

Metempsychosis: Abyss of Horrors

An unforgiving and punishing solitaire card game by Waclaw Traier

Rulebook v1.02 – for the physical version © 2020, War Claw Games

Mystics tell us that in the very principle of everything, the absolute Bliss lingers, from which all the forms of life rise as generous gifts full of Good and Beatitude. But what if the mystics are wrong?

What if the absolute being, that ur-consciousness at the root of every creation, is in itself an unbearable void and darkness, a miserable abyss that has to vomit creations to amuse itself at least a little, to give some, even if pathetic ones, distinct borders to infinity and eternity, unbearable in their utter vastness?

You are a soul born from such an abyss, capturing all forms of being in a desperate try to reach the higher steps of the existence ladder, hoping for some redemption once. You will have to go through the sequence of nightmarish incarnations, endure various evils of different states of being before you can catch some stable point where you could live far from the darkness of the abyss and its tentacles full of pain and despair.

In this game, you represent a soul trying to break free from the cycle of nightmarish incarnations by enduring a right sequence of them, building an octave from cosmic tones and getting to the higher, more peaceful level of being.



The game consists of:

The Pile

- 28 Nightmare-Incarnation cards (called also “a tone” card) – with letters and symbols at the upper left corner
- 6 Keeper cards – with symbols (no letters) in the upper middle

The table setting

- 4 Desperate cry cards – with number (1, 2, 3, 4) in the upper left corner
- 1 Willpower counter card, with Level 2 willpower counter on its back
- 1 Brief rules-reminder card to cover the counter; with sorting card instructions on its back

For the gameplay you might find this information useful:

- There are 7 letters/tones, each letter is 4times in the pile.
- There are 9 symbols, each symbol is 5times in the pile.

A tip: You can use ordinary **card sleeves** to cover the cards, even the ones with opaque backs, as the backs of the cards are not important in the game (with only one exception the willpower counter card, but you can leave it unsleeved).

The rulebook may seem long, but there is a lot of repetition and slow gradual going for more details in it, as well as hints and tips beside the rules as such, so, don't be afraid to start reading. A picture examples of a part of a gameplay in the second booklet may help too.

Playing the game

1) Setup

- Put all 4 **desperate cry** cards on the table.
- Put the **willpower counter card** on the table, Level 1 side facing up. Set the willpower on it to 12 by covering all other numbers by a card (use the card with the brief rules-reminder for this purpose).
- Shuffle all the other cards – these now make “**the pile**”.
- **Draw 6 cards** from the top of the pile. Once drawn, they are being referred as being “in your hand”, but as this is a single-player game, you can have them – and it is recommended – laid out on the table for better overview and comfort; only take care to distinguish which cards are “in your hand” and which are “on the table” – for example by keeping your hand cards in the lower row, the played cards in the middle of the table and the desperate cry cards in the top row, with the pile on right or left, next to the pile of discarded cards (“the tomb”) after you discard something – and the willpower counter above or under these piles.
- Now take your move! (Well, just after you read the rest of the rules.)



2) Turn structure and possible moves

Turn structure

- You can take any move if the previous one has already ended in full. (For example, you cannot play another card before the playing of the last one ends totally, with all the card drawing and resolving effects). You also, of course, have to have enough “resources” for the particular move. Apart from that nothing prevents you from playing, and it is always your turn in the solitaire game... So, choose one:

Possible moves

- **Incarnate your soul into a nightmarish life:** Set a card with a letter from your hand into the sequence (in the sequence this nightmare now plays a particular cosmic tone on your path to redemption). If there is no sequence yet, you can establish one by playing any tone you want from your hand. Now, **draw as many cards** as the number in the lower right corner of the played card indicates (usually one; exceptionally two or three). Put the drawn card(s) **into your hand face down**. Then **resolve the played card's effects, from top to bottom**. After the effects are played, **uncover the drawn card(s)** and you can take another move (we will repeat “how to play a card” in more detail below, so no need to stop and meditate here, rather read on to get general overview before focusing on details).
- **Face a keeper:** Put the keeper from your hand on the table. The following is the same as in the case of a tone card, with only that difference that you put the card into the tomb instead of into the sequence after resolving its effects, so: **Draw as many cards** as the number in the lower right corner of the played keeper card indicates (usually two, rarely three). Put the drawn cards **into your hand face down**. Then, **resolve the keeper card's effects, from top to bottom**. After the effects are played, put the keeper into the tomb, **uncover the drawn cards** and you can take another move. (The keepers in your hand prevent you from winning the game, so if you are not able to get rid of them by other means, you will have to face them at worst; see below.)
- **Dive into the abyss:** Discard **two cards** from your hand **with either the same symbol or the same letter** (if a card has various symbols, one of them suffices for this purpose): **Look at the top two cards of the pile**, then choose **one of them to put it into your hand** and **put the other one on the bottom of the pile**.
- **Cry desperately for mercy and help of higher beings:** Use a “Desperate Cry” card. Resolve its effect and **turn the card face down** – you will not be able to use it again during this game.

