

# The Shadow of Yesterday

A FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME BY CLINTON R. NIXON

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Shadow of Yesterday! This is a fantasy role-playing game set in a world broken and reborn, a world that you, the players, get to shape.

If you're not familiar with role-playing games, they're a form of play where you and your friends make up stories. The rules of the game are there to give the story structure. You could call it a "story construction kit."

Stories with this game will be set in a world called Near. Before we learn how to use the kit, let's learn about the world and the type of stories that take place in it.

### *The world of Near*

One hundred years ago, Near had a terrible calamity, an event its occupants call the "Sky Fire." This was most likely a giant asteroid that struck the world. At this time, a large part of Near was united in an empire called Maldor. They spoke one language and had a big multi-cultural society. When the Sky Fire struck, it shattered the world. A portion of the planet opposite from Maldor broke away and became a moon, something the people of Near had never seen before. Between the winter that came from all the dust that clouded the sky and the superstitions aggravated from this new celestial body, the empire of Maldor fell and the world was depopulated from hunger and cold. Near only has ten percent of the population it once did. Their universal language, a magical tongue that allowed anyone who heard it to speak it, was lost.

This game is set one hundred years after the Sky Fire. Society is just beginning to re-form, and your stories will be set in this rebuilding.

The rules of this game are meant to enable a type of fantasy where things don't necessarily make common sense, but are always full of style, a bit creepy, a bit comedic, a bit dark and violent, and definitely romantic.

You'll notice there's quite a few rules in here that have to do with love and sex. The game's setting is intentionally a sketch. It is there for you to fill in with your players and, hopefully, this game gives you a good set of tools to do so. The fundamental tenets of Near can be summed up as:

- \* No gods.
- \* No monsters.
- \* Just people.

### *What do we do?*

You'll make up characters and explore this crazy world. Together you'll fill in the setting with ideas that jazz you and make up stories that'll make you laugh and maybe, I don't know, move you a little.

Most of you will make up one character and play the role of that character until his or her story is done. One of you will have to be the Story Guide, who plays everyone else in the fictional world. The story will be heavily tilted toward the main characters (player characters or PCs), so you should all have about the same power to affect the story. The Story Guide's job is to just keep that story on track, using all the other characters in the world (Story Guide characters or SGCs) to press on the sides of that hot story iron and mold it.

Your player characters in this game will be heroes, most likely heroes with problems. Like the world of Near, your character will be full of possibility, both for good and bad. You'll explore the world, meet interesting people, and either solve their problems or give them new ones.

### *Credits, thanks, and influences*

All the contributors to the The Shadow of Yesterday wiki influenced me with this revision. Fred Hicks of Evil Hat Productions inspired me incredibly with his melding of the original version of this game's "Bringing Down the Pain" with his own game Fate, which I can't say enough nice things about. James Nostack and Brennan Taylor both contributed Keys from the wiki.

A big and hearty thanks to my personal playtesters: Mischa Krilov and Judson Lester.

Andy Kitkowski is a very good man. He worked this text like a ball of sourdough. Keith Senkowski and Ben Lehman also provided invaluable feedback.

Vincent Baker, creator of awesome games like Dogs in the Vineyard, helped more than he knows with his excellent weblog/discussion website called "anyway."

Lastly, as always, the good souls at The Forge outdid themselves with helpful suggestions and insight.

This game was influenced by many media, some of

which you'll see below.

#### RPGS

The Riddle of Steel by Jake Norwood (Driftwood Publishing) and Sorcerer by Ron Edwards (Adept Press). Two of the best role-playing games out there, they came at the idea that the players set the goals they are rewarded for from different angles. "Keys" in this game are their progeny.

Fudge by Steffan O'Sullivan (Grey Ghost Press). Like you couldn't tell.

Over the Edge by Jonathan Tweet with Robin Laws (Atlas Games): The bonus and penalty dice mechanic.

Dying Earth by Robin Laws (Pelgrane Press) and Shadowrun by FanPro: Attributes as resource pools (from both) and refreshment of these pools (Dying Earth).

Schism by Jared Sorensen (Memento-Mori Theatrics): The idea of character "transcendence."

#### BOOKS AND AUTHORS

I was sort of a late-comer to weird fantasy, but once I started, I couldn't put it down. The two writers who most influenced this game are Fritz Leiber and Robert E. Howard. Both of these authors took a different direction from the high fantasy written before them: dark, gritty fantasy where people, not gods, made a difference. In addition, they were much less derivative of European myth than their predecessors. Leiber especially gets recognition: the way he painted the world of Lankhmar was amazing and has informed every session of this game that I've run. The decline of civilizations, great empty walled cities, and black forests of Near are all Howard. "Red Nails" and "Beyond the Black River" were the two stories that had the most direct influence over this game. An article in the February 2003 Discover magazine, "How Was the Moon Formed?" was also a huge inspiration.

To see photographs of the World of Near, I recommend a book called Secret Corners of the World, produced by the National Geographic Society. The images of places and people in this book were instrumental in painting a picture of Near.

## CHARACTERS

Characters represent all sentient beings in your game. While not every stranger met by the players' characters may be fully fleshed out in terms of mechanics, all characters that could be created in the game should be able to be created with these rules. In order to define who a character is and what that character can do, there are four mechanical pieces: Pools, Abilities, Secrets, and Keys.

### *Pools*

Pools are resources the player can spend during the game in order for their character to push harder,

do more, and perform amazing feats. There are three pools: Vigor, Instinct, and Reason.

Vigor represents the character's reserves of physical power, wherewithal, and mental toughness. Characters with high Vigor are often known for bulging muscles, scarred faces, calloused hands, the "thousand-yard stare," and crushing strength.

Instinct represents the character's reserves of animal-like reactions, both physical and social. This ranges from cat-like reflexes in combat to pheromone-like sexual attraction. Characters with high Instinct are often known for their graceful motion, penetrating eyes, amazing hearing, stunning appearance, or sexual prowess.

Reason represents the character's intelligence and mental power. This could range from book knowledge to an uneducated, but highly practical mind. Characters with high Reason are often known for their vocabulary, ability to identify plants and animals, skill at games of chance, or power over others.

Pools are measured in points, and each pool ranges from one to infinite points, although a pool of more than 10 points is highly unusual. During the game, these points are spent to do better than normal or perform unusual feats, but are not permanently gone. Think of each one as a container of reserves: these reserves can be spent, but you can refill the container. The scores on each player's character sheet represent the maximum points in each pool - the size of the container - and players will get a chance to refresh their characters' pools to their maximum.

### *Pool refreshment*

Whenever a pool is not at its full level, it can be refreshed, restoring it to its full level by the character performing an in-game action.

Vigor is refreshed whenever your character engages in an act of physical exertion (including physical abuse, such as drugs, drinking, staying out all night) with another character, specifically for the intent of enjoying yourself.

Instinct is refreshed whenever your character engages in an act of social pleasure (examples: a date, going to a party, playing a game of chance) with another character.

Reason is refreshed whenever your character engages in an act of intellectual stimulation (examples: a night at the opera, a philosophical debate, playing a game of skill) with another another.

### *Abilities*

Abilities are representations of a character's skills both learned and innate. Some examples of abilities are Sailing, Tracking, Sword-fighting, and Oratory.

Abilities are always associated with a pool. This is shown by writing the name of the pool - or an abbreviation - after the ability name, like this: "Stealth (Instinct)" or just "Stealth (I)." This pool is the resource

from which characters draw their strength with that ability. This pool can be used to increase one's chances with an ability. Some game effects apply to all abilities that are associated with a specific pool.

There are three abilities common to every character. These are called innate abilities. They are purely reactive, and cannot be used to initiate action. They are only used to protect your character. They are:

#### **Endure (Vigor)**

This is your character's ability to push on and persevere through pain and fatigue. It is used to test the limits of a character's physicality and fitness.

#### **React (Instinct)**

This measures the quickness of a character's body and mind. It is as much "how quick the character notices something" as "how quick the character moves."

#### **Resist (Reason)**

"Resist" is the strength of a character's will, and is used to prevent compulsion of a natural or supernatural type. This includes physical compulsion: "Resist" would be used for a character to keep her cool under torture, for example, while "Endure" would be used to see how long she could stay conscious under the same torture.

All other abilities are chosen and are actively used by characters. Most abilities will be considered open abilities, which means any character can use them, even with no skill. Some, however, will be closed abilities, which depend on a prerequisite. This prerequisite is usually the species a character is or a culture the character has been exposed to.

Abilities are ranked with adjectives. An ability can have the following ranks: Unskilled, Competent, Adept, Master, and Grand Master. These adjectives do match up with a number, which is used in resolution.

The resolution system will be explained in further detail later, but here's what you need to know:

Being Unskilled in an ability, you can try to perform tasks that fall under that ability, but you'll usually fail. You'll succeed at about two out of every five tries.

When you get to be Competent, you're now ready to really use your skills. You'll succeed over half the time; in fact, you'll succeed at more than three out of every five tries.

As an Adept, you'll almost always succeed - 85 percent of the time, at least.

As a Master, it takes a freak chance for you to fail.

Grand Masters literally cannot ever fail.

It's important to note, though, that even someone with no ability can beat a Grand Master. The odds are far against them, but they could give it a try.

## *Secrets*

Secrets are special abilities a character can learn that augment abilities. These are often preternatural, sometimes magical, and always better than normal. In order to use Secrets, points from a pool are normally spent, meaning that Secrets can be used a limited number of

times before that pool is refreshed.

Secrets can be better explained with an example:

#### **Secret of the Hidden Pocket**

This character is adept at hiding objects on her person. No matter how carefully searched the character has been, she may pull an inexpensive, small (hand-sized) item off her person with a successful Stealth ability check. There is no need for the player to have written this item on the character sheet previously. Cost: 1 Instinct.

Like with abilities, there are open Secrets and closed Secrets.

