SHADES
A game of remembered suffering and the building of trust

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the darkness where there is no thought, the smallest flicker of consciousness is a momentous event. First comes perception - vaguely, distorted, but unmistakably the awareness of an outer reality. Then ideas emerge, slowly, unfocused fragments appearing and winking out of existence again in a twisted resemblance of thought. Suddenly your sense of individuality, lost for what may have been a few seconds or an eternity, returns. You are a person. An I. You can think and you can feel, and you know that once you lived a real life. But who are you? And what? In the depths of your mind, you feel memories stirring, waiting to be awakened. The painful remembrances of a tragic past.

In Shades, every player takes control of a fictional character caught in a bizarre parody of life. Your body died, possibly long ago, but your mind merely retreated in a temporary unconsciousness. Now you have returned as a shade, a being without corporeal form, invisible to living human beings, but able to perceive the material world. You have little sense of self, and no idea of who you are, why you are dead, in what place you find yourself. But many memories lurk beneath the surface of your mind, waiting only for the most tiny of prods before vehemently bursting forth. These memories tell the tragic tale of your terrible fate, of the pain you suffered and inflicted; yet they may also contain the key to appeasement and redemption.

The stories of all the shades' lives are inextricably entwined. You were the authors of each other's destinies; your choices, conflicts and actions led to the unhappy, and perhaps untimely, end of all. You have inflicted so much pain upon each other that the wounds have never healed. They keep you tied to this existence. Can you resolve your differences, forgive each other, redeem your mistakes? Or is the impasse of hate and accusation to remain forever?

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When playing *Shades*, you and one or two others will try to construct a haunting tale of tragedy and forgiveness from scratch. You will take turns narrating a piece of the story from the point of view of your character, and you will try to make these pieces into a coherent whole. But the rules of the game don't make it all that easy for you to succeed: *Shades* is meant as a challenging cooperative game. The challenge is for you and the other player or players to together tell a coherent, emotional tale; and to do it just by telling the tale, without any prior agreement and without talking about the story during the game. Sounds hard? It's easier than you may think, once you've learned to trust the other players and be sensitive to their wishes and ideas.

And the rules of *Shades* are specifically designed to help you build up that trust and that sensitivity. They will help you get to know what kind of stories the other players like, and how they try to signal their ideas to you. They will help you to learn to relinquish control over the story to others when that is Chapter 1 called for, without taking a posture of deferrence. Not only will you be telling great stories and having fun doing it, you may also become better friends.

Chapter 2: The challenge

2.1 Collaborative storytelling

Shades is a member of the large and diverse family of roleplaying games. Each player takes on the role of a character in a story, and together, collaboratively, the players tell a story. All you need are two or three people, about as many hours of your time as there are people, an active imagination, and six coins or tokens (three black ones and three white ones) for each player.

Together, you will sit and talk, each player telling a small part of the story before giving the turn to the next one. As the narrative progresses, a dreadful past is revealed even as the stage is set for a dramatic final scene of forgiveness and release — or of hate, anger and eternal imprisonment. This is your goal while playing *Shades*: telling a gripping, emotional story on the theme of forgiveness. You should think of this as a challenge, and the only way to rise up to the challenge is by developing an atmosphere of trust and sensitivity between the players. What *Shades* gives you are rules and advice that will help you create that atmosphere and achieve the goal of the game.

In this chapter, we will first look a little closer at the type of story which the players of *Shades* are meant to put together. Then, I will sketch what playing *Shades* actually looks like. The next three chapters flesh out this sketch. In chapter 3, the rules of *Shades* are explained, including the different kinds of scene, the stages of the game, the use of coins and the mandatory narrative techniques. Chapter 4 is all about the social situation, and explains why *Shades* needs you to be sensitive to the wishes of toher players, and trust them — more so than in most roleplaying games. More importantly, it also explains how the rules have been designed to allow you reach this level of sensitivity and trust without too much trouble. Finally, in chapter 5, I will give some miscellaneous advice about telling a

successful story of *Shades*, and I'll tell you how to raise the bar once you've managed to master the game.