On **level 2** (after you finished the first aim of the game, i.e. built a full octave and get rid of all keepers in your hand – see below) you get these additional moves (as they are marked on the level 2 counter card too) that you can repeat as long as you are able to pay for them:

- If your will power is 14 or less, you can sacrifice 3 willpower points to return 1 chosen card from the tomb to the pile. Shuffle the pile.
- If your will power is 8 or less, you can sacrifice 3 willpower points to draw a card.

Note: Do not bother with these level 2 moves too much now when you are getting familiar with the rules for the first time, they are for “master level” game.

3) How to win or lose

Aim of the game

- **The aim of the game is to build a cosmic octave – a full set of tones, specific in that way that it begins and ends by the same letter** (you got to the higher level of existence by setting the same cosmic tone for the second time): i.e. to build a sequence of cards either from A to A (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, a), or from B to B (b, c, d, e, f, g, a, b), or from C to C (c, d, e, f, g, a, b, c) and so on, while you are deciding its character during the game yourself. It does not mean that your first played tone must be the beginning and ending one (you can even put G in front of A and you can start with E, for example, and build the sequence from C to C in the end, depending on which cards you get during the game).
- Possible octaves:
- ABCDEFGA
- BCDEFGAB
- CDEFGABC
- DEFGABCD
- EFGABCDE
- FGABCDEF
- GABCDEFG
- **Any decision making about winning the game takes time when an ongoing move ends** – it means, if at one moment you have all the game's aims fulfilled, but there are some effects waiting to be resolved, you have to resolve them and check then if there is everything in the winning state. (Be sure to even draw and uncover the card(s) you have drawn when placing the final tone into the sequence: you might draw a keeper and now you would have to get rid of him to win.)

Continuing to the level 2 playing (master level – feel free to skip when reading for the first time):

- When you completed this task without having a keeper in your hand (see below for the rules about keepers), you can try to complete **the Level 2 aim**: to build such a sequence that would have the same letter in its beginning, center and end. (Again, it does not need to be the same letter which was two times in your sequence when you get here.) Possible variants:
- ABCDEFGABCDEFGA
- BCDEFGABCDEFGAB
- CDEFGABCDEFGABC
- DEFGABCDEFGABCD
- EFGABCDEFGABCDE
- FGABCDEFGABCDEF
- GABCDEFGABCDEFG
- When stepping on **Level 2** (reminder: after first sequence is made and no keeper is in hand): Turn the willpower counter card, now set your **willpower to 15** and you get **new abilities** once they are uncovered with lowering willpower (marked on the card; and see also above in "Possible moves" section). Then **shuffle whole your tomb back to the pile** and after that (yeah, after that – not before the shuffling!) **discard your whole hand** and **draw 6 new cards**. (The desperate cry cards are not refreshed, the ones you have used are exhausted, while the ones that have remained, remain available still.) – It is all summed up also on Level 1 card.
- Completing the level 2 means full deliverance of your soul. (But you do not need to follow this aim, it is even way harder than the base game.)

Beware – a trap of the keepers!

If you have reached the octave too easy (if all cards appropriate for the sequence have kept coming to you suspiciously smooth and you maybe even have not have to use any desperate move card), it might have been a trap of the keepers! They have allowed you here on purpose and soon you would find yourself as enslaved in the new level of being as you had been before, if not more, only maybe not noticing it at first (as most of us humans are in our everyday lives) – so, **you have to continue Level 2 playing** to get to the higher state where these cunning creatures cannot reach. (I.e.: While after a battle that gets you rid of most of your resources – willpower, cards in the deck, desperate moves – continuing in Level 2 playing is voluntary, in this case, IT IS OBLIGATORY.)

Sequence rules – summary and clarification

- You are trying to build a sequence starting and ending with the same letter (the same cosmic tone) and you have freedom to choose by what letter to start and by what to follow, the only condition is that **there cannot be a gap among cards/tones in any moment**. You can, for example, start with A and then put G on the left, then you can put B to the right, or F to the left and so on, freely, but never to put D next to B, waiting for C to be drawn later – see also in the rules below.