## *Keys*

Keys are the primary method of increasing a character's abilities. These are goals, emotional ties, or vows a character has. By bringing these into the story, the player gains experience points (XP) she can use to advance the character, increasing pools and abilities, or learning new Secrets and Keys.

Again, an example will illustrate this better:

#### **Key of Conscience**

Your character has a soft spot for those weaker than their opponents. Gain 1 XP every time your character helps someone who cannot help themselves. Gain 2 XP every time your character defends someone with might who is in danger and cannot save themselves. Gain 5 XP every time your character takes someone in an unfortunate situation and changes their life to where they can help themselves. Buyoff: Ignore a request for help.

The buyoff shown above is a special bit about Keys. Whenever a player has a character perform the action shown in one of the buyoffs, the player can (this is not mandatory) erase the Key and gain 10 XP. Once bought off, a character can never have the same Key again.

Unlike abilities and Secrets, the number of Keys a character can have is limited. A character can have no more than five Keys at one time.

## CREATING A BEGINNING CHARACTER

Making your character is the one of the most important parts of playing a role-playing game. In doing so, you not only define the person you want to play, but you determine what that play will be about. Through a combination of character concepts, species, cultures, and Keys, every player gets to contribute to the content of the story.

## *Concept*

In order to start creating a character, a concept needs to be built. The character concept cannot be generated in a vacuum, however; characters must fit together with a certain zest that makes them click, little motors ready to feed off each other. This isn't to say that all charac-

ters need to be alike, of the same species and culture, or even from the same place.

There's not a set process for how concept generation works, but it should be done as a group, in a relaxed atmosphere, preferably with whatever gets your imagination flowing, whether that be coffee, beer, music, or whatever else. Talk amongst each other, and don't think of your idea as sacrosanct: take suggestions from other players and give them back. Remember that in creating these characters, you create the landscape in which you will play.

At the end of generating character concepts, you should have a few things:

- \* An idea of where your character is from and what species she is.
- \* A few sentences about who your character is and what she cares about.
- \* A description of your character's appearance, also short.
- \* A name. This is totally not optional. Pick a name before you go any farther.

Many role-playing game texts will tell you to have a nearly complete idea of who your character is before play. I don't think that's necessary, though. You and your friends will get to know your character during play. What that character did before-hand is of some interest, but even those details will emerge during play easier than before play. If you were reading a book, would the author expect you to know the main character before-hand?

What you do need to know is this: what species this character is, where she's from, what she's good at, and what might be important to her.

## Species

There are four sentient species in the world of Near. (That is, according to the published setting. Maybe you have more in your game.) In choosing a species for your character, you have the following questions to ask yourself:

- \* What nifty abilities and Secrets can I get because of this species?
- \* How does this species fit into the culture we're playing in?
- \* How does this species interact with the other characters' species?
- \* What does this species represent to me? Why would I want to play this sort of character?

The species to choose from, like all character details, are found in the setting section of this rulebook.

## Culture

You will have to decide on a culture that your character is from. You and your friends have probably decided on an area in which the game will start before play, and your characters will likely come from that area and its surrounding cultures. Playing a stranger to the culture you begin play in can be fun, too. Your

group will have a lot more information with your setting.

## Pools

Once past the heavy-thought areas of concept, species, and culture, the fun number action begins. First up is your character's pools.

Divide 11 points among your character's pools, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 7 in each. (Note: this maximum is just for character creation; your character may end up with a pool later much higher than 7.)

## Abilities

All characters start with the three innate abilities. Set one at Adept level, one at Competent, and one at Unskilled.

Then, choose from your setting material more abilities that are available to your character. You should choose one at Adept level and three at Competent. This is just for a starting character, fresh out in the world. If you are playing more experienced characters, you'll get the chance to add more abilities or increase the ones you have later.

Note that you can use any open abilities or any closed abilities from your home culture at Unskilled. You can feel free to write down ones you expect to use. You cannot use abilities from other cultures unless trained in them by someone else.

## Secrets and Keys

Before play, players can choose one Secret and one Key for their characters.

## Further Advances

Lastly, players start with a number of advances (chances to improve) for their characters. This is determined by the group before play, depending on how powerful characters are to be at the beginning of the

Advancement table	
Increase an ability to:	
Competent	1 advance
Adept	2 advances
Master	3 advances
Grand Master	4 advances
(These are cumulative costs - it costs 3 to go from Unskilled to Adept, for example.)	
Increase a pool by one point	1 advance
Add a Secret	1 advance
Add a Key	1 advance

game. The standard number is five. To figure out how to spend them, read below.

### *Character advancement*

During the game, each player character will get experience points (XP) for meeting the player's goals for that character's story and the Story Guide's goals for the overall story. These experience points are converted to advances, usually at a rate of five XP to one advance. Each advance that you get can be banked toward improving your character's pools, abilities, Secrets, and Keys. The costs are found in the table below.

You can never increase the same thing twice in a row. That is, you cannot increase the same ability or pool twice in a row. You need to increase something else in between. In addition, you cannot buy two Secrets or two Keys in a row.

## RESOLUTION

In role-playing games, when a player wants their character to perform an action with an uncertain outcome, we have to resolve that action. In *The Shadow of Yesterday*, almost all resolution is what we call conflict resolution. It's a bit of a confusing term: don't all role-playing games have rules for resolving conflicts?

That's true, but many resolve conflicts piece by little piece. If your character's fighting someone, for example, each hit might be a separate task that gets resolved in some games. Using this game, the entire fight is resolved at once, and then we describe how it went down. Those ups and downs may still be described, but the outcome of the entire conflict is what the system determines.

### *The ability check*

The way we determine outcomes is called an ability check. When performing an uncertain action, the player needs to state her basic intention for the character and the ability they are using. (They don't have to have this ability on their character sheet, but, as you'll see, it helps.) This is not a full description of the action, as the dice provide a randomizer that let the player know how well this action happened. After stating the character's intention, deciding on stakes, and choosing the relevant ability, the ability check is made.

The ability check involves a dice roll. This roll uses special dice you can find at hobby stores or online called "Fudge dice." They were originally invented for a neat little role-playing game called Fudge. They are six-sided dice; two sides of them have plus signs on them, two sides are blank, and two sides have minus signs. If you don't have any, you can make your own really easily. Get a red and a green marker and some white dice. Color two sides red and two sides green, and you've got Fudge dice. The plus sides are +1, the blank sides are 0, and the minus sides are -1, in case you didn't know. An even better way to make your

own Fudge dice from ordinary six-sided dice can be found in Jonathan Walton's article "Baby's First Fudge Dice" in the online magazine *Fudge Factor*.

After you've got weird dice, the process is pretty simple: roll three dice and add them to your character's rank in the ability being used. As you probably remember, each ability rank has a number associated with it. That's what you use here. So, a character who is a Competent (1) in Scrapping that rolls two pluses and a minus on the dice has a total of 2. That's your success level (SL). There's only one trick to this: you can't get lower than zero. It's a hard bottom number, and if you end up with -1 or something, it's just zero.

Just like every ability rank has an associated number, each success level has an associated name.

That name is just there to help you describe the outcome. It doesn't have a mechanical effect. A Marginal success is all that is needed to succeed at any task in the game.

Success level table	
Description	Success Level
Failure	0
Good	1
Great	2
Superb	3
Amazing	4
Legendary	5
Penultimate	6
Transcendent	7

### *Bonus and penalty dice*

While an ability score determines the range of your character's ability, bonus and penalty dice are a mechanic to skew your results toward one end of that range. When making an ability check, bonus dice add to the number of dice rolled, as do penalty dice. Roll three Fudge dice, plus a number of Fudge dice equal to all your bonus and penalty dice. Whenever possible, bonus and penalty dice cancel each other out, so if you have two bonus dice and a penalty die before your roll, you end up with only one bonus die.

After you roll, remove a number of your dice equal to your penalty dice, starting with pluses. If you run out of pluses, remove blanks, and then minuses. Bonus dice work the opposite way: you remove minuses first, then blanks, then pluses. More simply, penalty dice take away your highest rolls. Bonus dice take away your lowest rolls.

Players can always spend one point from the ability's associated pool to get one bonus die on an ability check.

This is limited to one bonus die per ability check.

### *The Gift of Dice*

At the beginning of each session of the game, every player including the Story Guide receives a number of gift dice equal to the number of players at the table. At any point during the game, any of these dice can be given to another player to be added as bonus dice to that player's current ability check. This is most often used when a player's character is attempting something especially dangerous, or the player describes her character's intention in a cool way.

These gift dice are an important part of play and should not be forgotten. They encourage cooperation among the players as much as among the characters.

### *Expanding the ability check*

The ability check is the core of this system and all other mechanics derive from it, this injection of fortune, that serves as resolution for both instant actions and entire scenes. Here we break down the ways the mechanics grow from the ability check.

### *Ability check range*

Every ability check in this game can be described in terms of range. The term range refers to all the possible outcomes of an ability check. As the player rolls three Fudge dice, results from -3 to +3 plus a character's pertinent ability are always the range of a check. Note that a unskilled character (0) has a range with no result better than Great (3), and a character with a Grand Master (4) ability cannot fail. Related to this is the idea of an average outcome, the outcome most expected with any level of ability. Since zero is the most likely outcome on any roll of three Fudge dice, unskilled characters can be expected to fail the majority of the time. Characters do not succeed on average until they have a Competent ability (1).

Range seems like a simple concept, and it is. It's also very important, though: notice that a character with even no ability always has a chance of beating a character with a Grand Master, albeit small. This is entirely on purpose: with this system, your character has a limit to how good she might do at a task, but it always might be good enough to beat the other guy.