Have fun.

2.2 Of bondage and release

You start in the darkness.

Unlike most roleplaying games, *Shades* does not have a phase of character creation that precedes play. You start in the darkness, as a tiny flicker of consciousness, and the successive narrations will slowly reveal the character you are playing. At the beginning of the game, you do not know the name, the gender, the age, or the emotional make-up of your character. But you do know some things.

All the player characters are 'shades', incorporeal beings which can observe the external world but can influence it only with great strain. Once they were human beings, but they died and their minds receded into a darkness where there was no thought. Now seconds, years, or maybe centuries later — they find consciousness stirring again. They hardly know what it is to be an individual to think, to feel; they no longer know who they were, how they lived their lives, and so forth. We — the players — know that they were all part of a tragic series of events which took place at the location they are now destined to haunt. The stories of their lives form a twisted tale of pain and grief, which they visited upon each other and themselves. The past is tragedy.

Bound to this world because of the unhealed wounds the past has left in their souls, and starting without knowing even their own name and sex, the shades' predicament seems grim indeed. But as they explore the world, they find places and objects, perhaps people, which stir memories deep within. As these memories slowly accumulate, their own self is reconstructed, they remember the others, and the tragic tale becomes clear for all to see. The processes of discovery for the shades and for the players are, in a sense, one and the same. Once the story has been made clear, the shades can try and find a way to escape their present fate by resolving the past

tragedy in the present. Whether they will succeed or not is held in suspense until the last moment, as the possibility of a release is formulated, and eventually chosen or rejected by the shades in a dramatic final scene.

2.3 **Scenes and turns**

The basic concept of play is extremely simple. One player starts narrating a scene. When she has finished, the player to her left narrates the next scene. If there is a third player, he takes the next turn; and then the cycle starts again. The game ends when the players decide it does, which is normally right after the climax has taken place.

A scene should last no longer than five minutes, and the first few scenes especially may be much shorter. Every player should narrate the scene with his own shade as the main character; you cannot tell a scene about someone else, or set at a time and place where your shade is not present. We will talk more about narrative techniques in the next chapter.

During a scene narrated by one player, the other players must be silent. Everything the narrated player says is added to the story; there can be no objections or arguments. It is absolutely forbidden to say anything about the game before it has ended. You can ask clarifications of the rules, or state that you want to have a bathroom break, but you can *not* say anything about the story that is being told. "Wouldn't it be cool if, . " "No, you misremember what I said, because or "I don't think this is going anywhere, maybe we should .. are all forbidden. The whole challenge of *Shades* is to tell a story without any explicit discussion. You'll have to tune in on each other simply by telling the story, and by the informed use of tokens, which will be explained in chapter 3.

That is it. You take turns telling scenes in which your character is the protagonist, and while narrating you have absolute authority over the story. But there are several constraints on your narration, as

well as several material tools to shape the story. The next chapter is dedicated to those.

Chapter 3: Spinning the story

3.1 Pre-game preparation

Preparing for a game of *Shades* is very easy. You need two or three players, and for each player three black tokens and three white tokens Go pieces work perfectly, but really anything with these colours will do. These tokens should be placed where everyone can Cleary see them and easily reach them. Make yourselves comfortable. Open a bottle of wine and put on non-intrusive background music, if you like that kind of thing. Done? Then you are ready to play.

3.2 Three stages

A game of Shades always thas three stages: awakening, revelation, and resolution. During the first stage, the Shades slowly regain consciousness. During the second, the tragedy in their past is revealed both to the shades and to the players. Then, in the final stage, the tragic conflict is resolved, either for good or for ill.

The progression from one stage to the next happens in the following way:

- The first stage, the awakening, lasts for three rounds of scenes. When each player has narrated three scenes, the second stage — revelation commences.
- The second stage, revelation, lasts until all players are in the possession of at least one white token. Once this condition is realised, the narrative enters the third and final stage resolution.

