

Harem

Tales

an erotic roleplaying game
for two players
and no GM

Harem Tales is an erotically charged roleplaying game, for two players, with no GM. You will play as concubines in a decadent court, vie for the mistress' favor, scheme with and against other concubines, meddle with courtier intrigues, and make the most of your life in the palace--and what a life it might be.

Rather than stats or attributes, you have a list of Actions, all of which work the same way: every Action has both a Goal and a Danger. You roll a six-sided die for each of these. The Goal determines whether you succeed or fail at the Action itself. The Danger determines whether a complication or cost happens to you, *whether you succeed or not*.

You can succeed at a Goal and face a nasty Danger for your trouble, or fail at the goal but have the Danger skirted by, or any combination. You do this by *assigning* dice between the Goal and Danger (or Dangers plural).

In addition to Goals and Dangers, you'll also have Edges at least some of the time. An Edge describes something you can rely on, a trait or power or simple good luck, that cushions the risks that Actions otherwise pose, by absorbing bad dice.

Specifically, a die showing 1 or 2 means Bad News, 3 or 4 means Unfinished Business, and 5 or 6 means Good News. Even more specifically:

- A 1-2 is always bad:
 - When assigned to your Goal, the Goal fails, and you can't try again with the same Action until the situation somehow changes, such as trying for a different kind of outcome, or with a different variation of Danger.
 - When assigned to a Danger, the Danger happens in full. In some cases it may make more sense for the *consequences* of the Danger to wait, for example, a Danger of "losing reputation" wouldn't be immediately relevant, but should matter in future scenes.
 - When assigned to an Edge, the Edge is exhausted and you can no longer use it for the scene. If it's an Edge written on your character sheet, it will return after the scene concludes. If it's a temporary Edge, it doesn't come back.
- A 3-4 is always tense:
 - For a Goal, you haven't failed yet but may need to try again with higher narrated stakes, or using a different Action.
 - For a Danger, the Danger is unresolved for now, and persists into future Actions: you will have to roll an additional die for each unresolved Danger, and either give it a 5-6 (clearing it out by averting it) or a 1-2 (resolving it by letting it trigger). You can have as many Dangers looming overhead as you want . . . but eventually they'll come due.
 - When assigned to Edges, the Edge stays available for future Actions.
- A 5-6 is always good:
 - When assigned to your Goal, you succeed completely. Narrate the awesome outcome!
 - When assigned to your Danger, you avoid the Danger completely. You don't have to roll for it on future Actions (unless you make the same Action with the same kind of Danger).
 - When assigned to an Edge, you keep the Edge available. Since Edges exist to absorb bad dice, this only matters if you have no Goal or Danger(s) you'd rather put a better die into.

Both you and the other player can name an additional Danger, when your concubine makes an Action. This can allow you to risk something that you value less, letting you (hopefully) succeed at your Goal or avoid the normal Danger. It can also allow the other player to represent unusually severe or tense opposition or adversity, or other factors that would hinder or harm your concubine.

Actions

These Actions are the major plot beats of your story, and the foremost ways that your concubines get into and out of trouble and interact with other characters and the world. If your concubine does in-character acts that fit the description of an Action, or that seem to aim for its Goal, or that plausibly risk its Danger, then you should roll for that Action, because your concubine has done it in-character.

Conversely, if your character does *not* Persuade, or Slander, or Ingratiate, or any other Action, leave the dice alone. Actions serve to present interesting outcomes when your concubines do something tense, uncertain, or risky. If there's no tension, uncertainty, or risk, or if failure would be an uninteresting or unappealing outcome, just skip the dice, and tell the story that you both will enjoy.

In general, avoid ever doing the *same* Action repeatedly, unless the stakes or outcome somehow becomes significantly different in between occurrences of the Action. For example, avoid Persuading three Harem Members in a row, unless you're trying to Persuade each one of something different, with a distinctly different Danger to each. Otherwise, simply Persuade them all in one Action.

- **Persuade:** use your guile, wiles, bribery, or veiled threats to either convince someone of your words, or motivate them to action on your behalf. This takes three variations depending on *whom* you Persuade:
 - *The Harem:* Goals like "convince them you really are nobility from a far-flung land", or "spur them to go in your place to a feast so that you can sneak out". The Danger is giving them leverage against you later, or owing them a favor in kind later.
 - *The Mistress:* Goals like "convince her you didn't sneak out" or "coax her to bring you to the next feast (so that you can catch a noble's eye)". The Danger is inspiring her mistrust, or having to earn such a favor right away.
 - *Someone Else:* Goals like "convince them the mistress sent you" or "plead with them to get you a vial of poison". The Danger is they may demand proof, they may demand a bribe or service, or they may tell their own version of events to the mistress later.
- **Slander:** start or exaggerate a nasty, damning rumor about someone, by implication, omission, or outright assertion. This takes two variations depending on *whom* you Slander:
 - *The Mistress:* Goals like "suggest to a rival that she's weak or (offensively) debauched and immoral", or "imply to a courtier that she'll be too 'indisposed' to notice a spy sneaking in her chambers". The Danger is that the slander leads back to you, or that your audience acts on the slander in a way you didn't expect.
 - *Someone Else:* Goals like "accuse another concubine of sneaking out", or "suggest one of the guards is disloyal". The Danger is the harem or servants slandering or plotting against you in turn.
- **Ingratiate:** use your knowledge of someone's needs and ambitions to help their goals, as much as a concubine can--which may be a sympathetic ear, or might be the penstroke that dooms a nation. The Danger is your beneficiary may show no gratitude for it.
- **Pleasure:** use your looks, your body, and your skills to spark someone's desires, inflame their passions, or dispel their cares; infatuate them with you, rouse them to recklessness, or deliver them into blissful unconsciousness. The Danger is losing esteem for your debauchery, or the recipient takes your services for granted.
- **Perform:** sing, dance, tell tales, recite poetry, play an instrument, or make a work of art or science, for the mistress' glory and to raise your own esteem. The Danger is one of the audience may seek to humble you later.
- **Sneak:** act, move, or travel in secret, discover another's secret, or hide a secret you already know, for yourself or someone else. The Danger is punishment for a (possibly mistaken) offense, having to keep yourself in hiding and unable to act when you need to (whether literally, or verbally in a conversation), or uncovering a different secret yourself which might entangle you.
- **Brace:** keep to some virtue or principle you cherished and held sacred before entering the harem, such as chastity, charity, honesty, or simply your own sense of self. The Danger is needing consolation from the mistress or harem later (which they may use to wile you to their own ends).
- **Endure:** withstand physical injury or pain, exertion and exhaustion, or untoward intoxicants or environments, while pursuing some other goal or task. The Danger is becoming incapacitated (possibly after your task, if it succeeds).
- **Submit:** suppress your pride and self-worth and accept your role and its duties, or simply your pragmatic practical circumstances at someone else's mercy. The Danger is festering resentment toward your dominator, or despairingly forswearing your lasting desires and ambitions.