### *Intention, Initiation, Execution, and Effect*

Although the ability check seems very simple, there's more involved than it seems at first glance. Every time your character takes an action, there are four steps involved: Intention, Initiation, Execution, and Effect. Here's how these break down:

#### **Intention**

The player announces the intended action for the character. No movement or action has happened yet, though. The intention and its consequences may be discussed among the Story Guide and players and changed. Stakes must be stated for the check: what

stands to be lost and gained?

#### **Initiation**

The player has committed her character to the task, and no changes can be made now. The dice hit the table.

#### **Execution**

The character completes her action. The player adds the dice to the character's ability to figure out the success level.

#### **Effect**

The players and Story Guide decide what the effect of the task is, whether successfully completed or not.

Now, that sounds like a lot to go through every time you roll the dice. Normally, this all happens without thinking too much about it, making it quick. A player states, "My character's going to do something," she rolls dice, everyone looks to see how the character did, and a decision about what happened occurs.

The reason I bring up the four steps is because if you never think about them, you can cause tension among the players and Story Guide. Imagine a player, Joe, stating, "Jack, my character, hits the priest right in the chest with a sword blow." Now, following the four steps, you realize this has not happened in the game, but is just Joe stating her intention. (While his statement was technically incorrect, in that she stated it happened, and it was an intention, this is a common way of stating intention in role-playing games.)

Carrying on with this example, though, what if the Story Guide is confused about the four steps? She may take this as initiation, for example, and when she says, "The priest grabs her black mace," Joe might want her character Jack to back off. If the Story Guide thinks the above statement was initiation, though, Joe can't do this, and may get angry at the Story Guide for withholding the information that the priest had this mace.

And in the end, what if the group is confused about effect? If Joe's roll is successful, a confused group might think that Joe's stated intention for Jack is exactly what happens. This is not necessarily so: the outcome of the dice and disposition of the players might determine a different effect.

The point is this: take your time to make sure everyone is on the same page when it comes to a character performing a task. While the first game or two might run a bit slower than normal because steps are being heavily delineated, the speed will pick up as everyone gets used to following them.

### *Types of ability checks and how they work*

While the ability check is the core mechanic that ties this entire game together, it actually comes in several forms, each of which add on a layer of complexity.

The first and most simple type is the unopposed ability check. This is used when a player wants her character to try a task in which no other character is attempting any action which would stop her. There

are three steps to the unopposed ability check, and all other types of ability checks.

First, the player states the character's intention and the Story Guide sets the stakes. This should be easy: "Pieter is going to try to climb that boulder" is a good example. The Story Guide could reply "If you succeed, Pieter's over the rock," but that's pretty implicit. Usually, the results of success are easily taken from the what the player said. The results of failure are determined by the Story Guide and players. In this case, failure could mean Pieter's not over the rock or it could mean something worse. The Story Guide has free reign here to say, "That's a giant boulder. If you fail, Pieter falls and will break a bone." What's important is that these stakes are stated up front.

The second step is determining circumstances. This is where bonus and penalty dice come into play. Characters may often have either bonus or penalty dice because of Secrets activated, pools spent, harm taken, or The Gift of Dice, as shown below. In addition to any bonus or penalty dice outlined elsewhere in these rules, the Story Guide may assign one or two penalty dice to any ability check. One penalty die may be assigned if circumstances render a task especially difficult or if the character is ill-equipped. If trying to climb a wall, a character would not be assigned a penalty die if it were drizzling, or dark, or a bit chilly, but one could be assigned if there was an icy wind and hard rain coming down at night. If the climber was trying to go up a cliff face, which normally required some pitons and crampons and the like, and she didn't have any, she could receive a penalty die. Two penalty dice can be assigned in the very worst of circumstances. A good measure of whether to assign two penalty dice is if the description of the circumstances elicits a stream of profanity from a player. We're talking about seriously nasty conditions here - hail coming down in the midst of an icy rain while gale-force winds tear at our poor climber in the pitch dark.

The third and final step is actually rolling the dice. If the success level is equal or better than the difficulty, the character has succeeded. The Story Guide and players should use the success level to describe how the character performed at the stated intention.

The next type of ability check is the competitive ability check. This occurs when two or more characters are attempting the same task, but each wants to do it better or faster. All rules for the standard ability check apply, and in addition, the conditions of victory are set before the ability check: if the check is over a foot-race, the victor went the fastest; if it's composing a song, the victor made a better piece of work. This should be fairly obvious, but the Story Guide and players can decide together what the conditions of victory are if there's any question.

All players with competing characters make ability checks. After ability checks are made, any character who succeeded actually completed the task with some

proficiency and the player can use the success level to compute any relevant outcomes. The character of the player with the highest total score, however, completed the task better or faster, and the other characters are ranked in the order of their players' rolls. In the case of a tie, the characters' feats are so close in speed and quality that a winner cannot be determined between them. They can either tie, or if the players and Story Guide want to, those players can roll again to see which is the victor.

The last type of ability check is the resisted ability check. This check, most common in role-playing games, occurs when two characters attempt tasks that would cancel out each other. Examples include:

- \* One character swinging a sword at another character dodging.

- \* One character trying to get information by twisting another character's arm, who is attempting to suffer through the pain and keep quiet.

- \* One character sneaking up on a character who is keeping watch.

- \* One character offering a romp in bed to a character who is trying to deny the pleasures of the flesh.

All normal ability check rules apply to resisted checks. The two players involved make their ability checks and then compare their scores. The higher of the two wins: in the case of a tie, the instigator of the action loses.

When narrating a resisted ability check, both players' success levels come into account. For purposes of computing results, the winner's success level is used, but the loser's efforts are still significant. An example:

The character Violet, played by Kim, is attempting to drive the character Lore, played by Wilhelm, to his knees with a savage sword attack. Upon rolling, Kim ends up with an Amazing (4) success level, and Wilhelm ends up with a Great (3) success level. Kim's roll wins, but Lore still made a great block. The action is narrated as, "Violet brings up her sword and makes a vicious stroke down, aiming for the lower leg. Lore, anticipating the swing, throws his shield in the way, but the sword crashes down it, the force driving the shield itself back into Lore's shins as he falls."

The losing player must abide by the winner's stated intention for the ability check, even if it was "I kill that sorry character." That's not entirely true, though: what sort of game would this be if your character could die from one roll of the dice? To see how to extract your character from any sticky situation you don't like, see "Bringing Down the Pain" below.

### *Using abilities together*

If you want your character to perform a complex action that uses two abilities together, decide with the Story Guide which ability is most appropriate to the action and which is secondary. The secondary ability is used first and the success levels are used as bonus dice on the second ability check. The Story Guide and

player will have to decide what happens if the first ability check is failed: in some situations, the second ability check can still be attempted without harm; in others, the ability check can be attempted with a penalty die; and in others still, the second ability check cannot be attempted.

A character is trying to cut a thong from a guard's belt and snatch his keys, using Bladework to chop the thong, and Stealth to grab the keys without being seen. While she is using Bladework to actually get the keys free, the Stealth part of the action is most important. The player makes a Bladework ability check. If successful, the success levels are converted to bonus dice on the Stealth ability check. If unsuccessful, however, the keys are still on the guard's belt, so the Stealth ability check cannot be attempted.

Another character wants to approach a wild bear without getting attacked using Animal Ken. In order to help with this, she's going to attempt to remember what bears like to eat and see if she can find some, using Woodcraft. The Woodcraft ability check is secondary, and if successful, will add bonus dice to the Animal Ken ability check. If unsuccessful, there is no complication; the character just must approach the bear with no food gift.

### *Bringing Down the Pain*

Simple ability checks are well and good, and make resolution a quick and painless matter. Sometimes, though, for that dramatic punch, you need something a bit more gritty and focused. In this game, that is an expanded resolution system called Bringing Down the Pain. Bringing Down the Pain is a unique option for players to allow them to not only get out of sticky situations, but focus the story where they want it.

Any player involved in a conflict can Bring Down the Pain after a resisted ability check. Normally, a player has to abide by the results of this check. However, when a character belonging to a player - a player that is not the Story Guide - loses at a resisted ability check, that player does not have to accept the outcome. Instead, she can ask that the Pain be Brought Down. On the flip side, a player can demand this even when she succeeds at a resisted ability check. This not only allows her to zoom in the imagined camera on this conflict, but is the only way to permanently injure or get rid of a major named character controlled by the Story Guide.

The Story Guide cannot Bring Down the Pain. She can request it, but another player involved in the conflict must actually declare it.

When a player declares they are Bringing Down the Pain, action breaks down into a blow-by-blow, gritty basis instead of overall conflict resolution. This can be called task resolution. Both sides of the conflict must make certain their intention - their goal - is clarified and well-stated, for it is very important here. This intention must be clear, but can allow room for differing

actions to achieve the goal: "drive away these opponents in battle," "embarrass the noble in front of his peers," or "out-perform this guy on the guitar" are all fine intentions.

After intentions are stated, everyone who has a character involved in the conflict should state what their one action for this volley will be. Actions can be changed during this stage, where everything, even actions hidden to the characters, is discussed in the open. (In Ron Edwards' Trollbabe, this is called the free-and-clear stage and I'll use that term here.) Whose actions affect who is important to establish here. Actions can be visualized as perpendicular or parallel actions. What I mean this is:

Perpendicular actions get in the way of each other. If Violet's action is to stab Lore with a spear and Lore's action is to kick out Violet's legs from under her, these actions are perpendicular. They're fighting each other, and part of that is keeping advantage.

Parallel actions do not necessarily get in the way of each other. Let's say Violet is trying to convince Lore to join her ragtag group of misfits. Lore would rather her shut up and is cooking her dinner, hoping the smell of his righteous cooking distracts her. Both of these people can do this at the same time, and the winner will definitely have an effect on the loser, but as far as actions go, they don't get in the way of each other.

There is one other type of action, the defensive action. You can use a relevant innate ability (Endure, React, Resist) to resist what's happening to your character. You cannot deal harm this way, but otherwise it counts as a perpendicular action.