The purpose of the first stage is to lay a foundation for the characters that you will play, the setting in which you will play, the remembered tragedy and the general colour of the game. It is almost certain that you will not be able to say who your character is and where the action

is taking place at the end of the awakening, but you'll probably have your first vague ideas — maybe that you are male, or that the tragedy was about love, or that you are playing in an ancient castle or a sunken submarine.

The purpose of the second stage of the game is to reveal the tragedy that has bound all the shades to this existence. It is a terrible story in which all characters suffered greatly, and in which all characters inflicted great suffering on other characters. When it ends, it will not be the case that every single detail about this tragedy has been narrated, but it should have become clear in broad strokes how the characters suffered and inflicted suffering on each other. There may still be tensions in the story, unresolved conflicts between memories, but enough of the story must be known to start working towards a resolution. Both the pain and the villainy of all the characters have been at least partially revealed.

The purpose of the third stage of the game, the resolution, is to work towards a dramatic climax where the shades can either forgive each other and get the peace they have been craving, or harden their hearts and be doomed to haunt the earth forever.

The functional difference between the three stages is that different kinds of scenes occur in them. There are three kinds of scenes: awakening scenes, memory scenes and action scenes. We will talk about each of them seperately in the next three sections, but first the following table shows which kinds of scenes can occur at which stages of the game:

- During the awakening, only awakening scenes are allowed.
- During revelation, only memory scenes are allowed.
- During resolution, both memory and action scenes are allowed.

We will now talk about these three kinds of scenes.

3.3 Scenes: the awakening

During the first three scenes of each game, the shade slowly regains consciouness. This process is played out in awakening scenes. An

awakening scene is set in the present, and should be narrated as a stream-of-consciousness: the little snippets and fragments of thought that constitute the consciousness of the shade as she pulls herself together. Elements you may wish to use are: the darkness from which the shade emerges, her raw emotions, vague and incoherent perceptions of external reality and memories of pain and suffering. During these scenes, the thoughts of the shade are quite incoherent, and do not have the form of clear perceptions, or vivid memories. It is probably best to leave the gender and name of the shade indeterminate during the awakening.

Because the shade has not yet formed a sense of self, you should at first avoid using the words 'I' and 'me'; but because the thoughts do constitute the consciousness of the shade, ywords like 'he' and 'her' are inappropriate as well. For example:

Darkness. A silent eternity. Rest. And yet — yet, something is stirring. Something is amiss. A vague unrest pervades the Nothing; clouds of red lights swirl chaotically through the night. And then the pain returns, like a dagger through the heart.

The three subsequent scenes should progressively make the shade more of an individual, and more of a perceiver. You might wish to enter a notion of the 'I' during the second scene, and a perception of the external world in the third; or the other way around. Both should be present in the third scene. For example:

Like unimaginable horrors, the memories return but they recede into the darkness as I flee towards a small light in the distance. I. Me. Once, I was.. . but no. Stop thinking. The light grows bigger, it is a wreathing mass of red and yellow tendrils. It is a fire. In a hearth, a stone hearth. It angrily consumes a large piles of wood so why can't I feel the heat?

To repeat, an awakening scene is set in the present, and is narrated as a stream-of-consciousness. Once every player has

narrated three awakening scenes, the second stage of the game commences.

3.4 **Scenes: memories**

Memory scenes form the lion's share of a game of Shades. Each memory scene starts in the present, where the shade roams about, exploring the location she finds herself in. This can be anything: an ancient castle, a sunken ship, a monastry, a house, a school, a private hell, a small town. By slowly introducing elements of the scenery, it will soon become clear what kind of locale the shades are destined to haunt.

While exploring in the present, the shade encounters an object, a place, a person or an event that triggers a memory of his or her former life. At this point, the narrating player switches from the present to the past, and starts narrating the memory. Once the memory ends, the player can either end the scene immediately, or add a few more sentences that are set in the present.