Edges

Your concubine has four Edges, which are special traits, talents, skills, or quirks that can help her when she takes Action. As explained above, an Edge gives you an additional die to roll alongside the Goal and Danger(s) of an Action. You can always safely assign an unfavorable 1-2 die to an Edge, letting you assign higher-valued dice to Goals or Danger(s) you wish to avoid.

Consider your concubine's background, likely one of the following:

- A captured trophy that the mistress has fought for and claimed: "formidable skill", "tempting fire", "wanted for a reason", "legendary renown", "untarnished dignity", "reserved for the mistress".
- A purchased slave that caught the mistress' fancy: "irresistible innocence", "unexpected talent", "worth the cost", "above suspicion", "easy forgiveness", "manipulative submission".
- A trained courtesan who aspired to the harem: "prized acquisition", "exquisite technique", "unique talent", "skilled at intrigue", "respected for her station", "envied far and wide".
- A devotee seeking to serve the mistress: "implicit trust", "astute attention", "timely intervention", "unusual leeway", "delegated authority", "understands the mistress".
- A spy seeking to sabotage the mistress: "secret contact", "dangerous skills", "predatory focus", "natural secrecy", "hardened resistance", "expert in stealth".
- An infiltrator seeking to rescue another concubine: "misleadingly guileless", "dignified determination", "watchful opportunism", "steadfast loyalty", "secret skills", "selfless sacrifice".

Try to use Edges that characterize your concubine, that say where she came from, what she does best (or worst), what she values, or what she wishes for herself. A good Edge should generally help with any Action under some well-understood circumstance, or else help with a few Actions most-all the time.

Use your Edges as prompts for roleplay: these are the most distinct facts about your concubine, and should indicate what interests her, what she would pay attention to, what *others* would pay attention to, and what kinds of conversations or schemes she might seek out, or might avoid.

Some example Edges include "political instincts", "eloquent speech", "exotic allure", "diverse friends", "scientific studies", or "genuine empathy".

You can also create temporary Edges as the Goal of an Action. For example, Sneak to follow someone in secret, and gain an Edge to later Slander them with what you witnessed (or some close-enough embellishment). Or Persuade a fellow concubine to adorn and paint you, to grant you an Edge to Persuade the mistress for a favor that benefits you both. So long as you can describe how your current Action would improve the chances or reduce the risk of a future Action, you can get an Edge.

The Mistress

The mistress of your harem acts as the central figure of your story, but *not* its protagonist. [Harem Tales](#) cannot tell you how best to portray the mistress, you and your fellow player must decide on that yourselves. But to help you along, take turns with the following, until you both have complete agreement:

- *The mistress will always _____.*
- *The mistress will never _____.*
- *The mistress may sometimes _____.*
- *The mistress almost never _____, without a good reason.*

These include the mistress' choices in her Guards, Courtiers, Servants, and all else. In particular, you may state "the mistress will never allow a guard to injure a concubine", and so it is law for your story. You have the right to state "the mistress may sometimes whip her concubines (specifically my character)", and have the mistress treat your two concubines differently, to both players' tastes.

More generally, talk freely and openly about what you want from the mistress, what you specifically want for your concubine in terms of treatment, challenges, and indeed you can even restate the above prompts for your own concubines:

My concubine will always be loyal. My concubine will never trust anyone. My concubine may sometimes murder a rival. My concubine will always suffer unduly. My concubine almost never wins, without a good reason. My concubine will never bleed. My concubine will always be dominated by the mistress.

Alternation

With two players and no GM, narrative control and describing and playing adversity, especially the mistress, depends on alternation. *Harem Tales* achieves this by assigning GM Points. At the start of play, both players have zero GM Points. The players choose one player to begin a scene and start narrating.

As the other player makes Actions, each time they have to place a 1-2 die into their Goal or into a Danger, that player gains one GM Point. When the player has three GM Points, they should bring their current scene to a close, clear all their GM Points, and take up narration duties, giving the other player time to enjoy the spotlight.

The current narrator may always play their own concubine *in addition* to their duties narrating and providing adversity, especially if their concubine is present in the scene. But any Action their concubine takes follows the same rules for GM Points. To make it explicit, a player who is currently narrating and has cleared their GM Points will gain GM Points normally, if their concubine makes an Action and assigns a 1-2 die to a Goal or Danger. This makes it wise for the current narrator to focus on their narration duties, since playing their own concubine may reduce their later time in the spotlight.

Conversely, the player who currently has the spotlight and is not narrating may *remove* one GM Point per scene, if they take up narrating an Adversity Character (described below), in a way that opposes the concubine of the current narrator. The spotlighted player may only remove one GM Point, per scene, but this is the reward for giving the current narrator a break and some time to enjoy playing their own concubine.

Players may always conclude any scene when it feels natural or fitting to do so, and may choose to switch narration duties, or share them in any way that feels comfortable. But the above system works well as a default and ensures both players get to enjoy playing as their concubine, facing the courtly travails and erotic conflicts that can befall them--especially, the mistress' favor and ire.

It deserves special attention to note that both players will need to portray the mistress of the harem. This means both players need a mutual understanding of her personality, proclivities, virtues and vices, and the challenges and ambitions she has beyond enjoying and indulging her harem. The mistress is not a main character like your concubines, but she is likely the central figure of your story, and likely both players want to enjoy her treatment, for better and worse.

Adversity Characters

The following stock archetypal character roles serve to present adversity to your concubines, foils to play off of, rivals or allies to deal with, as well as *circumstances or situations* to face, independent of any one single character. They're deliberately abstract, so you'll need to provide some concrete specifics, but each Adversity Character gives some basic actions to guide you when you narrate these characters, during your narration duties.

Each Adversity Character consists of several Hard, Normal, and Soft Moves.

- Hard Moves target a player's concubine and force her to make some kind of Action in response, often to put her at a disadvantage, loss, or harm.
- Normal Moves give character and flavor to the Adversity Character, provide context for Dangers on Actions, and give prompts for roleplay.
- Soft Moves present benefits, assistance, or a reprieve that a player's concubine can receive with a successful Action if they choose.

All Adversity Characters, such as Courtiers, Guards, Servants, or anyone else, may be cruel or kind, loyal or treacherous, cunning or foolish, as suits the needs of your story. Further, a recurring Adversity Character may very well change their loyalties or affections during the story, and indeed they should if the concubines are taking action like they should.

During your narration duties, always try to portray an Adversity Character, by having them make Moves. Adversity Characters don't always *have* to seek to harm your concubines or hinder their plans, and a recurring Adversity Character may even become an ally. But true to the name, Adversity Characters *do* exist to present the concubines, the main characters of *Harem Tales*, with adversity and challenge to overcome, or lose to.