It is highly important to distinguish whether actions are perpendicular or parallel ahead of time and be very clear about it. The first time you use Bringing Down the Pain, it could be confusing. You see, with a normal ability check, you really can resist someone attacking your character by talking them out of it. That's because the entire conflict is at stake. In Bringing Down the Pain, the only things that can resist someone attacking your character are attacking them back or blocking their blow. That's because that roll's stakes are that one task.

If the two sides of a conflict cannot decide on actions - if one keeps changing theirs depending on the other - it is up to the Story Guide to resolve this. Hopefully, it can be resolved through player negotiation. If not, the side who wants a perpendicular action must take a defensive action.

After the free-and-clear stage, everyone rolls ability checks for their action. If this is the first action in Bringing Down the Pain, the winner at the roll that initiated Bringing Down the Pain gets bonus dice to her first action equal to the difference between her and her opponent's success levels. If two characters are taking action against each other (perpendicular actions), the check is a resisted ability check. The loser at this check takes harm equal to the difference between the success

levels, possibly modified by Secrets and weapons. If the actions are parallel, both sides take harm equal to their attacker's success level. If one action is defensive, and that player wins, she gets bonus dice to her next action equal to the difference between the success levels.

When all rolls are resolved, another free-and-clear stage begins. This continues until one side of the conflict gives up, at which time the winners' intentions happen. The trick to Bringing Down the Pain lies in this rule: in any free-and-clear stage, a player can announce that she is changing his character's intention completely. This could change from "sneak up on my enemy" to "kill my enemy," "best the queen in a war of words" to "seduce the queen," or even "out-play this guy on the guitar" to "magically put this guy to sleep." She does not have to state the new intention until the next free-and-clear stage. During this volley of rolls, she may only make a defensive action.

There is one exception to the idea that it takes a round to change your intention. If you and an opponent find yourself at a stalemate - you have perpendicular actions and roll the same success level - you can both immediately change intentions.

### *Using more than one ability*

Each use of an ability in Bringing Down the Pain is an action. To use one to get bonus dice for another, it cannot deal any harm or absorb any harm; it is a perpendicular action with no effect. This is exceedingly dangerous to try unless you have someone to cover your back.

This in no way supersedes using a defensive action to get bonus dice for your next action.

### *Surprise*

Surprise is not part of the Bringing Down the Pain system. Instead, it takes place before-hand. If a character acts against another, and the latter has no clue what's going on, the player will not be able to make an ability check to resist. This still counts as a resisted ability check, and the player can announce that he'd like to Bring Down the Pain.

As stated before, the winner at the check that initiated Bringing Down the Pain gets bonus dice to her first action equal to the difference between her and her opponent's success levels. This is an indicator of her opening advantage.

### *Harm and defeat*

"Harm" in this game does not necessarily refer to physical, blood-and-guts rending of flesh and bone. Instead, it is a quality of both the character in the context of the game world and the character in context of the real world. Harm is a count-down of when a player loses control over his character, and can be expressed as any of these things in-game:

- \* Cuts and bruises
- \* Fatigue and weariness

\* Embarrassment and crushed esteem

\* Loss of concentration and will

Whenever a successful ability check is made against a character while Bringing Down the Pain, that character takes harm. The base harm is equal to the success level of the acting player's roll, which can be modified by Secrets or weapons. Again, the type of action being done against the character does not matter - you can take harm from seduction as easily as you can from a sword.

Take that success level and check off the corresponding box on the harm tracker on your character sheet. If that checkbox is already filled, check the next highest unchecked one. Write down beside the checkbox either "Vigor," "Instinct," or "Reason," depending on the type of harm you took. This is usually determined by the associated pool from the ability used to harm you, but might be different if everyone involved agrees.

You'll see that one to three harm is bruised. This means on your very next ability check, you'll have a penalty die. These add up - if you get bruised twice in a round of Bringing Down the Pain, you'll have two penalty dice. Level four and five harm means your character is bloodied. All your abilities that are associated with the pool that you took the harm from now take a penalty die. If you are bloodied twice in the same pool, you still only take one penalty die. These do not stack. Level six harm means your character is broken. If broken, in order for your character to perform any action, even defense, you must spend a point from the ability's associated pool, and you still receive one penalty die to this action. Harm past broken results in the attacker's intention immediately happening.

At any point during Bringing Down the Pain, a player may decide that the harm taken is enough for this conflict and give up. Before a free-and-clear stage, the player gives up the conflict, and his opponent's intention occurs. It is often a good idea to give up before your opponent changes to a more deadly intention.

After Bringing Down the Pain, harm shakes out. That means that all damage collapses into the low end of the harm tracker. As an example, if you had checks at 2, 3, and 6 on the harm tracker, they'd collapse to 1, 2, and 3 after Bringing Down the Pain. This applies even to harm from before Bringing Down the Pain, so feel free to get in a nasty scrape if you're hurt.

Healing works exactly opposite of harm: if someone rolls an ability check to get rid of your harm (First Aid and Counsel could do this, for example), it removes the harm you have corresponding to their success level, or the highest harm you have if their success level is higher. If all your harm is of a higher level than their success level, nothing is healed. The harm does not shake out afterwards and one character can only attempt to heal your character once in a scene.

There is another method to heal your character: self-healing. By spending a number of pool points equal to the level of a harm your character has taken, you can

remove that harm from the character. The points must be spent from the pool associated with that particular harm. If the harm level is higher than your maximum pool, you can spend some points, refresh your pool, and then spend more later.

### *An example of Bringing Down the Pain and harm*

In this example, there are two players, Matt and Emily. The pertinent parts of their two characters are:

Emily's character: Tela, a Zaru assassin. Her pools are currently at Vigor 2, Instinct 3, and Reason 1. Her pertinent abilities are React: Master, Sneak: Master, Deceit: Competent, and Knife Fighting: Adept.

Matt's character: Gael, a noble from Ammeni. His pools are currently at Vigor 5, Instinct 2, and Reason 3. His pertinent abilities are React: Adept, Sense Danger: Adept, Dash: Competent, and Viper-Blade: Grand Master.

Gael is traveling down an alley-way when Tela sights him, and slides into the shadows to follow him. Emily states, "I want Tela to sneak up on this guy." She makes a resisted ability check of Sneak versus Gael's Sense Danger and rolls a -1 versus his 0, for a total of SL 2 versus SL 2. "Screw that," she says, and spends a point of Instinct to roll a bonus die. Matt has the same opportunity, but wants to conserve his Instinct pool, since it's low. She ends up with a roll of 0, for a total of SL 3 - a Great success!

Up until this point, the action has been taken care of by a simple ability check. According to the check, Emily wins, and Tela will sneak up on Gael, giving Emily three bonus dice to perform an action that uses that advantage. Matt's not having it, though: he wants his character out of here, and away from Tela. He says, "No way. I'm not accepting that outcome. It's time to Bring Down the Pain. My goal is for Gael to notice Tela, and get away from her." Emily decides to keep her intention of sneaking up on Gael.

During the free-and-clear phase, Matt says, "Ok, Gael stops for a moment and scans the area as the hair on the back of his neck stands up." Notice that Gael knows something's wrong: that's because Matt refused the outcome of the simple ability check. Also notice that Matt can narrate whatever he wants for Gael's action, as long as it stays within his overall intention. Emily, confident in her character's abilities, says "I'm going to creep along the wall slowly towards him, staying in the shadows." Another roll is made of Gael's Sense Danger versus Tela's Sneak, and Matt wins this check, with SL 3 (Great) versus SL 2 (Good). Tela takes a harm at level 1 - she's bruised.

Matt says, "A-ha! Gael sees a glimmer in the shadows behind him, and starts to move quickly away from it." Emily asks the Story Guide, "If I throw some rocks to make noise ahead of Gael, can I count them as a weapon, +1 harm to deceive him about my location?" The Guide agrees that the idea's sound, and Emily says,

"Tela scoops up some pebbles and throws them ahead of Gael, trying to confuse him as to her location." Her Deceit's pretty low, so she spends her one point of Reason for a bonus die, canceling out her penalty die from being bruised, and nails it, beating Matt's Sense Danger ability check, scoring SL 4 (Amazing) versus his SL 2 (Good). With the +1 weapon, that's harm level 3 to Gael.

Matt's in trouble now. He says, "As Gael takes off forward, a sound rattles him, and he spins, looking confused, but shakes it off." Emily says gleefully, "Seeing the Ammenite's confusion, Tela dives and rolls across the alley to get behind him." Matt's worried, but thinks the dice have got to go his way. He says, "Gael spins around, scanning the area for the unseen intruder." Just to be careful, he spends a point from his Instinct pool for a bonus die. They roll, and he gets a SL 3 (Good). Unfortunately, the dice are hot for Emily, and she rolls +3; she's got a grand total of SL 6 - an Ultimate success! That's harm level 3 for Gael, but he's already taken harm level 3, so that's level 4. Gael is now bloodied in Instinct, and has a penalty die to all actions that use it, including Sense Danger. "Crap," he mutters. "I'm changing my intention. Gael's just going to high-tail it, trying to avoid danger."

Emily's grinning from ear to ear. "As Gael runs, Tela's going to flit from shadow to shadow, staying right behind him." They roll, his Dash now versus her Sneak. Dash uses Vigor for its pool, so Matt doesn't have a penalty die from being bloodied in Instinct. Again, Emily wins: her roll comes up as a Good success versus his Marginal and Gael takes harm level 1. Emily narrates, "Tela moves so quickly, she gets in front of Gael before he can notice. As he runs, he comes face to face with the assassin."

