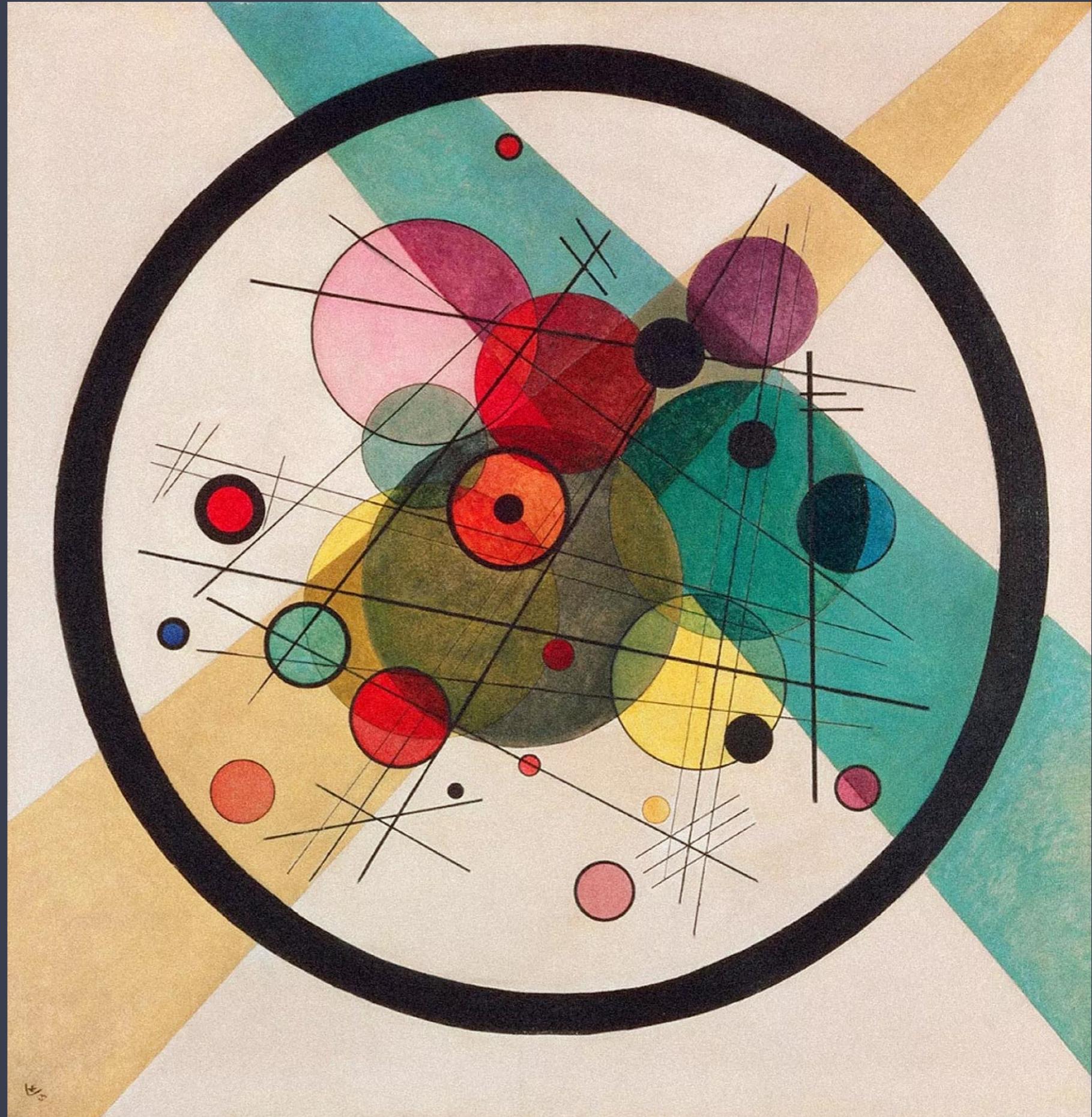


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THE BEAD GAME

A Roleplaying System



YET ANOTHER RPG?

I love role-playing games, and I love many different systems – ones that stress story, ones that facilitate exciting and crunchy combat, ones that perfectly encapsulate a given genre; there are many systems I'm happy to play and know I'll have fun doing so.