There are different rules concerning narrating the part of a memory scene that is set in the present, and the part that is set in the past. In the present, you must speak in the third person about your shade: 'he floats towards the huge doors', 'Maria walks through the wall that seperates the kitchen from the garden'. You are telling the story from the point of view of an all-knowing narrator, who is also reliable: everything which is stated is true. You may choose whether you tell everything from the point of view of the shade whether the shade is the 'eyes and ears' of the listener — or whether you also speak about events the shade cannot perceive. Narration should proceed in present tense. And since the shades are insubstantial, they cannot influence the external world. They cannot even speak to humans or each other.

In the past, in contrast, you must speak in the first person — you are narrating a memory of your shade from his or her own point of view: 'I walked across the garden path to Peter, carrying one of the red roses in my hands.' You may only talk in the past tense. Most

importantly, the shades are unreliable narrators: their memories of the past have been twisted and deformed by wishful thinking, conscious or unconscious repression, and all kinds of embelishments to justify their own behaviour. Therefore, the memories may not be accurate representations of the past. The memories of different shades, and even those of the same shade, may be inconsistent.

You are allowed to have the characters of other players enter the memory you are narrating. In fact, you can tell anything you wish about these characters, and the other player has no veto right; he does not even have the right to protest. (But remember: what you are telling may not actually have happened the way you tell it!)

To summarise: each memory scene starts in the present, then moves to the past, and may or may not briefly return to the present. In the present, narration is reliable, but the shades cannot influence the world. In the past, narration is unreliable, but the characters not yet shades at that point can do anything normal humans can.

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Memory scenes are also the only scenes in which you can earn black tokens and *white tokens*. Here is how it works. Whenever you narrate something that doesn't fit in with what another player has narrated, and that player thinks this difference in memory between the shades is important to the story, the player can give you a black token. If one shade remember a door being black, and the other remember the door being brown, that is probably not an important difference. But if one shade remembers that her child died in a car accident because her husband was driving too fast, whereas the other shade remembers that his child died in a car accident because his wife was making a terrible row with him that distracted him from driving that probably is a difference that is important to the unfolding story.

Only the player whose statements have been contradicted can give a black token to the current narrator, but it's never compulsory to do so. A player cannot receive more than one token (black or white) in any scene, and no player can receive more than three black tokens

during the entire game. You may still narrate important differences after you've received your third black token, you'll just won't get any new tokens for this.

When you narrate a memory that shows how your shade is comming around to the point of view of one of the other shades, the player of that shade may give you a white token. Again, tokens should only be given for important parts of the narration. If the shade remembers that the door was, after all, black, this is probably too unimportant to be worthy of a token. But if the shade remembers that, yes, he *was* prone to driving too fast — that might net the player a white token.

You do not have to return to an already established contradiction in order to get a white token. If the general narrative has shown that the first shade believes the second to have been very cruel to her, whereas the second shade believes that he has always acted for the first shade's benefit, a white token might be earned for the first shade remembering the second to be nice to her, or for the second to remember streaks of cruelty in his own behaviour.

Only the player whose statements have been contradicted can give a white token to the current narrator, but it's never compulsory to do so. A player cannot receive more than one token (black or white) in any scene. In addition, you can only get a white token by removing a black token from your pile. If you have no black tokens, you cannot earn a white token. (Since you can only earn three black tokens during the game, you can also earn at most three white tokens.) You may still narrate reconciliations if you have no black tokens; it just won't earn you a white one.

3.5 Scenes: actions

Action scenes only become possible in the final stage of the game. To start an action scene, the narrating player must use a single white token, removing it from her pile. Any other player can enter the action scene by paying a white token of his own. In each action scene, every player participating thus pays one and only one white token.

Action scenes take place in the present. Each player narrates in first person, from the point of view of his own character, in the present tense. This narration is reliable: whatever is narrated actually happens. When more than one player is active in the scene, they should take turns narrating; often, they will be involved in dialogue.

In an action scene, the shades can influence the world. The spending of awhite token signifies the spending of willpower which the immaterial shade needs to become material, manipulate objects and communicate. In an action scene, the shades may open doors, play the piano, pluck roses. They also become visible to, and may speak with, living beings. Perhaps most importantly, they are able to talk to, hug, kiss or hit each other.