It's Matt's turn, but Gael's got a penalty die. If he gives up, though, Tela will have cornered him, which he doesn't want, especially not this damaged. He glowers, "Gael's running as fast as he can." Emily smiles, "I'm changing intention if he's going to run." Matt figures that he can beat her in a foot-race, so he goes ahead and rolls Dash, with a penalty die, versus Tela's React: she could not sneak, but only defend this turn. With a low roll from Emily, he wins, scoring a mere Good success level versus her Marginal. She takes harm level 1, but that's already happened, so harm level 2 - a bruise.

In the next free-and-clear phase, Emily says, "Screw this. Want to know my intention? I'm killing this Ammenite."

Matt's in a real sticky situation now. He's got a plan, though: he can change his intention, and spend his last point of Instinct to defend when Tela attacks Gael this turn, which he knows she will. His Viper-Blade is awesome, and his weapon's +2 versus Zaru. It's risky, but if he gives up this turn, Gael's dead, and he thinks he can scare Emily by dealing some serious damage next turn. He says, "Gael falls back, baffled and frightened

by the sudden raise of a dagger. I'm changing intention." Emily says, "I spend a Vigor point. Tela brings the dagger in, stabbing at Gael." The roll is tense, SL 5 to SL 1, with Matt losing. That would be harm level 4, but that's already taken, so harm level 5 to Gael. He's now bloodied in both Instinct and Vigor, and is going to have a hard time getting out of this one.

Short of breath, Matt says, "My intention: teach a slave girl her place." Emily and the Story Guide look at each other as if to say, "What's up with all the repression?" Matt says, "What? What's Tela up to?" Emily grins, "Time to die." Matt's out of Instinct points and that's what he needs for Viper-Blade. He hopes against hope and they throw down the dice. Even with a penalty die for being bloodied, Matt rolls +2 for a total of Ultimate (6). Emily rolls a 0 and gets a Good (2) success. That would be harm level 4, but Matt's weapon is +2 versus Zaru: harm level 6, and Tela's broken.

Without hesitation, Emily says, "I give. I'd rather have this jerk teach me a lesson rather than die."

### *When to Bring Down the Pain*

Every time something doesn't go your way, you might be tempted to Bring Down the Pain. It's not necessarily a good idea to do so. You really have to examine the conflict and your strategy for it.

If someone beat you in an ability check even though the odds were against them, then go for it. Over many rolls, their luck will run out. The same thing applies if they got in a good roll because of several bonus dice: they won't have those dice in Bringing Down the Pain.

If someone beat you by using an ability very different from yours, Bringing Down the Pain might be a good idea. If they keep that up in Bringing Down the Pain, it'll be a parallel action, and you'll both take damage. If you can deal it out faster than they can, Bringing Down the Pain's a good idea.

Taking on someone in Bringing Down the Pain that's just plain better than you in the ability you plan to use is a bad idea. A Master in Sway will crush a Adept in Sway in an argument drawn out into Bringing Down the Pain.

If it appears that you have the advantage in Bringing Down the Pain, go for perpendicular actions. You'll hurt your opponent and stay unharmed yourself. Likewise, if it's unclear, parallel actions guarantee that your opponent will suffer and perhaps give.

And while we're on this topic, if you get into Bringing Down the Pain and it's obvious you'll lose over the long run, quit. Give up. Some players want to keep going until their character's taken all the harm they can, but you set yourself up to be quite weakened in the next scene, where you'll want your character to get her revenge or make her great escape. Don't fall into this trap.

### *Multiple characters in a conflict*

For simple ability checks, having multiple characters

involved is easy to handle. If the characters are using varying abilities, each building to help another one, it's handled like one character using abilities together. Decide the order the checks have to be performed in, and have each player roll, with success levels being added as bonus dice to the next player's roll. As with one character, failure at an ability check may mean that the overall action cannot continue, that the next player must roll a penalty die on her ability check, or that the checks may continue, with no penalty dice.

If multiple characters are using the same, or fairly equivalent, abilities to perform a task together, use the method above, with the following caveats:

Failure always means the next player adds a penalty die to her roll.

Always roll from the character with the highest ability to the character with the least ability.

If a penalty die is given from the Story Guide because of difficulty, it applies to all rolls.

This does mean that having a character helping who is weak with the ability may hinder the task.

Mike, Wil, and Susan are going to have their characters Miska, Wolf-Snarl, and Skala try to open a stuck door together. All of them are using Athletics to do this, pushing against the door with their shoulders. Their scores are Wolf-Snarl, Adept; Skala, Competent; Miska, Unskilled.

Wil rolls success level 2. With two bonus dice, Susan rolls success level 3. Finally, with three bonus dice, Mike rolls a 0, with a 0 for Miska's lack of Athletics, for success level 0 - a Failure.

Wil has Wolf-Snarl growl, "Out of my way, weakling," and grab the door alone. Even with a roll of -1, Wolf-Snarl scores success level 1 and yanks the door open.

If Bringing Down the Pain is the ultimate way to test two differing wills, how to you manage it when more people want to get in on the fun? The standard way is easy: whenever one player declares that she wants to Bring Down the Pain, any character around can get involved. Part of the declaration of intention is who you're planning to affect: your character can only harm that character until you change intention. The Bringing Down of the Pain does not end until only one character is left standing, or all the other players have given up.

The gestalt method of group Pain-Bringing may be an easier and more fun way to arbitrate these situations. If everyone on one side of a conflict has a similar intention towards the other side, you can use the above rules for a group ability check when everyone is using similar abilities. In the gestalt mode, anyone can spend from their pools to help anyone else. Harm taken is distributed by the winning side to one or more of the losers. (A singular harm can be split up; for example, level 4 harm could be level 2 to one loser and level 1 to two other losers.) Whenever a character is broken, her player falls out of the group Pain-Bringing.

## *Weapons and armor*

Ah, weapons and armor - the love of any player, and an oft-fetishized part of any role-playing game. In this game, harm is, as shown above, an erosion of a character's ability to get her way, instead of always being physical pain and suffering. Therefore, weapons aren't just swords, knives, clubs, and the like, and armor isn't just padding a character wears on her body. Anything can be a weapon - but only in certain situations.

When using a weapon, if your character is successful in an action, you can add the weapon's rating to your success level. If you are unsuccessful, the weapon does nothing. Your success level cannot go above Ultimate (6) because of a weapon. Armor subtracts from the success level of actions taken against you. Armor cannot lower a success level past Marginal (1). In both cases, the items can have +1, +2, or +3 ratings. The level of the rating is determined by the specificity of the harm or protection.

Weapons and armor with a +1 rating work in specific situations determined by action taken, and often ability used. Examples include:

- \* A sword that gives +1 harm in combat.

- \* A royal crest that provides +1 protection when involved in diplomacy.

- \* A lute that deals +1 harm in attempts to win a crowd while playing it.

Weapons and armor with a +2 rating work in situations with a specific type of people, environment, or other restrictions. Examples include:

- \* A mace that gives +2 harm against "hard" armors, like plate or chain.

- \* The Seal of Maldor, which provides +2 protection against the law in Maldor.

- \* A set of snowshoes, which deal +2 harm in attempts to race across snowy areas.

Weapons and armor with a +3 rating work in rare situations or against particular persons. Examples include:

- \* A dagger forged to kill the Potentate of Ammeni, which deals +3 harm in attempts to kill her.

- \* A writ of birthday immunity, which gives +3 protection against any attempt to prosecute a person for crimes committed on their birthday.

- \* A set of goggles which give +3 harm while trying to see motion during an eclipse.

An item can have more than one rating - it can have up to three +1, two +2, and one +3 ratings.

Weapons and armor can occur in the game in two ways. The Story Guide can declare any item in the game to give +1 harm or protection in a particular situation. For example, someone using a sword to fight an unarmed person could be given +1 harm to all her attacks, or someone with a sack of gold could be given +1 harm to influence someone else. Alternatively, any player can declare her character's equipment to have a bonus with the Secret of Imbuement. This purchase is

subject to Story Guide approval.

## *Character Transcendence*

Transcendence is the result of a Transcendent (7) success level on an ability check. It signals the end of a character's story, and is a special occasion for that character's player. With this result, the player should feel free to narrate the outcome of her roll herself, with any help she likes from the other players and Story Guide. If the roll comes during Bringing Down the Pain, that ends immediately. If the scene is taking place during the day, the sun is eclipsed by the moon within the hour; if during the night, the moon is eclipsed by the sun.

The story should immediately focus upon the transcendent character. She has just accomplished a feat that will be spoke of by her companions forever, and the day is her. Within 24 game-hours of the moment she became transcendent, her story will be over. The character may die; she may retire for a quiet life; she may disappear over the hills; or she may become something else entirely. Her story will end and she will be retired from play.

This does not mean the campaign is over. The player may bring a new character into play after her current character leaves. This character may well be established during the day of transcendence, and carry on the legends of a character who has just had her most glorious moment.

## CRUNCHY BITS

### *Abilities*

Each ability in The Shadow of Yesterday has an associated pool, a pool which can be drawn on in order to give a bonus die to use of the ability. This is noted when naming abilities like this: Ability Name (Pool).

#### INNATE ABILITIES

Every character in this game has three innate abilities: natural reactions and quantifications of the character's physical and mental stability.

##### **Endure (Vigor)**

This is your character's ability to push on and persevere though pain and fatigue. It is used to test the limits of a character's physicality and fitness.

##### **React (Instinct)**

This measures the quickness of a character's body and mind. It is as much "how quick the character notices something" as "how quick the character moves."

##### **Resist (Reason)**

"Resist" is the strength of a character's will, and is used to prevent compulsion of a natural or supernatural type. This includes physical compulsion: "Resist" would be used for a character to keep her cool under torture, for example, while "Endure" would be used to see how long she could stay conscious under the same torture.

#### OTHER ABILITIES

While *The Shadow of Yesterday* has a full setting, and plenty of pre-made abilities and rules that go with that, you should never forget that it's your setting. Story Guides and players are encouraged to make up their own abilities, Secrets, and Keys.