So why make another game? It's not because I want to replace any of the systems I love or because I want to update some system to have a more modern feel. It's to provide an alternative, a game that might appeal for different reasons or have a different feel from other game systems. This is the pistachio ice cream system – it's probably not the first system you tried, and you might enjoy chocolate and vanilla as your regular choices, but when you're in the mood for something a little different, give it a go!

If you find you like this system, I'm delighted to have provided you some enjoyment. And if you bounce off it, no worries – play what you love and give this book to a friend to try.

QUICK PITCH

This is a classless system where the core mechanic is the use of effort (force, speed, smarts) to power actions. A character is partially defined by the mix of effort that is available to them, and actions are taken by committing effort (using beads as physical representations) and then using them to achieve a desired outcome.

Examples of ways this core mechanic is employed include:

- In encounters, you do not act in "initiative order", instead you simultaneously choose which effort to employ, and resolve actions in speed order; when your turn comes around you decide how to use the effort you committed.
- As characters improve they gain more effort beads; you customize your character by the mix you choose.
- Items and weapons are different because they limit the effort that can be used while wielding them.
- Feats, Spells, and other special abilities require certain degrees of effort to use.
- Ancestry beads are used to differentiate races and traditions, making them a major part of defining a character.

EFFORT

Each character in *The Bead Game* has a set of effort tokens. In this book we'll represent them by colored beads, but feel free to use poker chips, tokens, or whatever comes handily to you. There are four types of effort:

Force

We represent **force** by **black** beads; the more force used in an action the more powerful the result is likely to be – the bigger the effect, and the more obvious it will be. Use force when you want to make a big, obvious impact.

Smarts

We represent **smarts** by **blue** beads; the more smarts used in an action the more you take advantage of knowledge, hidden information or unusual methods to achieve the goal. Use smarts when you want to tilt odds in your favor or achieve goals in a subtle fashion.

Speed

We represent **speed** by **green** beads; the more speed used in an action the faster the action takes place and the more movement the action can involve. Use speed when you want to take the initiative and do a lot all at once.

Ancestry

We represent **ancestry** by **white** beads; ancestry beads have different effects defined by your character's heritage and tradition and the use of them will be different for each tradition.

EFFORT POOLS

A character's effort always resides in one of a number of pools. Those pools indicate how available the effort is. As actions are taken both by you and affecting you, effort is moved between pools, indicating the effect. The pools are:

Action Pool

The **action pool** that contains the effort you are committing to an action right now. In the *preparation phase* of the *encounter round* you move effort from your *ready pool* to the *action pool* as you plan to take an action. After you resolve an action, the contents of the *action pool* are moved to *spent pool*.

Ready Pool

The **ready pool** contains effort that is available for use in the current encounter; when it is empty, you cannot take any more action until the *refresh phase* of the *encounter round*.

Spent Pool

The **spent pool** contains effort that has been spent on actions. During the *refresh phase* of the *encounter turn* all effort in the *spent pool* is moved back to the *action pool*, ready for you to take future actions.

Exhausted Pool

The **exhausted pool** contains effort that has been exhausted and is no longer available for use in this encounter. Effort is moved here typically as a result of opposition actions and can be thought of as temporary damage to the character. At the end of the encounter, effort in this pool is moved back into the *action pool*.

Injury Pool

The **injury pool** contains effort that is completely unavailable to the character. It is similar to the *exhausted pool*, but effort from this

pool is only restored to the action pool by specific game mechanisms. It can be thought of as persistent damage to the character. Minor enemies do not have an injury pool – they are defeated if they take any injury.

HOW ENCOUNTERS WORK

A roleplaying game is broken down into units called encounters (or scenes in some other systems). Encounters generally have a goal in mind, and whether you achieve that goal in the face of opposition is what the encounter resolves.

An encounter consists of a set of rounds, each of which allows all those involved to take action. An encounter ends when only one side is capable of taking actions – the other side or sides are completely exhausted or injured.

Encounter Rounds

Each round starts with the **preparation phase**, where each participant takes zero or more effort beads from their *ready pool* and puts them in their *action pool*, where they are ready to be used. This selection is simultaneous, and can be done in secret if any participants want it to be.

If nobody places anything in the action pool, perform a **refresh phase** immediately: everyone moves any effort from their *spent pool* into their *ready pool*, and start a new round. If only one side in the encounter is capable of refreshing their pool, then the encounter is over, and the side that still has actions possible prevails!