As your story progresses, keep notes of recurring characters: Courtiers who owe your concubines a favor, or have a favor to collect; Guards you might trust and Guards to avoid; Servants you can rely on or not; and most of all, others in the harem. Indeed, you might even find it useful to 'create' a character for each important Harem Member as she appears, giving her a background and 'Edges', even if she lacks Actions to use them on. This will help you portray loyal, loving, vicious, innocent, and depraved Harem Members with depth and nuance, and especially, to track her status in the Harem respective to your concubines, and her favor or disfavor with the mistress. You might even take turns playing her directly as a concubine with Actions she can take, as a third (or fourth or--) main character.

Courtier

Hard Moves:

- Present evidence of the concubine's misbehavior.
- Demand the concubine assist with a plot.
- Demand the concubine divulge details about the mistress.
- Leave the mistress in a dangerous mood.
- Demand the concubine's 'entertainment' in especially sadistic fashion.
- Propose a plan or policy to the mistress that hinders or harms the concubine.
- Demand the mistress' attention at the worst possible moment.
- Dismiss the concubine at the worst possible moment.
- Grant a favor to a rival.
- Insist the concubine partake of decadent or addicting vices.

Normal Moves:

- Pontificate about courtly matters.
- Regale with tales of far-off peoples and lands.
- Fret and fuss over concerns of the domain.
- Compliment and criticize the harem for obtuse details.

Soft Moves:

- Grant a favor to the concubine.
- Allude to a rival's misbehavior.
- Divulge a secret about the mistress.
- Let slip a useful piece of leverage on the courtier (or a different courier).
- Invite the concubine to enjoyable entertainments.
- Propose a plan or policy to the mistress that favors the concubine.

Note: Courtiers act as ministers, advisors, aides, and experts to the mistress, and generally do most of the work of administering her domain. While they all generally pursue their own interests, *usually* this aligns with carrying out the mistress' will and supporting her rule. Usually, Courtiers have fairly broad and sweeping powers and high status, and generally have their position precisely because they have the mistress' trust and esteem, as well as the alleged trust and esteem of the other courtiers.

Guard

Hard Moves:

- Demand to 'inspect' a concubine.
- Deny passage to somewhere important.
- Accuse a concubine of misbehavior.
- Punish a guilty concubine for misbehavior.
- Recommend a concubine be sent to the dungeon.
- Demand 'entertainment' in private.
- Bring more guards, for help or to watch.

Normal Moves:

- Belittle or deride a concubine.
- Boast of cruelties inflicted in the dungeon.
- Compliment a concubine in an unexpected way.
- Inquire about the harem and other concubines' actions.

Soft Moves:

- Fall asleep or intoxicated while on duty.
- Disparage a rival, or provide useful leverage.
- Allow entry to a forbidden place.
- Provide a rare or forbidden item.
- Provide a favor for a 'favor'.

Note: Guards always have freedom to go anywhere in the mistress' domain, to stop or interfere with anyone, and to beat or detain whoever they see fit.

Harem Member

Hard Moves:

- Accuse the concubine of misbehavior.
- Blackmail the concubine with concrete evidence.
- Intervene to humiliate the concubine in an event.
- Flaunt the mistress' favor (if she has it).
- Do an impressive and intimidating performance, delighting the mistress and guests.
- Reveal the aid of a loyal Courtier, Guard, Servant, or other Harem Member.
- Inflict a deniable cruelty or degradation in private.
- Bring in other Harem Members to harass the concubine.

Normal Moves:

- Lounge in alluring attire.
- Casually provide service and entertainment to the mistress and her guests.
- Subtly show favor to one of the mistress' guests.
- Gossip and chatter with other Harem Members.

Soft Moves:

- Offer a useful favor at a price.
- Offer or let slip useful leverage on another Harem Member.
- Cooperate to suborn another Harem Member.
- Hint at leverage on a Courtier, Guard, or Servant.
- Suggest secrets about the mistress.
- Attempt an impressive performance which the concubine can sabotage or participate in.

Note: Harem Members occupy the same realm and have the same overall status as your concubines, but obviously, the mistress has her favorites. Whether friendly or hostile, any Harem Member will generally have the wherewithal to use any of these Moves as suits the Harem Member's interests. *All* Harem Members fear punishment, and desire favor, whether for innocent or underhanded reasons, and all Harem Members have a precarious position, as the mistress may always do with them as she pleases.

Servant

Hard Moves:

- Present something the concubine will have to explain.
- Insist on 'helping' with a private errand.
- Present a rival with exactly what they needed.
- Make a blunder that humiliates the concubine.
- Make a blunder that endangers the concubine.
- Irritate the mistress.

Normal Moves:

- Bring refreshments and conveniences.
- Make conversation about the most recent event.
- Appear and disappear silently and unexpectedly.
- Amuse and delight the mistress.

Soft Moves:

- Mention useful leverage on a rival.
- Present the concubine with exactly what she needed.
- Distract someone at a crucial moment.
- Take the mistress' ire.

Note: Servants outside of the harem usually have relative freedom to come and go within the mistress' domain. There may be some areas in the domain which are private or forbidden, but even then, *some* servant probably has the duty of going in to sweep and mop, and all servants can *leave* the domain which the harem usually cannot.

Rival Ruler

Hard Moves:

- Blame the concubine for a slight or offense.
- Single out a rival for praise and rewards.
- Demand especially depraved entertainment from the concubine.
- Begin bargaining for the concubine with the mistress.
- Threaten the concubine's loved ones outside of the palace.
- Present their own impressive harem, inciting the mistress' envy.
- Hint at the concubine's disloyalty in front of the mistress.
- Privately reveal that a Courtier, Guard, or Harem Member is loyal to them without revealing who.
- Leave the mistress infuriated, despondent, or frightened.

Normal Moves:

- Talk idly of past and planned conquests.
- Spar with the mistress (verbally or physically).
- Display decadent opulence and majesty.
- Follow strange customs and folkways.
- Leave the mistress envious, distrustful, or bemused.

Soft Moves:

- Openly single the concubine out for praise.
- Single out a rival for disdain or criticism.
- Offhandedly give the concubine a lavish gift.
- Bring the concubine into decadent entertainment.
- Reveal who in the palace might betray the mistress.
- Leave the mistress confident, assured, or prideful.