Rules

- A card without a letter (“**Keeper**”; a mighty astral being that wants to prevent you from breaking the chains of miserable incarnations) can be played without any reference to cards in the game...
- ...while a card with a letter-tone (“**Nightmare-Incarnation**”; representing a miserable life that you incarnate during your journey to higher states of the reincarnation ladder) can be played only as a subsequent or follow-up member of the sequence already on the table (if there is no card in the sequence yet, you can choose freely which letter-tone to play: you do not need to start with A).
- **You cannot win the game as long as there is any keeper in your hand**: you need to get rid of all keepers (at worst by playing them and facing their effects) at least when your sequence is finished, if you did not manage before.
- If you are in the situation where the sequence is complete, but there is a keeper in your hand, you cannot attach other cards to the sequence (in order to move somewhere through drawing a card), it is sealed now till you get rid of the keeper or admit your loss.
- You have **12 willpower points** in the beginning of the game. Going through some terrible nightmarish lives, facing keepers or other acts exhaust this power of yours; once your **willpower is 0, you have become an utter slave of the abyss**, wandering forever through the reincarnation spiral with no hope for redemption (game over).
- **Once there are 0 cards in the pile, you lose**. Cards in the pile represent possible new lives (though nightmarish) to be incarnated; and once there is none, your imagination has dried out and you have been trapped in the circle of eternal return of the same.
- Third possible game over is when you get stuck in the nightmares, with no way to move anywhere: when you are not able to play anything (but see below: very often there is a way, though it is not evident at the moment).

How to play a card – reminder and clarification

- 1) Put the card from your hand into the game (in case of a cosmic tone card, embed it into its place of the sequence – to the right or to the left –, or, in case of a keeper card, just put it in the center of the table).
- 2) Then **draw** the number of cards marked by the number **at the lower right corner** and put them into your hand **facing down**.
- 3) Now resolve the played card's effects (see them below) **from top to bottom**.
- 4) If the card is a keeper put him on the top of the tomb (discard pile) facing up (in case it was a tone, it is now embedded in the sequence) ...
- 5) ... and finally uncover the card(s) you have drawn (or uncover all cards in case one of the card's effects was random discarding from your hand, which had made you to cover all the cards during resolving this effect – see below).

Card effect symbols meaning

The following card effects represent various ways how an incarnation into a particular life affects your soul. And because you are incarnating only miserable and nightmarish lives in your current state of existence, there is always some harm. Only make sure these harms do not deprive you of all your will and freedom!



: You lose (X) willpower points. Move a card covering the willpower points counter to the new position.



: You discard (X) cards at random from your hand. Turn all cards in your hand face down, shuffle them and choose the appropriate number of cards to be discarded. (Remember that you already have one or two cards more in your hand as you drew a card from playing the one with this effect – you do not uncover this card before resolving the effect; on the contrary, you turn all the other cards to this face down position too and then you shuffle them and resolve discarding. You uncover all the cards in your hand in the very end of a “playing a card” move. See also above or in the picture booklet with the gameplay example.)



: Put (X) cards from the top of the pile to the tomb. (Remember, again, that you **first** drew a card or cards, facing down, before this effect resolves, so you never discard a card that is on the top of the pile at the very moment of playing a card with this effect.)



(broken treble clef): Shuffle X cards from the opposite side of the sequence back to the pile. (If you play this card as the first card of the sequence, do this effect with the card itself, after drawing a card(s) and resolving its other effects). Anyway, card with this symbol cannot be played, if there are less than X cards in the sequence (once you count also the played card).
Note: there are treble clefs with only “1” value in the basic version of the game, but the rule is general, ready to serve eventual expansions.

How to play

You already know all the rules, but you may find these tips useful for setting your game up and to have smooth gameplay (see also the picture booklet with a short example of a gameplay).

- When you draw your cards, put them on the table and sort them as you like, for example, you can sort them from lowest letter to the highest and keep keepers little aside. You can also use card symbols as a sorting mechanism: remember that the symbols have no other effect in game than that they allow you to discard them to look on the top two cards of the pile, put one into your hand and the other on the bottom of the pile (the move called “diving into the abyss”). You will find that **this mechanism is the core of the game**. But mind that every move like this shortens the number of cards in your hand by one.
- How to get rid of the keepers in your hand: there are three ways of doing it: one is uncertain one, depending on them being **randomly discarded** during resolving a discarding effect on a played card; second way is the nicest one: to have a card with a same symbol as the keeper has (one same symbol suffices), so you could discard these two cards for the effect described in the end of the last paragraph (**diving into the abyss**); and the third way of getting rid of a keeper is to face him: **play the keeper card** to have the effects on him resolved, but to draw more cards (remember that you always draw cards before the effects resolve but you keep them face down till it resolves – this “face down” thing also suggest to play with your “hand” right-down on the table, not with cards “in your hand” verbatim).
- **Take your time** before any move, especially before the first one, because there is no time limit and you play alone.
- You should put cards into the tomb one across the other in the manner that the **card letters and symbols are visible**. In every moment you should have, thanks to the tomb uncovered like this, an overview if there are still enough cards you need in the pile (or you might want to use the desperate move working with shuffling half of your tomb back to the pile). It also allows you to see how many keepers are there left in the pile.