Once the action effort has been revealed, step through the actions in order, fastest to slowest. All actions that happen at the same speed are resolved simultaneously. After resolution, any effort in the *action pool* is moved to the *spent pool*. In general the amount of *speed effort* determines which actions go first.

Many actions are designed to affect other participants, and the results of these actions often shift the target's effort between pools. Take a look at the list of common actions to get an idea of what is possible.

One important point to note is that you do not need to plan which action to use – you might have an action in mind, but when it comes to your turn, you can use any action your effort allows, so you can react to changes in the situation and never have to waste your action!

ACTIONS

Action resolution is at the heart of any role-playing game system. Each action has a minimum amount of effort needed to power it (all actions require at least one effort), but usually more effort can be allocated to improve the effect. Often the tools used for the action or other circumstances might constrain the available action.

Actions might also be modified by *feats* – special abilities a character has that allow them to take actions that no-one else can, or to modify the effects of an action. These are all special cases, so read up on the feats you are interested in to get an idea of how they work.

Tests

Some actions simply work or do not work, there is no randomness associated with them. For others you may need to test effectiveness. This means rolling a six-sided dice and attempting to get a result of 4,5,6 for a **success**. Other factors will often modify the level needs for success.

Occasionally the degree of success is important. If you roll a six, make a follow-up roll and if that roll is a success, the test is a **critical success**.

Damage

When an action damages an opponent, they must move a bead to the exhausted pool. This must be taken from the active pool if possible, then the ready pool. And if both those are empty, from the spent pool. If all these pools are empty a bead is moved from the exhausted pool to the injury pool.

The player of the damaged character chooses which bead to move if they have a choice within a pool, unless the damage was caused by a critical success, in which case the acting player chooses which dice to exhaust.

COMBAT ACTIONS

CLOSE ATTACK

You attack a target that you can see in the same zone as you

Effort: Any

Special: A close-combat weapon must be used. The weapon used will limits the effort that can be applied

Effect: Test the opponent's defenses, and do damage on a success.

- For each ■, make an additional test
 - For each □, reduce the test difficulty by one
 - For each ▲, you may move a zone either before or after the attack action
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RANGED ATTACK

You attack a target you can see in the same or neighboring zone

Effort: Any

Special: A ranged weapon must be used. The weapon used will limits the effort that can be applied

Effect: Test the opponent's defenses, and do damage on a success.

- For each ■, make an additional test
- For each □, reduce the test difficulty by one
- For each ▲, you may move a zone either before or after the attack action

EQUIPMENT

BARE-HANDED

Punches, kicks and elbow strikes

Usage: Must be in the same zone as an opponent

Effort Limit: ■ ■

DAGGER

A small knife

Usage: Must be in the same zone as an opponent; occupies a hand

Effort Limit: ■ ■ ■

SIMPLE ONE-HANDED MELEE WEAPON

A sword, club, mace or other common one-handed item

Usage: Must be in the same zone as an opponent; occupies a hand

Effort Limit: ■ ■ ■

SIMPLE TWO-HANDED MELEE WEAPON

A greatsword, axe or similar item

Usage: Must be in the same zone as an opponent; occupies two hands

Effort Limit: ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

SHIELD

Protection held in the off-hand

Usage: Occupies a hand

Effort Limit: n/a

Special: increases the difficulty of hitting you by one

NO ARMOR

You are unprotected and unencumbered

Usage: none

Effort Limit: n/a

Special: if tied for speed with someone wearing armor, you go first. If a six is rolled against you (and it would hit), you automatically take a critical hit without needing to confirm.

LIGHT ARMOR

You can move pretty freely, and have some protection against damage

Usage: none **Effort Limit:** n/a

Special: if tied for speed with someone wearing heavy armor, you go first.

HEAVY ARMOR

You sacrifice speed for resistance

Usage: none **Effort Limit:** n/a

Special: no benefits until you take feats to use it well

DESIGN GOALS

The default combat character should have 5-6 beads to spend, and show be using a simple sword and shield and light armor

This would make them one step harder to hit (needing a 5,6).

My goal is that the optimum strategy for a simple one-one fight should be to spend 2 effort each round. Something like the following: ■ ■ — ■ ■ — ■

However it should not be too much of a disadvantage to spend similar effort