Note: the Rival Ruler may have somewhat more or somewhat less power than the mistress, but most importantly, is nearly or fully immune to the mistress' rule, and the Rival Ruler has a domain of her own. This usually includes an entourage of her own Courtiers, Guards, and Harem, though the Rival Ruler might not always invite them to the mistress' palace. Especially note, the mistress must deal with the Rival Ruler as an equal or near-equal, and will likely punish any of her subjects for hindering her relations, negotiations, or schemes against the Rival Ruler. Historically, a concubine might be executed for displeasing a visiting ruler of another domain; or, a ruler might murder a visiting dignitary for dishonoring a favored concubine. All depends on the mistress' balance of power against the Rival Ruler, and the mistress' own proclivities.

Events With the Mistress

The following events are designed as Adversity Characters, because in effect, they are: each event presents a kind of encounter that will challenge the concubines and present them with opportunities to pursue their agendas, and risks that may haunt them afterward.

Grand Gala

Hard Moves:

- Have the mistress demand the concubine perform for the attendees.
- Have the mistress announce a competition between the concubine and a Harem Member.
- Have the mistress relegate the concubine to entertaining an attendee.
- An attendee demands degrading services.
- A Harem Member subtly sabotages the concubine.
- A Courtier ominously pulls the concubine aside.
- A Guard demands to 'inspect' the concubine.
- Something in the wine, the food, or the music makes the concubine unsteady.

Normal Moves:

- A constant bustle of dancing revelers.
- A dull roar of murmuring conversation.
- Leering, ogling, dismissive, and suspicious stares.
- Portray the mistress' mood as inscrutable.

Soft Moves:

- A Courtier carelessly reveals who the concubine can trust and who to suspect.
- A Guard leaves a forbidden place unwatched.
- A Harem Member humiliates herself.
- An attendee leads a cheer for the concubine.
- Have the mistress relish the concubine's performance or simple presence.

Note: Grand Galas should be infrequent, and feature a large crowd of attendees of all sorts, with varying agendas and motives. The Gala is a spectacle and a memorable event for most, an opportunity to show off or wrangle favors for some, and a tedious and tiring ordeal for a few, likely including the more weathered of the harem. The mistress will take poorly to anything that might tarnish her reputation or the renown of her galas.

Customary Feast

Hard Moves:

- Have the mistress seat the concubine with the worst Harem Member.
- Have the mistress seat the concubine across from the worst Courtier.
- Have the mistress sharply criticize the concubine for a breach of decorum.
- Have the mistress interrupt the concubine to have the concubine service a guest.
- A Courtier jokingly asks the concubine a question to humiliate the concubine.
- A Harem Member 'accidentally' spoils the concubine's wardrobe or meal.

Normal Moves:

- Raucous laughter, rueful reflections, chattering gossip.
- Stately music plays as the meal progresses.
- Portray the mistress as pensive, jovial, irritable, or withdrawn.
- Food and drink pass from the servants to the guests.

Soft Moves:

- The concubine has an opportunity to impress the guests with an impromptu performance.
- One of the Courtiers is inebriated and alone.
- One of the Guards is inebriated and asleep.
- One of the Harem Members is in a desperate bind.
- Have the mistress give the concubine pride of place after the feast.

Note: Customary Feasts should be affairs for the mistress' trusted courtiers to discuss less serious matters and enjoy their collective wealth and opulence. Stakes are far lower than a Grand Gala, but likely every person who might matter to the court will be in attendance, or have reason for absence.

Ceremonial Rite

Hard Moves:

- Have the mistress demand utter silence and stillness.
- Have the mistress doubt the concubine's reverence and sincerity.
- Have the mistress demand the concubine's participation.
- The rite includes something that shocks or humbles the concubine.
- The rite tests the concubine's mental and physical endurance.
- A trusted Courtier criticizes the concubine's presence or conduct.
- A Harem Member performs her role impeccably.

Normal Moves:

- The ceremony is interminable.
- Everyone is solemn, as if afraid.
- Some of the Harem have seen this before, some have not.
- Show that the mistress will severely punish any who disturbs the rite.

Soft Moves:

- Participation is a profound honor.
- A Courtier accords the concubine respect for her conduct and comportment.
- Someone praises the concubine for an unexpectedly deep understanding of the principles of the ceremony.
- Have the mistress choose the concubine to relax and soothe her afterward.

Note: Ceremonial Rites should be rare and foretold well in advance. They may be civil or religious, but are defined by extreme adherence to process and protocol, and severity of stakes. The rite may have real, material consequences for the mistress or her goals, or may be purely formal and reflective of her stature. Any Courtiers present will likely be necessary for some function of the rite (such as a religious figure or legal official), or admitted as an honorarium.

Intimate Meal

Hard Moves:

- Have the mistress suggest she suspects the concubine of something.
- Have the mistress inquire about the best Harem Member.
- Have the mistress inquire about a Courtier the concubine dealt with.
- Have the mistress insist the concubine try an intense or addictive vice.
- Have the mistress demand the concubine 'make amends' with the worst Harem Member.
- Have the mistress subordinate the concubine to another Harem Member.
- Have the mistress declare the concubine will undergo 'special training'.
- A Harem Member 'thoughtlessly' mentions the worst topic.

Normal Moves:

- Portray the mistress as jovial, convivial, and perfectly at ease.
- The food and wine are rapturous.
- Show the mistress' attention is fully on the concubine.
- Show the Harem Members' attention is fully on the concubine.

Soft Moves:

- Have the mistress prize a unique service the concubine gives.
- Have the mistress present the concubine with an enviable gift.
- Have the mistress earnestly hear the concubine's concerns.
- Have the mistress chastise a rival, or puts her under the concubine's authority.
- A Courtier later barter for the concubine's reach of the mistress' ear.

Note: Intimate Meals needn't involve any food, but do represent the mistress pointedly taking one or two concubines in private, to enjoy their services, to express her power and possession, and in passing, to monitor and manage her harem. While concubines aren't 'supposed' to scheme and machinate, it's no secret that they do. Rather, the pretense is "surely *you* wouldn't scheme and plot for personal gain, surely you're a simple servant of the mistress' pleasure?" And an Intimate Meal is where this pretense is tested.

Inquisition

Hard Moves:

- Have the mistress accuse the concubine of treachery.
- Have the mistress accuse the concubine of sowing dissent.
- Have the mistress accuse the concubine of unfaithfulness.
- Have the mistress accuse the concubine of heresy.
- Have the mistress demand the concubine's conspirators' names.
- Have the mistress bring forth a conspirator.
- Have the mistress coerce the concubine's body.
- Have the mistress pry at the concubine's emotions.
- Have the mistress unravel the concubine's intellect.
- Have the mistress decide to humble the concubine.
- Have the mistress decide to punish the concubine.
- Have the mistress send the concubine to the Dungeon.

Normal Moves:

- The concubine has the dignity of a brief recess.
- Everyone is watching the concubine.
- Everything about the concubine is suspect.
- All of the concubine's ambitions are at stake.