Open abilities follow a few guidelines:

They are either innate abilities to a person (Athletics) or things that can be easily learned. Usually, they're both, as in the aforementioned case of Athletics, or Scrapping.

They are rather wide in scope, encompassing a field of actions, without being overly broad. Movement is too broad; Climbing Fences is too narrow. Fighting is too broad; Broad-sword Usage is too narrow.

They are not specialized knowledge that applies only to a certain people or culture. These are the Species and Cultural Abilities, which are much more narrow in scope.

They often overlap with other abilities, which is great. Two abilities may describe different styles of performing similar tasks.

The pre-made open abilities are below. Examine them to get ideas for your own. They've been organized by category. Any character can take abilities from any category, but it may be easier to choose a category or two that define your character and take most of the abilities from them.

#### ARTISTIC ABILITIES

##### **Freeload (Instinct)**

Freeload is used to get free meals and shelter. Your character can't really get wealthy using Freeload, but you can manage to survive even if broke, which isn't bad.

##### **Create (Instinct)**

Create is used for painting, sculpting, and other arts where a concrete item is created.

##### **Story-tell (Reason)**

Story-tell is used for creating or telling stories, including ballads.

##### **Music (Instinct)**

Music is used for singing and playing instruments, and represents musical talent, not lyrical talent. Music and Story-tell are often used together to make an effective song.

#### CRAFTSMAN ABILITIES

##### **Haggling (Instinct)**

Haggling is used to get the best price for goods. In the world of *Near*, coinage doesn't really exist, and this is used to make sure you get a fair trade in barter, which means it can be used to evaluate the quality and worth of goods as well.

##### **Fine Crafts (Reason)**

Fine Crafts is used for leatherworking, woodwork-ing, and other crafts that require fine manipulation.

##### **Rough Crafts (Vigor)**

Rough Crafts is used for stonecutting, forging, and other crafts that require a great deal of strength.

##### **Complex Crafts (Reason)**

Complex Crafts is used for any task that requires a great deal of steps or mixing of different materials, ranging from building clocks and locks to cooking.

#### WARRIOR ABILITIES

##### **First Aid (Reason)**

First Aid is simple medicine: bandaging cuts, binding broken bones, and washing out wounds. If someone's been physically hurt, this can be used to heal them.

##### **Scrapping (Vigor)**

Untrained fighting is the center of this ability. Fists, feet, daggers, kitchen knives, table legs, and all sorts of clubbery are usually used in Scrapping.

##### **Sense Danger (Instinct)**

This ability is used to perceive anything that might physically harm your character. It is not a "sixth sense": the danger must be somehow perceivable, if only barely. Here's where you get those cat-like reflexes.

##### **Battle (Reason)**

Battle is the basic skills and tactics known by any military commander. It is used for giving orders in combat and planning attacks, including ambushes.

#### ILLICIT ABILITIES

##### **Stealth (Instinct)**

Stealth is used to sneak up on people, hide from other characters, and conceal objects on your character's body.

##### **Theft (Instinct)**

Theft is used for picking pockets, cutting purses, lockpicking, breaking and entering without being noticed, and safecracking, as well as any other theft-related activity.

##### **Deceit (Reason)**

Deceit is used to fool other characters, including pretending to be someone else, forge a document, or straight-out lie well.

##### **Streetwise (Reason)**

Streetwise is used to know information about the illegal underground, including where to buy illegal things, sell stolen goods, or know who controls organized crime.

#### OUTDOOR ABILITIES

##### **Athletics (Vigor)**

This is a measure of raw physicality and fitness. It is used for running, jumping, swimming, climbing, or any other strength-based task not listed as a separate ability.

##### **Aim (Vigor)**

Aim is used for shooting bows and crossbows and throwing objects.

### **Woodcraft (Reason)**

Woodcraft is used to track people or animals, know what sorts of plants and animals are present in an area and their properties, as well as set traps.

### **Animal Ken (Instinct)**

Animal Ken is the social skill for dealing with animals, and is used to deal with domesticated animals or wild ones. Domesticated animals are much easier to control, of course, and this may be used to give them commands. For wild animals, on the other hand, this works about as far as scaring them off, or convincing them not to eat you.

### **PRIESTLY ABILITIES**

#### **Pray (Vigor)**

Pray is used for meditation, blessing actions, and performing religious rituals. It involves the character's belief that she is connected to something better than her.

#### **Counsel (Reason)**

Counsel is used to bring peace to someone via private conversation, not unlike mental health counseling. It is the spiritual equivalent of First Aid.

#### **Discern Truth (Instinct)**

Discern Truth is used to tell if someone is being honest, or read a person's intentions.

#### **Orate (Reason)**

Orate is used to sway opinion with speech or demagoguery, and is generally used with crowds.

### **SOCIAL ABILITIES**

#### **Sway (Instinct)**

Sway is used to affect individuals through conversation. Unlike Orate, this works better one-on-one, and the character being swayed may not even realize your character's intentions.

#### **Savoir-Faire (Instinct)**

Savoir-Faire is used to act smooth, dance, get a kiss from a lady, and get another character into your character's bedchambers.

#### **Etiquette (Reason)**

Etiquette is used to know your way around a society, including knowing who is important and where to get favors. It is the non-illegal society equivalent of Streetwise.

#### **Dueling (Vigor)**

Dueling is the art of honorable one-on-one battle. Almost every culture has its rituals for physically solving problems, which usually involve a sword.

### **ABILITY BREADTH**

If you've ever played another RPG, you might look at Complex Crafts and think, "Why can my master chef character fix clocks?" It's a good question, but the answer is simple: "She can't unless you decide she can." You decide what your character is good at with craft and artistic skills, and if she picks something up later, that's great. You don't have to quantify this: you

don't have to write down "cooking" when you take Complex Crafts. Just play your character as you envision her, and if it's thematically interesting for your chef character to fix a clock, go for it.

## *Secrets*

Secrets are special qualities your character has that let her do extraordinary things. They generally work in the following ways:

- \* Permanently get a bonus die to a specific use of an ability.

- \* Permanently get +1 damage or protection with an ability.

- \* Permanently get a minor unusual ability. This ability may require a skill use.

- \* Spend one die from a pool to use an ability in an unusual way.

- \* Spend two or three dice from a pool to use an ability in a supernatural or powerful unusual way.

- \* Spend as many dice from a pool for a scalable effect. If this effect is especially powerful or unusual, it may carry a cost of extra dice.

Most of the Secrets pre-made for *The Shadow of Yesterday* follow the above guidelines, but not all. Look at the ones below, and examine them for ideas for your own.

#### **Secret of Animal Speech**

Your character can speak to an animal and understand its signals. In order to get the animal to cooperate or not try to eat you, you might need a successful Animal Ken ability check. Even if you fail this check, you'll understand that it wants to eat you loud and clear. Cost: 2 Instinct.

#### **Secret of Blessing**

With a successful Pray ability check, your character may bless the actions of a group. You must state a specific goal for them to accomplish. Your success level with this ability check is a pool of bonus dice any member of this group can use in accomplishing this task. Cost: 1 Vigor.

#### **Secret of the Bodhisavatta**

You must have at least one ability ranked at Grand Master to take this Secret. When you roll a Transcendent success level, you do not have to have your character transcend. Your character can deny herself of perfection and will stay chained to this life. Roll a penalty die immediately. You can keep rolling penalty dice until you are no longer Transcendent. Cost: Take a level one harm associated with the ability per penalty die.

#### **Secret of Contacts**

Your character knows all sorts of people in all sorts of places. You can use this Secret for your character to automatically have a past relationship with any Story Guide character in the adventure. You may describe the relationship in a short phrase, such as "old enemy," "wartime buddy," "ex-lover," but the Story Guide gets to decide the history and current disposition of the relationship. Cost: 3 points from a pool deter-

mined by the Story Guide. Vigor would fit for a wartime buddy, Instinct for an ex-lover, and Reason for a former colleague in your character's field of study.

#### **Secret of Disarm**

Your character can disarm an opponent, without changing intentions, with a successful ability check using a weapon in Bringing Down the Pain. Because weapons can be all sorts of things in this game, "disarm" just means that the weapon's been rendered ineffective for the duration of Bringing Down the Pain. Cost: 1 Vigor.

#### **Secret of Enhancement (Ability)**

You must select an ability when you take this Secret. You may spend as many points out of the associated pool to give bonus dice to the ability as you like.

#### **Secret of Evaluate**

Your character's battle experience has given her the ability to read an opponent well. Evaluate your character's opponent not in descriptive terms, but in game mechanics, on a successful Battle ability check. You can ask for any of the following information, one bit per success level: Vigor score, Instinct score, best combat ability and score, specific ability score. Cost: 1 Reason.

#### **Secret of Flying Leap**

Your character can make amazing leaps. Using this Secret, she can jump much further or higher than normal. For each Vigor point you spend, up to three, you can jump another multiple of normal human ability for one leap.

#### **Secret of Herbal Health**

Your character can always find an herb that is an effective healing agent with a successful Woodcraft ability check in the outdoors. The herb lets you use your Woodcraft Ability to act like First Aid and heal others. Cost: 1 Reason.

#### **Secret of the Hidden Pocket**

Your character is adept at hiding objects on her person. No matter how carefully searched the character has been, she may pull an inexpensive, small (hand-sized) item off her person with a successful Stealth ability check. Cost: 2 Instinct.

#### **Secret of Imbuement**

Turn an item into a weapon or armor, using the rules found in the Resolution chapter. You can add one weapon or armor rating to the item each time you take this Secret. In addition, you can use this Secret to imbue the item with the power of another Secret. That Secret will have its costs lowered by one pool point. The item can be taken away from you, but you must be given a chance to get it back, or you can roll your advances spent on this Secret into a new item. You can take away someone else's Imbued item, but you'll have to pay the original cost to keep it.

