

House Rules: Karma Points

Version 1.03 (These rules may be modified, removed, added to at any time, buyer beware)

Karma Points are a new resource intended to give players a greater control over their own heroism. Quite often, dice and fate can rob players of what could have been a very cool moment. While Karma Points are not the complete solution to being cool – that is up to the player, ultimately – it can give an occasional boost when it matters most. This can mean that characters are slightly more powerful than those found in a 4E game that doesn't use the system. A DM who finds that the players now walk over any opposition should count the characters as one level higher when estimating encounter difficulty. The system takes some aspects of action points found in 3.5 Eberron, but merges it with the model from 4E. Here are the highlights for Karma Points.

Replaces Action Points

Part of the problem with Action Points is they're dependably boring. You can only use one every encounter. You gain one every other encounter. There are times when the smart player will use an Action Point because it's the tactically smart thing to do – not because it's needed, or even thematically interesting. But don't worry – the Karma Point system allows for the mimicking of Action Points. This is important for various Paragon, Feat and Class abilities that utilize that mechanic. It should also be noted that particularly thrifty and well-played characters might even be able to use an Action Point every encounter – or even twice!

Assumes and Rewards Role-Playing

This system will only work if the players are involved and interested in role-playing. Those who are uninvolved (or uninterested?) will find themselves at somewhat of a mechanical loss with this system. But even the truly near dead at the game table will only find themselves with less equivalent Action Points than their more active peers. Of course, this begs the question to those players – why are you at my table?

Persistent

Karma Points are not lost or reset from session to session. You can have as many as you wish, and there is no maximum amount that can be saved. This means you can be miserly with your Karma, spending it only on those situations that you consider important. Whether thrifty or free with your Karma, you can count on those points never being 'lost' – only used.

Gives An Edge

There are times when you need a little help. You miss your Daily in the final confrontation with your arch-nemesis; you fail to make a perception roll when you just know a rogue is lurking; you fail a death saving throw after being taken out by a kobold. While some of these situations *can* be interesting, they have a tendency to make the player feel very anti-heroic. Because of this, Karma Points can be spent to add dice to a particular roll. This can mean that every so often a player may elect to spend (for example) points on an extra actions, extra dice, or other benefits in a single combat. The balance lies in the fact that they can only do this by being less effective in previous battles, of course.



Earning Karma Points

Karma Points can be earned by only one means: Making the story interesting and fun for everyone. Descriptive (but fast!) combat actions, making your character more 'human', being involved in role-playing situations.

Every Combat Encounter

+1 to +3 KP

Players can earn between 1 and 3 Karma Points per Combat Encounter. They are earned by describing each of their character's actions with both speed and style. Utilizing scenery also helps. Fast and simple descriptors are better than slow and complex ones. Simply having your character involved in a combat will always gain you one action point.

Roleplaying Encounter/Skill Challenge

+1 KP

Simply participating in a roleplaying encounter or skill challenge gains you an action point. You needn't be the focus of the encounter or challenge. As long as you are involved, you'll get the point.

Writing

+1 KP

If you write for the game, you gain additional Karma Points (gained at the time when the writing is emailed or handed to the DM). This includes backgrounds, questionnaires, or summaries.

Situational Drawback, Minor

+1 KP

This means that you voluntarily put your character into a slightly disadvantaged situation (with usually no mechanical penalty). This is normally done for roleplaying purposes as befitting the personality or history you've given your character. Examples:

- Refusing to wear a mask to the governor's ball because your culture feels it is shaming;
- Spending the night with a queen's handmaiden because your character has a weakness for women;
- Spending your gold on the 'good life' – drink, women, fine clothes, or even donations to your favorite church. Often this won't be for any mechanical benefit, but it does create what can be a sense of realistic behavior for your character. The actual amount varies, based upon your level (for example, at level 6 this equates to 90 gp). This may be done once per session, and requires a minimum of a few hours (in-game time).