Soft Moves:

- The concubine can name someone else as guilty.
- The concubine can blame someone else for her misdeeds.
- The concubine can plead for brutality instead of death or exile.
- The concubine can plead for degradation instead of brutality.
- If the concubine has evidence, she can clear her name fully.
- If the concubine's ambitions have served the mistress, she can earn mercy.

Note: an Inquisition is purposely intense, and intended as a true trial of your concubine, unlikely to end with her death or removal from your story, but very likely to result in erotically charged suffering and pathos. However, it also presents the most direct avenues of bringing punishment and comeuppance on *any* rival, except perhaps a Rival Ruler. Of course, Inquisitions can also target Harem Members, Guards, or even Courtiers, though your concubine likely will have very little influence without substantial evidence. Surviving an Inquisition will likely be a defining turning point in your story.

Dungeon

Hard Moves:

- Have the mistress visit to watch.
- Have the mistress participate in the concubine's punishment.
- Half-mad prisoners mob the concubine.
- A few jaded Guards degrade the concubine.
- Someone the concubine cares about sees her debasement.
- The concubine suffers a newly-devised torment.
- Someone the concubine cares about is left broken, physically or mentally.
- The concubine must make a humiliating payment for a morsel or clean clothes or other pittance or real necessity.

Normal Moves:

- Have the mistress announce a new torment she has devised, in as little or much detail as she pleases.
- Circulate rumors among the prisoners and Guards.
- Display barbarity and cruelty.
- Show unshakable solidarity and organization in the prisoners.
- Show gleeful corruption and vice in the Guards.

Soft Moves:

- The concubine finds a loyal contact.
- The concubine finds a rival sentenced here and at her mercy.
- The Guards fall for an obvious ruse or false compliance.
- The concubine can show sufficient submission or contrition to shorten or end her sentence.

Note: the Dungeon serves for dark and intense scenes of degradation and sadism. It may not suit the mistress to witness or participate, or it may be a cherished entertainment, depending on her predilections. Most importantly, the Dungeon 'wants' to break your concubine, to see her at her worst, and to embody fear of the mistress' rule and wrath.

Premises and Scenarios

After establishing what kind of mistress your concubines serve, and what kind of other concubines make up the harem, you'll need some plots and intrigues and eventful events for your concubines to entangle themselves with.

- **The New Concubine(s):** the mistress has acquired one or more new additions to her harem! If they're one or both of the players' concubines, then get to know your mistress' personal quirks, vices, and virtues, meet the rest of the harem and learn their rivalries and grudges and loyalties, flirt with the rest of the court and servants and learn their ambitions and fears. If not, learn how you might secure the new concubine's loyalty and support, without her outshining you.
- **Rival Concubine:** someone (or several someones) in the harem have it out for you. Perhaps they have a grudge from before you both found yourselves under the same mistress. Perhaps they have some enmity or bigotry against you. Perhaps they simply want to make sure you never outshine them. What do they want, and do you want them to have it if it doesn't harm you directly? What do *you* want, and how might she jeopardize it?
- **Romantic Concubines:** one of the concubines is profoundly in love with another. The mistress would doubtless be jealous, and perhaps others of the harem as well. If you are one of the parties, will you hide it, and if so, how? If not, will you help them protect their romance? How? Or perhaps you'll expose them, and use the opportunity for your own gain.
- **Infatuated Servant:** one of the palace servants is in love with a concubine. Is it required? If you are the concubine, how can you benefit from their love? And what punishment might you face, if you accept their advances? If a different concubine, how can you turn this to your advantage?
- **Scheming Courtier:** one of the mistress' ministers, advisors, or petty nobility has a plot against the mistress! Will you expose them, and risk their retribution--or worse, risk being disbelieved and punished simply for accusing them? Perhaps they can do you a favor if you keep their secret--or perhaps their scheme itself might benefit you.
- **Enemy In the Gates:** the mistress isn't the only, or even most, powerful figure in the wider world. A hostile ruler threatens the mistress' power, and to avoid direct confrontation, the mistress is entertaining her rival. Could it be possible to neutralize them for the mistress' benefit and gratitude? Or betray the mistress to their designs? Or perhaps set another concubine up, only to fail? And don't forget the visiting ruler's entourage . . .

As general guidance for the narrating player, the following may help if none of the provided Adversity Characters suit the immediate needs of an arc or circumstance you find yourself narrating:

If you and the other player *feel aimless*, fumbling without forward momentum, bring in an Adversity Character you already have. A Harem Member or Courtier or even an infuriated Guard, suddenly entering the scene with some grievance or crisis or surprising leverage to impose. In particular, Harem Members make a fine default to suddenly intrude into any scene.

If you *do* have a direction things should go, but no clear framework of what what the concubine(s) should *face* in this direction, see Countdowns below. Countdowns exist to meter and punctuate progress toward a fate, a goal, or some other event, providing both a format for pacing and a framework for interesting events leading up to some conclusion. With the Countdown providing the structure and events, you can rest on character interactions, the established setting and events, Adversity Characters, any Mistress Events, and the concubines themselves. Let the Countdown do your GMing as much as you can.

If no Adversity Character suits this situation, but it seems like "A Situation" that feels natural and right for your story, and you don't see a clear way to make a Countdown to rely on, or guidance for the character archetypes, you may well have a story that Harem Tales never intended to tell. This doesn't mean Harem Tales can't tell this story, but does mean you probably need to create a new Adversity Character. If you need to, ignore the GM Points and switch narrators for a bit, or pause playing, to actually create the new Adversity Character together, and add it to your gallery.

Optional Rules

For longer stories, or with more specific settings or premises, the basic Actions and Edges may not suit all of your needs. The following optional rules give support for long-term progressions, some specific genre considerations, and reflecting a concubine's status within the harem or the palace.

Twists

To reflect a lasting or permanent hindrance or imposition on a character, Twists provide a kind of 'permanent Danger' similar to your permanent Edges. Twists can fall into three broad ranges of severity.

Minor Twists affect only one Action with an added Danger, or may affect many Actions but only under very specific circumstances. For example, if your concubine partakes of a Courtier's recommended vice, she may temporarily have the Twist, [giddy], causing her to prattle indiscreetly when making any Action, until she goes to sleep. Or, having falsely Slandered someone only for the mistress to discover it, your concubine may face a Twist of [another lie] should she try to Slander anyone else, falsely or truly.

Minor Twists work well to give a Danger to a specific situation or circumstance, like 'flirtatious servants', a location or a person, such as staining your garments when in the kitchen, or to reflect a specific hindrance, such as intoxication or a sullied reputation. Minor Twists can be fairly commonplace (applying distinct Dangers to different areas of the palace, or different people in the mistress' court), and a concubine likely thinks of them as mere obstacles to avoid.