#### **Secret of Inner Meaning**

Your character's art carries a meaning beyond the surface. Use any non-physical Instinct-based ability at a distance via a piece of your character's art. Cost: 2

Reason.

#### **Secret of Knock-back**

Your character's blows send people flying. Knock back a stricken character one yard per success level. This immediately ends Bringing Down the Pain if you're involved in that, with no resolution as to intentions. Cost: 2 Vigor.

#### **Secret of Languages (Specific language)**

Your character knows a language outside her homeland's.

#### **Secret of Mighty Blow**

Your character can strike with extreme might. Spend as many dice of Vigor as you like to increase the harm of a successful blow in combat.

#### **Secret of Quality Construction (Craft Ability)**

You must choose a specific Craft Ability when you take this Secret. Your character can craft items of excellent quality. Any item your character creates using this Secret gives one bonus die to a particular ability when using the item, permanently. Cost: 5 Reason.

#### **Secret of Scribing**

Your character can read and write any language she knows.

#### **Secret of Shattering**

The weight of your weapon can be used to destroy other weapons and armor in combat. With a successful attack, your success level (not including any damage bonuses) is removed from the damage bonuses of weapons or damage reductions of armor. If reduced to 0, the item is destroyed. Cost: 2 Vigor. (Note: if used against player characters' weapons or armor bought with the Secret of Imbuement, they may repair the item or have it become something new after the scene.)

#### **Secret of the Signature Weapon**

Your character has one weapon with which she is bonded. You gain a bonus die to any action taken with that weapon and any other character else attempting to use the weapon receives a penalty die. (Note: to change this weapon, this Secret must be taken again.)

#### **Secret of Speciality (Skill)**

You must select an ability when you take this Secret. Choose a speciality your character has within that ability - for example, cooking pastries for the Complex Crafts skill. You always have a bonus die when your character attempts an action that falls within that speciality.

#### **Secret of Synergy**

You can chain multiple abilities together in Bringing Down the Pain as you would in a normal ability check; that is, you can roll multiple ability checks in one action to add bonus dice to the final check. Cost: 1 associated pool point for each extra ability you roll.

#### **Secret of the Sudden Knife**

Your character is a master of the assassin's art. In a surprise attack, the victim automatically takes harm level 4 (bloodied) if your character successfully hits. She should make an Endure ability check resisting your roll. If she fails, she automatically takes harm level 6.

This is irrespective of being in a Bringing Down the Pain situation. Cost: 3 points from whatever pool is associated with the ability you're using, plus 1 from each of the other pools.

#### **Secret of Throwing**

Anything is a dangerous missile in your character's hands. She can throw anything fist-sized to greatsword-sized as an attack, using the Aim ability, and the object counts as a +1 weapon. Cost: 1 Vigor.

#### **Secret of the Unwalked Path**

Your character's footfalls leave little trace for others to follow. You can use your character's Woodcraft ability in resistance to anyone trying to track her. Cost: 1 Instinct.

### *Keys*

Keys are the motivations, problems, connections, duties, and loyalties that pull on your character. To the player, they're highly important because they generate experience points. Creating new Keys may be easier than new Abilities or Secrets - they follow very simple rules.

A Key must involve a motivation, problem, connection, duty, or loyalty.

Keys come in two types:

\* Motivations. When the motivation is fulfilled in play, gain an experience point. When the motivation is fulfilled against good odds, gain three experience points.

\* Everything else. When the Key comes up in play, gain an experience point. (You can use this three times per session. This applies to all Keys below.) When the Key presents a minor problem, gain two experience points. When it presents a major problem, gain five experience points.

All Keys have a Buyoff, which is a reversal from the Key by the character. All Buyoffs give the character 10 experience points. This Buyoff occurs only when you, the player, wants it to happen: you can lose a battle with the Secret of Bloodlust and still keep the Secret. If you want your character to undergo a change in her personality, though, adding to the story, you can take this Buyoff by fulfilling it. If you do take the Buyoff, you can never take this Key again.

As always, see the pre-made Keys to get a feel for creating your own.

#### **Key of Bloodlust**

Your character enjoys overpowering others in combat. Gain 1 XP every time your character defeats someone in battle. Gain 3 XP for defeating someone equal to or more powerful than your character (equal or higher combat skill.) Buyoff: Be defeated in battle.

#### **Key of Conscience**

Your character has a soft spot for those weaker than their opponents. Gain 1 XP every time your character helps someone who cannot help themselves. Gain 2 XP every time your character defends someone with might who is in danger and cannot save themselves.

Gain 5 XP every time your character takes someone in an unfortunate situation and changes their life to where they can help themselves. Buyoff: Ignore a request for help.

#### **Key of the Coward**

Your character avoids combat like the plague. Gain 1 XP every time your character avoids a potentially dangerous situation. Gain 3 XP every time your character stops a combat using other means besides violence. Buyoff: Leap into combat with no hesitation.

#### **Key of Faith**

Your character has a strong religious belief that guides her. Gain 1 XP every time she defends her faith to others. Gain 2 XP whenever this character converts someone to her faith. Gain 5 XP whenever this character defends her faith even though it brings her great harm. Buyoff: Your character renounces her beliefs.

#### **Key of Fraternity**

Your character has someone she is sworn to, a friend who is more important than anyone else. Gain 1 XP every time this character is present in a scene with your character (maximum 3 per adventure). Gain 2 XP whenever your character has to make a decision that is influenced by them. Gain 5 XP every time your character defends them by putting herself at risk. Buyoff: Sever the relationship with this person.

#### **Key of Glittering Gold**

Your character loves wealth. Gain 1 XP every time you make a deal that favors you in wealth. Gain 3 XP every time you double your wealth. Buyoff: Give away everything you own except what you can carry lightly.

#### **Key of the Guardian**

Your character has a ward, someone who depends on her for security and protection. Gain 1 XP every time this character is present in a scene with your character. Gain 2 XP whenever your character has to make a decision that is influenced by them. Gain 5 XP every time your character rescues them from harm. Buyoff: Sever the relationship with this person.

#### **Key of the Impostor**

Sometimes your entire life is a lie. You gain 1 XP whenever you pass yourself off as someone/something you're not. You gain 2 XP whenever you convince others in spite of serious skepticism. You gain 5 XP whenever your story survives a deliberate, focused, "Hey everybody, look!" attempt to reveal your identity. Buyoff: Confess your imposture to those duped.

#### **Key of the Masochist**

Your character thrives on personal pain and suffering. Gain 1 XP every time she is bloodied and 3 XP every time she is broken. Buyoff: Flee a source of physical or psychic damage.

#### **Key of the Mission**

Your character has a personal mission that she must complete. Gain 1 XP every time she takes action to complete this mission (2 XP if this action is successful.) Gain 5 XP every time she takes action that completes a major part of this mission. Buyoff: Abandon

this mission.

#### **Key of the Outcast**

Your character has lost fellowship or membership in an organization - which could just be a culture, or a specific cross-cultural group. This separation defines your character as much as membership in the organization defines its members. Gain 1 XP every time her status with this organization comes up. Gain 2 XP every time her disassociation brings her harm. Gain 5 XP every time the separation brings your character great pain and suffering. Buyoff: Regain membership in the organization.

#### **Key of Renown**

"You must be the worst assassin I've ever heard of." "But you have heard of me." You gain 1 XP whenever you see to it that your name and deeds are known, by bragging about them or making sure there are witnesses. You gain 2 XP whenever you put yourself at risk to do something unnecessary or foolish that will add to your reputation. You gain 5 XP whenever you risk your life to take credit for your actions (bragging that you were the one who killed the Duke's son, for example.). Buyoff: Give someone else credit for an action that would increase your renown.

#### **Key of Power**

You don't even care what you do with it, you just want it. You gain 1 XP whenever you earn a boon from someone important, earn a slight gain in prestige, or make a rival look bad. You gain 3 XP whenever you ruin, kill, or otherwise eliminate a rival, and improve your own position because of it. Buyoff: Relinquish your power and position.

#### **Key of Vengeance**

Your character has a hatred for a particular organization, person, or even species or culture. Gain 1 XP every time your character hurts a member of that group or a lackey of that person. Gain 2 XP every time your character strikes a minor blow at that group or person (killing a member of the organization or one of the person's lackeys, disrupting their life, destroying their property). Gain 5 XP every time your character strikes a major blow at that group or person. Buyoff: Let your enemy go.

#### **Key of the Vow**

Your character has a vow of personal behavior that she has sworn not to break. This could be a dietary restriction, a requirement to pray at sunbreak every morning, or something else like that. Gain 1 XP for every adventure in which your character does not break this vow. Gain 2 XP every time your character does not break this vow even though it causes her minor harm or inconvenience. Gain 5 XP every time your character does not break this vow even though it causes her great harm. Buyoff: Break this vow.

## THE STORY GUIDE

### *Designing an adventure*

Adventure design is not a hard process. No one should ever be afraid of being the Story Guide. You are not responsible for telling the entire story or anything, so don't worry about that. Imagine being the Story Guide, and designing an adventure like this. You meet up with your players and get to know their characters. You find out what they're all about and what makes them tick. Then you sit down and say, "I'd like to see an adventure about these people and their issues, and I'd like to see a few things in it: an evil sorcerer, a misguided maiden, and a knife fight under a waterfall. Go!"

#### KNOW YOUR CHARACTERS

The most important part of adventure design is knowing the characters. The adventure will, of course, be about them. Keys, Secrets, and abilities are chosen by the players so they can find their characters in scenes where these things are useful. Read the character sheets. Better yet, keep a copy of them so you can use them during game preparation. Organize the characters somehow. I take out a sheet of paper and write down the character's names on it, each in a separate corner. I write down all their Keys around them, and the Secrets they use the most and their best abilities.

Then take these notes and think of how this bit of character can work into an adventure. You don't have to hit everything, but hit at least one Key and one other thing per character. Make up some non-player characters that hit these things. Your adventure is pretty much written at this point.