The final climax of the story must be an action scene, or several action scenes. The shades can only forgive each other, or fail to forgive each other, by communicating in the present and this can only be done in action scenes. Also note that any action scene in which one of the players spends his third white token is automatically a climactic scene: if the tragedy is not resolved in this scene, the shade will never again be able to gather the willpower necessary to try again. Such a shade is fated to haunt the earth forever in a nightmare of hate, anger and pain. The player of such a shade is allowed one final stream-ofconsciousness scene to show the predicament of the lost character.

But if the shades are reconciled, you can narrate a different ending. Perhaps they ascend to Heaven; perhaps they find their final rest; perhaps the scene simply fades to black.

Neither of the two finales is the right one; both can be dramatic, beautiful end emotional. Success is measured in tears or other signs of genuine pathos. Or actually, success is measured through answering several questions.

3.6 Wrapping up

Once you have either narrated how the shades have reconciled, or how they have doomed themselves forever, the game ends.

Speaking about the story is now allowed, encouraged, and even called for. Together, you should decide how well you have addressed the challenge presented by *Shades*. Specifically, you should make sure that the following three questions are answered by all the players:

1. Was the tale coherent and compelling?
2. Did it follow the narrative structure called for by the rules of the game?
3. Did all the players influence the story equally?

The more compelling the tale, the closer it followed the structure laid down by the rules and the more balanced the input of all the players was, the better you have succeeded. The latter condition is especially important: if one of the players made all the substantial contributions and the others just followed him, you have failed. The story should be made in a truly collaborative fashion.

Make sure to discuss what worked and didn't work for you. Where there any misunderstandings? Did you get the feeling that one of the players didn't want to use your ideas? Did you feel pushed around, or did you feel like you were pushing others? Lay all of this in the open, and talk about it! It will help you all to understand each other better, and improve your chances of success at playing *Shades*. If you play Shades several times with the same people, you'll quickly notice that you become better and better at it! Why? Because you've become more sensitive to the other players, and you've learnt to trust them. The next chapter will look into that more closely.

Chapter 4: Trust and sensitivity

4.1 The social level

Shades is a game of pain and forgiveness. That is what the stories are about. But is also a game of trust and sensitivity. That is what playing it is about. In this chapter we are going to look beyond the story and the means of its generation, and focus exclusively on the social situation of play. That, after all is what is real.

In general, roleplaying games allow negotiating about the statements that get added to the narration. Traditional games with a strong GameMaster invest one person with the authority to be the judge in all conflicts, but players are almost always allowed to argue their case. Other games have more democratic ways of argument, ofttimes even explicitly formulated in the rules. Many games use the friendly conflicts that arise during play as the main motor of the game. The result of these arrangements is that no statement a player makes is automatically added to the official narration of the game: it first goes through a stage of negotiation, even though this is most often silent and implicit acceptance.

In *Shades*, the situation is very different. The rules explicitly disallow any form of negotiation: whatever the narrating player says is added to the narration. Within the confines of the game, the narrating player has absolute power over the story. This is frightening: it is frightening that other players have such power, but it is even more frightening to have this power yourself. You want to have fun together, but anything you say might spoil the story for the other players. It is your heavy responsibility to say only things which everyone can accept in good cheer. To assuage the first fear, you must learn to trust the other players; in order to assuage the second, you must become sensitive to their tastes and wishes.

Luckily, *Shades* does not leave you without the tools to be successful. In the following sections, I will explain how you can use the narrative techniques that are the heart of the game to gently prod

and poke and find out what the other players like. Based on trust and sensitivity instead of friendly rivalry and self-assertion, *Shades* plays very differently from games that are propelled by the latter.

4.2 **Using the awakening**

Two elements of the fictional world which in the vast majority of games are already in place before game commences, are the characters and in broad outline the world they live in. In *Shades*, however, both characters and settings are constructed from scratch during the game. It is important to realise that not all characters appeal to all people, and the same goes for settings. So you should try and find a setting and a cast of characters that appeal to all players. The way to achieve this effect is by piecemeal narration, and ambiguity.