Moderate Twists affect multiple Actions in a pervasive way, or affect only a few Actions but with very harsh effect. For instance, should your concubine sprain her ankle, you can represent this as a Twist, [sprained ankle], and add a Danger when she Pleasures, Performs, or Sneaks (if her ankle might hinder her in the act). Or, if your concubine has angered a Courtier, she may face a Twist of [when the time comes] for their revenge whenever she Persuades any of the Courtiers.

Moderate Twists serve to reflect a serious antagonist's efforts or opposition even when that antagonist isn't in the scene, or to represent a lasting injury or other hindrance. A concubine facing a moderate Twist likely considers it a problem to solve, or at least is aware of it as a frequent frustration.

Major Twists may affect most or all Actions with a modest nuisance, or several Actions with a serious risk. For example, during an Inquisition, all of your concubine's Actions may have the Twist [and why are you doing that?], reflecting the intense scrutiny on every word or gesture she makes. Or, after a harrowing Ceremonial Rite, your concubine may face a Twist of [stricken mute] when she Slanders another--which doesn't mean she can't Slander, but presents a serious risk if she does.

Major Twists represent some of the most serious burdens or harms that may befall a concubine, whether from testing the limits of the mistress' patience with her, risking fatal injury or debility, or taunting supernatural forces. A lasting Major Twist would likely reflect a permanent disability, and a lesser concubine's story would likely end there.

Challenges

Where Twists afflict your concubines with added risk or potential harm on Actions they can otherwise take normally, Challenges represent difficulty or hindrance on ordinary, everyday things that would not qualify as an Action at all. Tasks you would never need to roll for can become Actions with risk and uncertainty, if your concubine has a Challenge.

Challenges do not neatly fit into categories by severity, and both players should think and discuss what form a Challenge should take. But a Challenge always represents a loss of ability, a reduction of freedom, or a removal of choice from your concubine. As a few examples of a range of severity:

Pilfering one of the Courtiers' exotic herb extracts has given your eyes a green tinge, an unmistakable telltale of what you've done. You have to Sneak whenever anyone gets close enough that they might see your eyes in full daylight.

After a Harem Member humiliated you during a Rival Ruler's visit, you've become a near pariah. While the mistress herself has not punished you, even the most passing interactions with others in the palace require you to Ingratiate them, and their 'gratitude' reflected in the Danger is simply whether they accord you some basic civility, or fulfill their duty to you such as cleaning your clothes or serving your food.

You've returned from the Dungeon, without any visible scars, but the effect of the punishments still shows its mark: you can no longer speak of the mistress at all, no matter how fawningly, without it feeling like Slander--and making the appropriate Action. For this special case, the Danger works as normal, but failure at the Goal means your concubine cannot muster any words at all, and must simply remain silent about her mistress out of fear.

Countdowns

For dealing with progressive effects or states, or signifying headway to a long-term goal (or fate), Countdowns offer a versatile and flexible framework that you can tailor to your needs. All Countdowns consist of 'ticks' of time, and have the same basic structure, with five questions that define the Countdown:

- The 'type' of ending condition: winning rounds, buying time, or ironclad deadline.
- How many ticks in total at the start.
- How much in-story 'time' each tick represents.
- The Action that happens on each tick that passes.
- What finally happens after the last tick.

Type: a Countdown can have three basic 'end conditions':

- Rounds you can win: each tick of the Countdown prompts some kind of Action, with successful Actions adding up to a favorable resolution for whatever effect the Countdown represents, while failed Actions lead to some unfavorable outcome. Generally 'winning' a majority of these rounds should suffice, but you should still play the Countdown out to its conclusion, even if you've succeeded (or failed) at a majority of the ticks' Actions.
- Buying time: for an open-ended or at least variable condition, each tick of the Countdown prompts some Action, with success postponing the end of the Countdown, and failure usually prompting some worsening or degeneration of the condition. This suits well for conditions one can fight against, but which one can't easily reverse. Instead, by buying time, your concubine can pursue some difficult cure or reversal. This can also serve for progress toward a *desired* outcome, with success bringing the conclusion more quickly, while failure postpones it.
- Ironclad deadline: reserved for truly fateful conditions, the ticks of an ironclad deadline Countdown do not offer any reprieve, but instead serve for your concubine to barely keep hold of herself as the condition progresses. Counterintuitively, this also works well for recovery from an injury, whenever recuperation is assured but the process might be interesting to play out.

Number: a Countdown starts with some definite number of ticks, phases of its progression, after which the Countdown concludes. Consider the number of distinct phases or milestones that your concubine's condition would present if left unchecked, and give an according number of ticks. Usually, six works well to start from.

Time: the amount of in-story time between ticks has enormous effect on the progression and feel of a Countdown. The shortest you could sensibly use is "each Action provokes a tick", for something covering mere minutes or an hour. Still extremely fast, "a tick happens after each scene" might represent a condition covering one night or a few days. More likely, you'll find use for "each in-story day" (or several days). You can also tie ticks to events, such as touching an artifact, encountering a cursed person, or making a specific Action or an outcome of an Action, like "failing to Persuade", where each recurring event provokes a tick on the Countdown.

Action: each tick of any Countdown provokes some kind of Action. Bracing against mental corruption or Enduring against physical changes make for good defaults, which cover most obvious or likely conditions for which you'd use a Countdown. However, you could use Persuade to represent a struggle against maddening, whispering spirits, or you might Perform to keep your shadow from slipping the bonds of your feet each sunset. Any sort of Action can work, but decide what Action at the outset.

Outcome: every Countdown ends eventually. Define what happens after that if left unchecked. You might face a fate of "transformation into a creature", or "mindless servitude", or "hatch abominable spawn", or even "receive divine enlightenment". After your concubine has done an Action for each elapsed tick, narrate this outcome, especially if as in 'winning rounds', the outcome would potentially vary.

As an example, Mira is a concubine contending with a complicated combination of Countdowns: the mistress intends her to purify herself to participate in a Ceremonial Rite, but Mira has her own designs on suborning and subjugating a rival Harem Member. Alice, playing Mira, discusses this with the other player, Betty, and the two consider how best to create these Countdowns.

The 'purification' Countdown seems apt as a 'winnable rounds' affair, with six days during which Mira must pursue virtuous acts and avoid 'sullyng' herself with any Courtiers, Guards, or Servants. Should such an encounter occur, Mira will have to Sneak, Persuade, Ingratiate, or otherwise escape untouched, and she cannot Slander or Persuade with any false words, or she will lose that 'tick' of the Countdown. But, so long as she can remain 'pure' for this purpose for four days out of the six, she will face the Ceremonial Rite with ease (and if not, the Actions during the Rite will include more Dangers and harsher prompts).