#### KNOW YOUR PLAYERS

These people are probably your friends. If not, you're in trouble.

What do your friends like? Does one of them prefer stories with bloody combat, guts a-sprayin' everywhere? Maybe you should throw some of that in. Does one like reversing gender roles? Put in a prince in distress.

Here's something I like to do, but it's touchy. Think about what your friends are currently going through. People dig stories they can identify with. Is one of them going through a break-up? Have the status of her character's love interest change, or if she doesn't have one, introduce one. It doesn't matter whether the change is for good or bad - he'll grab on and take care of that. Does another have issues with her boss? Introduce an authoritative non-player character. That player will take care of how her character reacts. In all these reflections of real life, do not plan a resolution. That is totally and completely not the job of the Story Guide. The players will find a resolution. Your job is to insert conflict that they can identify with.

#### KNOW THYSELF

What do you like in a story? Put some in. You're the Story Guide, after all.

#### KEY SCENES

Now you get to apply all that work above to the game. Take your big list of ideas, and turn them into Key Scenes.

The main experience engines in *The Shadow of Yesterday* are Keys, allowing players to decide exactly what sort of experiences in play they are most interested in. The Story Guide is just as much of a player, though, and so she controls a secondary experience engine: Key Scenes. Key Scenes are similar to some fantasy RPG experience systems in that they are particular junctures in the play session that the Story Guide has decided beforehand are worth experience to the characters: *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* is one game that uses this. These are not particular outcomes, though. "Saving the princess," "killing or thwarting the evil overlord," and "taming the wild beast" are not good examples of Key Scenes. Key Scenes should be tense, have multiple outcomes, and force players to make a decision for their characters. (In this, they are like Bangs from Ron Edwards' *Sorcerer*.)

"Discovering the princess is trapped in a high tower," "meeting the overlord," and "confronting the wild beast" are good Key Scenes, as each can result in multiple outcomes and do not put restrictions on what the player decision is for her character. Key Scenes do not have to tie into any particular overarching plot or story-line; they can be light and humorous, or grim and serious.

Whenever a character is present in a Key Scene, she earns one to three experience points, as determined beforehand by the Story Guide. These experience points are given as soon as the scene is over.

### *Designing SGCs*

Interesting Story Guide characters (SGCs) are the cornerstone of a good adventure. In their interactions with the players' characters, they provide a mirror to reflect action and values. Before figuring out their mechanics, you should figure out their motivations and general reactions. This is easier than you might think: depending on the importance of their character to the story, you should be able to sum this up in one to three sentences.

Of extreme importance is a name for the character: first impressions are, as it's said, lasting. I recommend making a list of common and uncommon names for the culture that your game is currently set in and having that by your side as a Story Guide. Pick names for your most important SGCs ahead of time; throwaway SGCs can have a name picked on the fly from the list.

#### BEASTS

Beasts are the easiest SGCs of all to write up. Instead

of having the normal gamut of abilities, they should have just these few.

#### **Power (Vigor)**

This is the animal's strength and ferocity. Even animals, such as a tame buffalo, that do not normally attack people may have a high Prowess, as they'd whip some tail if provoked. This is used to attack other characters and smash things.

#### **Prowess (Instinct)**

This is the animal's quickness and control. It is used to dodge blows, run away, and be fast like a rabbit.

#### **Senses (Instinct)**

This is self-explanatory: it is the animal's ability to notice its surroundings.

#### **Brain (Reason)**

This is a measure of the animal's intelligence and will, and is used like Reason. While it may be a hindrance to domestication, it is also used for a domesticated animal to understand commands.

Beasts should have few, if any, points in their pools. One or two points in Instinct makes them a much more formidable foe, and one or two points in Vigor makes them devastating. No points should be in Reason unless the animal has very special properties. An animal may have one or two Secrets to represent special abilities that it has, such as goring horns, or a prehensile tail. You can remove the cost from these Secrets if the ability is built in to the animal.

#### PUNKS, POGUES, AND PEEPS

With people, abilities can be built as you need them. If this SGC has any real importance to the story, you'll need a name. After that, just assign abilities as you need them. With a small scale, it should be easy to decide if someone's a Unskilled or a Master or anything in between. Write down the ability and rank and make sure to keep that consistent. If you're making up someone on the fly, they have no pools. If you decide to give them a Secret, they can only use it once in a scene.

If you have a major SGC that you're building before play, design that character as normal. However, their pools should be halved, as they do not have the chances to spend them that the players' characters do.

### *Running an adventure*

Running an adventure in *The Shadow of Yesterday* is, more than anything, about timing. Your first adventure with a group of characters will be a lot of you injecting content: you'll definitely have to start the first scene. Do like I said above: take a look at these characters, especially their Keys. Where would they be? Make up a few options and give them to the player: "So, where do you think Mr. Senkowski would be on an average morning? At the bar, or maybe a cathouse?"

Once the ball's rolling, you need to sit back and watch. Wait for pauses in the game, moments where the players don't really know where to take things.

Then make something exciting happen to one of their characters. They'll react, and you can sit back again.

If the players take stuff in a direction you didn't expect, be agile. Rewrite your concepts on the fly to fit in the direction the game's moving. Remember this: nothing in the game exists until a player character interacts with it. It's easy to fall into the trap that you've made up this great location and, by gum, it's part of the game. Don't do that: the only things that exist in the game are the ones that come up in play. Until then, everything and everyone else is in a state of possibility.

### *Giving out experience points*

As a Story Guide, you are responsible for binding the game together into an enjoyable narrative. You may be considered responsible by the players for their experience points and advancement. They are, of course, as wrong as they can be. When you see a player have her character act in a way that should earn her experience from a Key, feel free to announce that out loud. Feel just as free not to: that character is that player's creation, and she should well be playing attention to what's going on, and be invested in her character's advancement.

With the exception of Key Scenes, which you are responsible for, an ideal flow of experience point giving should go like this:

Jack, a player: My character, Willis, leaps forward, his ratkin legs kicking to land in front of the sword-blow coming down on Jeph. (rolls) Success! Hey, that hits one of my Keys. 2 experience, right?

Jennifer, the Story Guide: A-yup.

### *The Standard Advance*

Before a campaign begins, the Story Guide and players need to decide how long they want the game to be, and how fast they want characters to advance. Each group, and each story, can work differently in these respects, and so *The Shadow of Yesterday* can be easily changed to accommodate this.

The standard advance, how many experience points it costs to buy an advance for a character, is normally set at 5 XP. This will accommodate a style of play where your character will gain one to three advances at every session, normally, which is pretty quick compared to most RPGs. If this is too fast for you, I suggest moving this standard advance up in increments of 5 XP to change play speed. Set at 10 XP, characters will earn an advance every session or two; set at 15 XP, characters will earn, on average, an advance over two to three sessions; and set at 20 XP, characters will earn an advance every three or four sessions. It is not recommended to set the standard advance higher than 20 XP.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

### FOR THE PLAYER

Using two abilities is usually better than using one. If both of them are Competent or better, you'll get bonus dice and really shine.

When Bringing Down the Pain, give up. Do it often. In other games, each combat you were in might have been to the death. That's been my experience, at least. If you try that here, it will drag out. Every round, you should think "is losing so bad? Can I deal with a broken arm, or sullied reputation, or whatever?" Chances are, if you're losing, that you'll lose a lot more by staying in.

When you're physically tore up, get in an argument and Bring Down the Pain. If you've been socially massacred, get in a fight and Bring Down the Pain. Harm shakes out afterwards. A tussle's good for the soul.

Don't forget about gift dice. Use them and ask others for them.

Bring up your Keys whenever you use them.

Picking two Keys that are at odds with each other (the classic example is the Key of Conscience and the Key of Bloodlust) means you can get experience points for whatever decision you make in an applicable conflict. And it makes your character more interesting.

If you're losing in Bringing Down the Pain, you can spend advances to raise the ability you're using right then and right there. Don't forget that.

When you're in real trouble, buy off a Key. Sure, it changes your character permanently, but that can be a lot of fun.

Use pool refreshment like a rock star. You are more than allowed to refresh more than one pool at once. Get a sexy man or lady to pour wine down your throat, oil you down and get with the friction, and then make with the bedtime reading. You'll be all refreshed and have a great scene.

### FOR THE STORY GUIDE

This game doesn't have a lot of perception-based abilities. Sense Danger's the only one and it's used for active physical danger. That's on purpose. If it is interesting for a character to see or hear something, like a clue, they do. The exception is when one character actively tries to fool another. When that happens, a player can roll React - or Resist, if more applicable - in a resisted ability check against whatever the other character is using.

Hey, Story Guide! Don't hold back. Seriously. It's no fun. To be more explicit, you might in some other role-playing game had this whole campaign where you were trying to find clues leading to something big. Don't do that in this game. If, for example, one of the most powerful people in the world, who gains her feral strength and near-immortality through drinking foul poisons and eating human flesh is going to be part of your campaign, have her show up early. One of your

players might do something crazy like say, "Ooh! I take the Key of Unrequited Love with her right now." That is fun.

Don't you dare play your SGCs like complete fatalists. You need to give up Bringing Down the Pain, too.

Feel free to set nasty stakes for crazy attempts your players will want to make. There's nothing wrong with saying "If you lose this ability check writing a song for the duke, you'll take level 5 harm in Instinct, and be banned from the kingdom."

If your players don't Bring Down the Pain against one of your SGCs, and wipe them out with a regular ability check, bring that bad guy back in two or three sessions. Recurring enemies are awesome.

Use pool refreshment like a rock star. Your best chance to introduce some new characters in the game is by making player characters meet them in order to refresh a pool. If a player says, "I need to refresh Reason," and doesn't say how, she's begging to be clubbed with your imagination. Seriously, this happened to me and I got to play a dead guy with a theremin.