If you say 'Anna floats through the abandoned castle', the setting has been established in one fell stroke. If you say, instead, 'Anna looks down the stone spiral staircase, that winds its way into the depths', you have only added a small element to the setting. A long stone spiral staircase certainly invokes imagery of ancient buildings, of castles and tumbledown towers but alone, it is insufficient to determine the setting. If your fellow players do not like the idea of playing in an ancient castle, they can add new elements to the setting that pull the imagination in different directions. Thus, by piecemeal narration, you can work towards a setting and a cast of characters everyone is happy with.

A game of Shades always starts with three rounds of the fragmentary streamof-consciousness narration: the awakening scenes in which each shade pulls itself together. The first facts about the setting and the characters are thus, by virtue of the system, established in a piecemeal way, as vague references to the setting and the identity of the protagonists pop up in the consciousness of the shades. The awakening also sets the stage for a few memory scenes in which the attention of the shade is not yet very well

focused, allowing the players to continue piecemeal narration without awkwardness for quite a while.

Ambiguity is another very useful tool, which is almost automatically at work in the stream-of-consciousness scenes that constitute the awakening. Here you can drop words and phrases which the other players can use as they see fit. For example:

> Images follow each other in rapid succession. Clouds over the moors. A castle. Laughing people. The taste of salt on my lips. And *her.* In her red dress.. . the ground gives way beneath me.

At this point, another player can either narrate her shade also remembering a woman in a red dress, or remembering herself wearing a red dress. You, by making the above narration, have made a suggestion to the other player: 'it might be cool if you play a woman in a red dress'. But the other player can easily reject the suggestion by forcing a different interpretation of the narration.

Thus, by adding information to the fictional world one small fact at a time, and by making your statements open to many interpretations, the process of building a setting and a cast can be streamlined. The narrative structure of Shades, with its slowly awakening protagonists, allows you to do this in a very natural way.

4.3 Using unreliable narration

An important part of *Shades* is the revelation of the tragedy that took place in the past. The resurfacing memories of the shades slowly reveal this tale. Once again, you should strive to create a story that is appealing to all the players. Apart from the piecemeal and non-chronological nature of the memories, Shades furnishes you with another very useful tool: unreliable narration.

No memory of a shade is guaranteed to be reliable. In fact, most of them will be deformed by the wishful thinking, the selective recollection and the later rationalisations of the protagonists. If Maria remembers how John treated her with indifference and cruelty, it may very well be the case that she has unconcsciously reconstructed this

episode to accord with her later hate of John. Thus, if a player narrates John mistreating Maria, it has not been established that John actually treated Maria that badly. The truth is always left unspecified. And since telling contradicting stories is the only way to earn black tokens, and since earning black tokens in the only way to ever get the game to a conclusion, it is even *required* that you use the unreliability of the shades' memories.

This makes it easy to narrate significant events in the past without taking the story into directions the other players would rather avoid. The other players are not forced to accept what you say as true; that is, they need not accept any element of a memory as veridical. If they dislike the way you take the story, they can use their next (or any later) scene to narrate a memory that contradicts your story.

At least as important as avoiding directions the others do not like to go, the unreliable memories are a great tool in avoiding that one player makes all the decisions about the past tragedy. You can propose story elements without forcing them onto other people: they can always contradict you if they wish. In the same way, you can contradict them when you think they take too much control over the story. In this way, you can keep each other in line and make sure that everyone contributes equally.

To do this effectively, it is of the utmost importance that you understand what *black tokens* mean. They do not mean: you have contradicted me! They mean: you have contradicted me, and this contradiction between the memories of our shades is going to be important for the story. So, by giving a black token you are saying that what the other person said is an important part of the narrative. Conseuqently, by not giving a black token when somebody contradicts you on what could easily be seen as an important issue, you are saying that you do not want to focus on this difference; that, in fact, you'd like to leave open the possibility that his shade is simply and unambigously wrong about this event. Both giving and not giving a black token are important signals use them to your advantage!

