the original owner of the karma killed his or her parents) the PC may feel extreme guilt or anger for no identifiable reason.

Finding A Karma Master

Word of mouth. (Yeah, it's a cop out).