Meanwhile the Harem Member has a Countdown of her dignity and self-possession, her resistance to Mira's domination. Alice and Betty think this best fits a 'buying time' Countdown, in which success *shortens* the Countdown, while failure prolongs it. Mira must contrive to intimidate the Harem Member with stunning Performances, Sneak to browbeat and humiliate her in private, Slander her to others, and Persuade her to accept Mira's superiority and (self-appointed) authority, as well as Persuading *others* to disadvantage the Harem Member. For this endeavor, Alice and Betty think it fitting for the Harem Member to have six 'willpower points', which the Countdown tracks as they decrease, and when the Harem Member ends her Countdown, she will begrudgingly admit to Mira's pride of place in the harem.

These two Countdowns can interact: during the week of purification, Mira cannot Slander or Persuade falsely, and can't offer her easiest barter for Persuasion of others to help her put the Harem Member under Mira's thumb. Conversely, if Mira can make the Harem Member into her underling and crony, she may coerce or extract favors, such as the Harem Member acting on Mira's behalf in ways the purification would forbid.

So Mira's two active Countdowns work as follows:

Purification for the Rite:

- The type is 'winnable rounds'.
- Mira has six 'ticks' she can win.
- Each 'tick' takes one day.
- The Action is complicated, but at its simplest, Mira must use some Action to avoid 'sullyng' herself, and may not use certain Actions 'falsely', as Alice and Betty have agreed on.
- Should Mira remain pure (on these terms) for four of the six in-story days, she will have a much easier time of the Rite.

Subjugating the Harem Member:

- The type is 'buying time', except success *shortens* the Countdown, while failure prolongs it.
- The Harem Member has six 'ticks' of 'willpower' to defeat.
- The time is variable, based on Mira's own pursuit of Actions.
- The Action is any Action that Alice and Betty have agreed on to diminish the Harem Member, while failure restores the Harem Member's self-possession.
- When Mira finally whittles away the last of the Harem Member's willpower, Mira won't need to Persuade, Ingratiate, or otherwise take Actions to cajole the Harem Member to Mira's whims.

Facing these two Countdowns, Alice will need to balance her interest in the prestigious Rite with her desire to control her rival Harem Member--who may well intend to sabotage Mira's role in that Rite.

As shown here, Countdowns can represent most any process that occurs over time, with periodic events that punctuate the progression. This can include things as simple and concrete as "hours needed to sober up from a revelry", to something as abstract as "becoming the mistress' legitimate wife", or even tracking the stages of a pregnancy.

statuses

Where Twists give a way to tailor Adversity Characters, encounters, and locations with specific Dangers on Actions taken toward or around them, Statuses expand this idea to formalize the kind of adversity a concubine can face. Simply describe a Status and what practical effect it has within your story, and you can use it to affect your concubines.

For example, Courtiers have the Hard Move "insist the concubine partake of decadent or addicting vices". You *can* simply have your concubine Brace or Endure against the effect of such a vice, or even impose a Twist on the concubine, adding a Danger to any Actions she takes while inebriated. But you may find it useful to state that "the Courtier's 'green-eye herb' imposes the Status [green eyes]". Any Courtier might try to get your concubine drunk; any normal intoxicant might add a Twist of 'giddiness', adding that Danger to Actions; but this particular Courtier's 'green-eye herb' imposes a meaningful *Status* which can affect your concubine whether she makes an Action or not.

Anyone with the [green eyes] Status has obviously partaken of the 'green-eye herb'. The earlier example giving this as a Twist posits that the danger (and Danger) is of your concubine facing punishment, for stealing from a Courtier. However, if your concubine has partaken with permission, her lime-green sclerae do not risk any punishment. But perhaps instead, the [green eyes] status means that your concubine will smell and taste unspoken desires of others, and secret excesses that have permeated a location--whether she wishes it or not. While she *may* need to Brace or Endure from being overwhelmed, more importantly, this effect of [green eyes] changes the world around your concubine, and how she may interact with it, before even making any Actions at all.

With a suitable selection of Statuses, their causes and effects, and how to resolve or *preserve* them, your Adversity Characters and events can impose Statuses as part of their Hard and Soft Moves. Guards can declare a concubine [suspicious], Courtiers can deem a concubine [trusted], and a Ceremonial Rite may result in a concubine being [blessed].

Likewise, Statuses allow for defined and understood rules for otherwise nebulous conditions. For example, whether it might result in punishment or not, the [green eyes] Status may be burdensome, and you may declare, or discover through playing, that your concubine can alleviate her [green eyes] by watching the moon, from moonrise to moonset, removing the effects of her long-time use of the 'green-eye herb'.

Make sure to define the *cause*, the *effect*, and the *resolution* of any Status you wish to include, such as adding to an Adversity Character's Hard or Soft Moves, or Twists or Challenges, unless you both expressly want to make discovery of these facts into the plot of your story.

New Adversity Characters

The Adversity Characters in [Harem Tales](#) present versatile, but generic stock characters, and a range of encounters or circumstances suitable to courtesans and concubines at the service of a noble, monarch, or similar figure. Should you need a new kind of character, location, or encounter, the following guidance should help create an Adversity Character to suit your needs. This example will create a kind of 'plague', an adversity entirely different from the existing Adversity Characters.

Firstly, consider the overarching, archetypal, five-word summary nature of the adversity you need. In this instance, "corrupting slime on people and places": this phrase will guide the rest of the details to fill in, for its Hard and Soft Moves, and Statuses it might impose.

Secondly, consider when your concubines should face this adversity, what kind of danger it should pose to them, how it should threaten what they value, and how they can best confront it, successfully or otherwise. In this instance, the 'plague' should occur after a failed Ceremonial Rite, or as the end of a scheme by a Rival Ruler or traitorous Courtier.

Thirdly, before making the Adversity Character more specific to your story, list the *kinds* of Hard and Soft Moves that would suit "any plague" such as you want to use. In this instance, the plague shouldn't feature excessive body-horror or disfigurement, but should inspire sufficient dread and disgust to motivate characters to avoid or combat it. A list of suitable Moves will follow shortly.

Lastly, picture the particular form the Adversity Character should take, when you use it in your story. Having a list of Hard, Normal, and Soft Moves, and an idea of the desired aesthetic, this 'plague' takes the form of a slick, glistening violet film that drips from ceilings, seeps down walls, bubbles up from the floor, and clings to skin and clothing, and wherever it reaches, delirium and depravity soon follow.

The Purple Stain

Hard Moves:

- Drip onto a concubine, seeping through sheer fabric or clinging to skin.
- Smear from a person's body onto a concubine from touch.
- Waft in a scent and permeate the room until the air clears.
- Permanently befoul clothing, perfume, rouge, or other adornments.
- Seep into the floor, wall, or furniture, to permanently inhabit a room.
- Drive someone to dangerous or violent excess or delirium.
- Afflict a concubine who has had three exposures with the Status [delirious].
- Compel a [delirious] concubine to bring the Stain to a clean person or place.
- Others consider the concubine [stained] until she can persuade them otherwise.