4.4 Trust and the tragedy

Sometimes you have been working towards this really painful memory, where two shades hurt each other out of pride or — worse love, when one of the other players suddenly narrates a scene that takes the sting out of all you've previously implied. That is the moment you are tempted most to exclaim: 'No, please, why do you do *that*?!'

It is also the moment you have to take a deep breath, relax, and trust the other player. Both of you are working towards a tale of tragedy. Accept the momentary setback, and consider how the new situation could give rise to an even more heart-rending story than you originally envisioned.

The only time that something is amiss is when another player starts giving you *white tokens* or trying to earn them at a time you cannot see a tragedy having formed in the narrative at all. The scenes where you earn white tokens are those where the shades start reassessing the tragedy. As a narrative necessity, this can only happen once at least the basic outlines of the tragedy have been made clear. Giving a white token to another player, or recounting a memory in such a way that it is clear you are asking for a white token, is a way of saying that you think the tragedy is mostly in place.

So, what to do when the other player thinks this is the case, and you do not? Well, it is important that you are both on the same page, so there is more work to be done. The tragedy has to become clear to you, and moveing towards resolution must be delayed. Luckily, there is an easy way to say so: do not give the other player any white tokens. This is a very clear statement to the effect that you cannot see a real tragedy in the story narrated so far. Then, start adding to the pain. Alerted by your non-commitment to the final stage of the game, the other player will now know that he has to show you more clearly what he believes to be the tragic story implied by the narration so far, or that he has to work with you to create something that both of you find tragic.

Never, ever, put foward a white token simply to conform to the other players. It is essential that you use it as a means of communication; a means of saying: yes, I think we are in agreement about how all the strands of our tale together weave a tragic story.

4.5 The end

The end may well be the hardest part of the game. Here you will have to choose between redemption or eternal hate; but it is emphatically not the idea that one player makes this choice and the others conform. So how do you make such a choice together? Here is how: drop any idea you have of what would be the preferable and simply play the scenes out together. See where your shared ideas take you. Let the shades interact with each other, let them talk, abandon yourself to the story and who knows?, perhaps both of you are surprised at the outcome.

In any case, good luck!

Chapter 5: Advice on the art

As you can see, this section still has to be written. I've postponed this to *after* playtest, because advice on the art should be given, well, once the art has actually been seen in action and I know what works and will not work, and where advice is needed. However, the entries below give you some idea of what this advice could look like.

5.1 Suitable characters

[Characters must be human: no innocents, no villains. No good versus evil: everything in Shades is morally grey, especially the player characters.]

5.2 Reinforcement and contrast

[Using the tales of different characters to highlight thematic elements of the tales of the others.]

5.3 Telling and re-telling

[The great and important technique of retelling the same scene several times, from different points of view; or from the same point of view, but in a memory less tainted by selective memory and unconscious editing.]

5.4 The material present

[Tips on using the present world (the diegetic level, to use a fancy narratological concept) to reinforce your narration in the past (the hypo-diegetic level).]

5.5 Experimental art

[Going over the edge, and throwing away your tokens.]

5.6 **The greater challenge**

If you have mastered *Shades*, you can enter Hell-mode! (Ok, I've been influenced by too much bad computer games. This flavour text will be removed from future versions, I promise.) You can raise the challenge posed by the game by adding a new requirement on the story:

> The tragedy that unfolded in the past is somehow mirrored by events taking place in the present. There are people alive in the present that are locked in a situation much like that of the shades in their lives, but just before it got really out of hand. Establish this situation, and have the shades' possibility of release be dependent upon whether or not they succeed in defusing this present situation.

Why does this make the game harder? First, it adds a whole new bunch of characters and events to the mix, making the tale to be told simply more complicated. But more importantly: in the present, you have neither unreliable narration, nor can black or white tokens be giving or withheld. So you'll have to establish the situation and the events without the safety nets and communicative possibilities that are available for the past tragedy. This is a real challenge, and if you can create a successful tale of this kind, you and your fellow players deserve an award for being one hell of a well-tuned and sensitive group!