Situational Drawback, Major

+2 KP

This means that you voluntarily put your character into a greatly disadvantaged situation (but with usually no mechanical penalty). Note that this may end or create storylines based upon your decision! Examples:

- Refusing to negotiate with an eladrin diplomat because of your racial prejudice – despite being the party diplomat;
- Slapping a duke in front of his court because he insulted your closest friend;
- Rescuing your betrothed when she's been kidnapped.

Mechanical Penalty, Minor

+2 KP

You allow your character to suffer a minor penalty to an attack, skill check, or anything else that is governed by dice. Commonly, this is done to reflect your personality, beliefs, or other situations that you simply believe should cause you a problem. Examples:

- Refusing to use a magic sword because your character believes it's cursed;
- Assuming a penalty to a Climbing check because you recently took damage from touching a pool of acid;
- Due to a mystical forest with undead trees, you take a penalty to Nature checks because you think it may not apply to your character's knowledge.

Mechanical Penalty, Major

+4 KP

You allow your character to suffer a major penalty to an attack, skill check, or anything else that is governed by dice. This way of earning Karma Points should be rarely used or sought after, as it can have significant repercussions (and not just for you). Typically, this use would be deeply tied into your character's background.

- You count your character as Weakened when fighting a particular sect of demons, as he is deathly afraid of them;
- When you find out your mother is a vampire, you refuse to engage her in combat, tearfully leaving it to your allies;
- Taking a severe penalty to your Perception rolls after being blinded in an important encounter, ruling that you won't regain it until you visit a healer.

DM Fiat

+1 KP

The DM can also grant additional Karma Points for a variety of reasons. Specific acts of good roleplaying; coming up with unique solutions to problems; keeping detailed notes on the campaign;



Spending Karma Points

You may only spend Karma Points for your own character. There is no limit to how many may be spent in a particular turn or combat, but some uses do have limitations as to how often they may be called upon.

Bonus Dice

Costs 1 KP

By spending a Karma Point, you may apply a bonus of +1d4 to any single d20 dice roll (exception: Saving Throws). This cannot trigger a critical hit. The bonus dice must be rolled after the d20 roll, but before the effects or resolution of that roll are known. There is no maximum amount that can be applied to a particular roll, but all the dice that are to be used must be rolled at the same time.

Activate Magic Item

Costs 1KP, 2KP, 3KP, etc.

Normally, a character may activate magic item daily powers once per day (or twice at paragon, three times at epic). Due to the lifting of 'milestones' as a mechanic, players can now spend Karma Points to activate additional uses. These uses must come from different magic items, as per the standard rules. Each use during a particular day costs one more point than the previous use, i.e. 1 Karma Point for the first use in a day, 2 Karma Points for the second use in the same day, etc.

I Have That!

Costs 2 KP

The party may spend two Karma Points to "remember" they brought a non-magical common item with them (retroactively adding the item to their inventory), to find one in the area, or to find something that makes a good improvised version. Improvised versions may have a few drawbacks but may be the only option when there's little or no chance of finding the real item in the area.

Moving On

Costs 3 KP

Sometimes an encounter isn't working. No one's into it or the solution to the problem is eluding everyone. In these cases the party can decide to spend 3 Karma Points to suggest the action "flash forward" to the next encounter (past the current fight or death trap, out of an ugly social situation that no one's excited about, etc.). If the DM agrees, he may concoct whatever story or circumstances are appropriate to explain the intervening time — indeed, the party is giving him this right by enacting this perk — though the DM may ask for ideas if he is at a loss and/or would like to include the players in the narrative. All rewards from the encounter are forfeit, including XP and treasure. Note that this is the only option for spending Karma Points that may come from multiple characters.

Refresh Encounter Power

Costs 4 KP

Once per session, a player may elect to refresh an expended encounter power. This is in addition to any other abilities or powers that refresh powers.

Action Point

Costs 4 KP, 8 KP

Take an extra Standard Action. For all intents and purposes, this counts as an Action Point for any power or ability that requires one be spent. This may be used up to twice per encounter, although the second use costs double (-8 KP). This may not be used on a character's first turn in combat, and must occur before or after a character's turn.