Hints and tips

- Numbers on desperate cry cards are only indicative, to be able to refer to them in this rulebook and to get a stable table setting and easier orientation on the table on repeated plays, the numbers have no real impact on the game (you can use the moves in any order you need or not to use them at all).
- Try to always have in mind that you can set A after G or G before A... and that the sequence does not need to start with A at all.
- You can play keeper as well. Yes, facing him hurts, but once you finish him, you get a card advantage (because you have just played one card and drew two or even more).
- You will probably need all, or almost all desperate moves to be used to complete the game, so do not feel like losing when you use it – mind that EVERY move in this game is punishing and self-injuring in this way or another, there is no way to finish it unharmed and in full glory.
- Maximum number of cards in your hand is not limited, only remember that you draw 6 in the beginning of the game, and that your entering level 2 makes you (after reshuffling the tomb into the pile) discard all cards in your hand and to draw new 6 (it means the more cards you have in your hand at the moment, the fewer cards will now be left in the pile – and what more, with all the keepers lurking in these diminished numbers of cards, because you could not have any keeper in hand when stepping on level 2, as they would not let you win the level 1 game).

- Mind also that the more cards you draw, the more probably you will have a keeper in hand, so maybe try not to draw more cards than you really need.
- The order of cards in the tomb is not stated, you can assort cards there as you like (for example by their letter so you could see how many cards of this particular letter are still left in the pile – if there are not enough, you can try to help you through desperate move 4).
- Again, try not to draw more cards than you need – for example if you have an opportunity to draw more cards, consider if you really need them, because every drawn card means less cards in your pile and remember that the most common game over in this game is getting rid of all the cards in the pile and that winning is always very close to losing.
- Mind that another possible cause of losing is when you get stuck with no possibility to play any card from you hand or to use it for the “diving”. So, make sure to strive for cards not only to build the sequence but to have such letters or symbols that would allow you to “dive” further. (Mind also that there are two desperate cry cards helping with this situation, but one is conditioned with losing half your willpower and the second with not having a keeper in hand and both can be – as every desperate cry card – used only once.)
- If you think you get stuck, be cautious: there often is a possibility that you don’t see, for example, playing a keeper card (even if you have to use a desperate move to regain your willpower which this keeper has sucked out) – these possibilities are kind of hidden, because one is usually used to games which are not “flagellant/suicidal” and a desperate option that takes you so many “life” or resources does not seem to be an option at first.
- The game is balanced in such a way that the loss lurks often very close to winning, so do not celebrate too early: you may for example even draw a keeper when you play last tone to the sequence and it will be even harder now to get rid of him, because the sequence is sealed and you cannot play a tone to draw another card that would help you against him. So, always prepare for the worst!
- If you sort your cards in your hand that way that keepers are set aside, remember to include them in your hand when shuffling your hand for the reason of random discarding. You may forget to add them if they are off to the side.
- The wording on desperate cry cards is deliberately brief; if you have a problem understanding them, this might help: **Desperate Cry 2** might be rewritten like this: Count the cards in the pile, then keep discarding the cards from the top of the pile till you discard half of it, rounded up: heal your willpower to full (12 on level 1, 15 on level 2). **Desperate cry 3**: If there is no Keeper in your hand, discard your hand, then draw (X) cards where (X) is the number of cards you have discarded. **Desperate Cry 4**: Shuffle half of the cards in the tomb, chosen randomly and rounded down, and 1 card from each side of the sequence into the pile. (If there are fewer than two cards in the sequence at the moment, you cannot use this desperate cry move; but this situation is highly unlikely.) Or: Take the most left & right card of the sequence plus random 1/2 of the tomb, r. down, and shuffle these into the pile.
- You can notice that all the desperate cards use “the hostility rule”: when you are halving something, the rounding goes always against you: you are losing the bigger half (as in case of sacrificing your willpower or cards in the pile) and gaining the smaller half (as in case of random cards from the tomb returning back to the pile).

Now you know everything important and you can start playing. Or you can look at the short example of a gameplay to the second PDF booklet to be more certain about some of the core rules.

Though this rulebook was long (**forgive me my verbiage, dear player!**), the game itself speaks more in **the language of visual art**. During playing, you can try focusing not only on symbols, letters and the stuff that builds the technical part of the gameplay, but also on the scenes depicted on the cards. Some cards even make one half of an artwork that continues on another card, and you can try to find them all. Each artwork in this game represents a crucial scene or an “essential spirit” from a miserable life you have to endure on your soul’s way to redemption.

And the keeper paintings ... well, they just... represent keepers, the lost souls full of hate and envy, who do not want anyone to get on the higher level that they are themselves. Yeah, each and every game – no matter how philosophical or mystical its story is – needs tough bosses with big muscles, odd sickles, whips and hammers, if you ask me.

Thanks

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Last but not least I thank you, brave player, for your interest in the game and for your support! Enjoy and stay tuned, more games coming soon.

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