Normal Moves:

- Smell of lilacs, jasmine, rust, and moldy leaves.
- The floor or wall or furniture feels queasily soft underfoot or to the touch.
- Clothing has a cloying, oily texture, unpleasant to wear.
- Skin glistens with a violet hue.
- Everything is so very funny until it becomes infuriating.

Soft Moves:

- Incapacitate a rival Harem Member, Guard, or Courtier.
- Require bustling, distracting efforts to clean, which a concubine may exploit.
- Give a justification for the concubine avoiding, detaining, excluding, or attacking someone.
- Give an excuse for the concubine acting out of turn or defying the mistress' rules or will.

While the bulk of harmful effect that the Purple Stain can inflict on a concubine comes from infecting her, notice that only a few Hard Moves actually *do* so. Instead, most of the Hard Moves deal with contaminating *others*, people or locations or even *opinions*, such as a concubine having the Status [stained]. The concubine might not have had any exposure whatsoever, but this Adversity Character can still afflict a concubine with others *believing* that the Purple Stain has infected the concubine, forcing her to allay their suspicions.

Likewise, characters afflicted with the Stain behave erratically and sometimes dangerously, including spreading the contagion. Whether infected or not, the people of the palace present at least as much a danger, through the Purple Stain, as the contagion itself.

The Hard Move to "waft in a scent" leaves an open-ended possibility, that even if one hasn't become infected, a room may become so contaminated as to still have the *effects* of contagion until someone leaves. This especially allows for uncertainty as to who has fully succumbed to the Purple Stain, and who merely has temporary effects from its presence.

The Normal Moves give prompts for the narrator to describe the Purple Stain, how it progresses, what makes it disturbing, as well as what makes it erotically charged and alluring for your story. The Soft Moves go further and provide a few benefits that a desperate or cunning concubine might exploit as the Purple Stain creeps across the palace, while others try to eradicate it.

This Adversity Character makes use of Statuses, as explained above, in lieu of more complex or time-consuming Countdowns, for simplicity's sake. However, Countdowns for both a concubine's infection and its effects, as well as the palace as a whole, would prove very useful if you wish something like the Purple Stain to comprise an arc of your story.

New Actions

The normal Actions your concubines can take have a number of inherent assumptions about your concubines themselves: they answer to a mistress, and interact as something like peers with anyone else; they have social wiles, which they use as their main means to pursue their desires; they don't use brute force or violence, and strenuous bodily hardship only occurs under unusual duress or danger; and they have no particular superhuman or paranormal traits or abilities, nothing that distinguishes them from an ordinary human.

If you need to adjust Harem Tales for concubines that *do not* adhere to these assumptions, adding and modifying Actions presents the simplest way to do so. For example, supposing your story requires a much less civilized and more violent harem, you may need:

- **Attack:** use force, violence, or direct threats to intimidate, injure, or destroy people or things. This takes three variations depending on whom you Attack:
 - *The Mistress:* with Goals like "defy her will" or "challenge her primacy", Dangers include crippling retaliation, or attack from the rest of the harem.
 - *The Harem:* with Goals like "assert your own will" or "secure your place", Dangers include scarring your beauty now, or treacherous ambush later.
 - *Someone Else:* with Goals like "take what you want", "remove a threat", or "please the mistress", Dangers include suffering injury from the person you Attack, or causing damage to something you didn't intend to destroy.

This new Action can serve well for a 'harem' comprised of a gang leader and her gun-molls, or a feral werewolf pack, but greatly diminishes much of the tension of the social conflict that the other Actions enable and rely on. Should you use such an Action, consider having the mistress 'strongly discourage' excessive in-fighting amongst her harem or other lackeys, which will keep direct physical confrontations *available* as a last resort, but make them tense and momentous when they occur.

If your desired setting includes fantastical elements, and you feel your concubines should have the opportunity to practice sorcerous arts, one of the following may suit your needs, possibly both, as different approaches toward magic:

- **Perform a Ritual:** you may sacrifice a creature or part of yourself, paint runes or sigils in a location, concoct an alchemical potion, or invoke deities, spirits, demons, or other forces. You can accomplish any task you can name, if you succeed under all conditions.
Danger: nonstandard, the value of the die you assign to Danger represents how many of the following requirements you can ignore for your ritual:
 - It's very, very time-consuming to perform.
 - It's very, very slow to take effect.
 - It will require serious danger to you.
 - It will harm or endanger someone you care about.
 - It requires extremely rare ingredients you don't have.
 - It will leave a permanent effect on you other than harm.
 - It will come with a complication other than failure which you must address when it occurs.

This Action gives a basic framework for performing magic and using the supernatural. Performing a ritual expressly lacks any limits on what it can do. All of the Danger options are intended as fodder for drama and action, and by themselves provide things to do in your game, in essence becoming a small quest or arc of their own.

- **Dark Bargain:** the Goal is to open yourself to insidious, malevolent, or inhuman powers in order to borrow their strength for your ends. The Danger is that while controlling you, those powers will claim or destroy something you care about.

Much like Attack, this Action presents a way to solve problems at a risk of losing or destroying something. However, the 'inhuman powers' provides far more narrative license, depending on the source. For example, drinking vampiric blood might provide healing or inhuman strength; carrying living shadows might allow for intangibility or teleportation; feral, cunning creatures might lend their aid but ransack at the first chance; elemental spirits may bend your will and motivations toward their own nature.

And for a more futuristic or science-fictional premise, one or both of your concubines may have, or set out to learn, an Action similar to:

- **Hack:** the Goal is to circumvent or defeat a security measure, grant access to a system, or control a device or machine. The Danger is damaging the function of the device, alerting security personnel, or triggering a (delayed) self-destruct feature.

The key practice and technique of creating Actions lies in choosing both a Goal that suits the kind of story you wish to tell and the main characters you wish to play, and a Danger that makes narrative sense whether the Goal succeeds or fails, and which does not *undermine or undo* success, or amount to failure by itself.

The standard Actions of Harem Tales intend to tell a story of alluring, beguiling concubines under a controlling mistress, and further, the Actions intend these concubines to scheme and plot against each other, and possibly even the mistress, without engaging in overt violence or force. Because of this, the Goals primarily deal with persuasion and manipulation, and the Dangers deal most with social standing or managing appearances.

New Actions present the most direct and pervasive way to expand the bounds of your story, but each Action requires careful thought about what that Action will *mean* by existing at all, and what it will *look like* in practice, when a concubine does it. Study the existing Actions and these examples carefully, and always keep in mind, an Action should allow for interesting roleplay no matter whether it succeeds or fails, no matter whether the Danger occurs or passes by. And especially, a Danger may never undermine or contradict a successful Goal.