

Sarosa

The City of Ink and Mist

"You can tell the fortune of a street from the depths of its waters." - Sarosan Proverb

What is Sarosa?

Sarosa is a Tabletop Roleplaying Game (TTRPG). It's a collaborative storytelling engine; a system of rules to structure a group game of pretend. There are many types of TTRPG, exploring many types of story. This one is geared towards noir and steampunk stories: science has rendered wonders of industry and war, but the benefits have yet to trickle down to the working classes, from which your characters will come.

To play you'll need:

- This guide (good job!)
- A *generous* handful of six-sided dice (referred to as D6s)
- Character sheets
- Pencils

You'll also need a small group to play with. Ideally, one of you will read the rulebook first, and take on the role of the **City Guide (CG)**. It's their job to lead the storytelling, acting as something between a narrator and a god. With this power comes great responsibility, as it's also their job to ensure that the rest of the group is somewhat working together, and provide boundaries on ways the story can progress.

Everyone at the table has a duty to ensure that everyone is having fun, so open communication, discussion, and kindness are key. Just because the city is cruel doesn't mean you have to be.

A World On The Cusp

The City

The city has many names - all soaked in blood and salt-water and girded in steel and stone. Fleeting. Fading. Sarosa will one day soon fall below its rising tides completely. Until it does, it will lumber on with the inertia of a falling body that hasn't realised it's dead. That's not to say the world is without hope - just that it hides in strange places. A determined individual can find it, though not without effort.

The People

The wider world is mostly unknown to those who dwell here. They know only the slow creep of water through their neighbourhoods, and the coal-fires of industry. Many spend their days toiling for a chance to reach the towering spires of the Civic Nobility; distant tyrants who have long since become so consumed with legacy that they seek Immortality: everlasting life by means of electricity, harvested from raging storms.

The World Beyond

Traders flock to Sarosa, bringing strange tales and artefacts from unknown places. Citizens of the city care little for these fables. The world beyond the ocean mists is of minor concern. A pastime for academics with nothing to do. Normal folk are far too busy working, for tales of such places.

The Denizens

There are things other than people that walk the streets of Sarosa. Spirits in the muck and the stone and the water. Creatures that crawl from the sea or slither through the sewers. Most try to ignore them - keeping the stranger parts of the city firmly in the corners of their vision. That doesn't mean they're not there. That they don't see you, even as you avert your gaze...

Creating a Character

Statistics

Mind	Body	Soul
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge• Intellect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strength• Resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charm• Insight

Roll 3d6 to determine each stat total. If a stat totals 3-5, you may reroll the lowest die and keep the new total.

If any stat reaches 0 during play, your character falls unconscious. If two or more do, your character dies.

Age and Backstory

Many of your character's abilities come from their Backstory. This is the narrative of their life up to the start of the game. View each Life Event as a defining event within, or main occupation of, a 7-10 year period of your character's life.

Characters may gain new Life Events during the course of a game. The CG will tell you when this occurs.

Select a number of Life Events from the following list. The first 3 incur no penalty, but each additional Event costs one die from a stat pool of your choice.

Life Event	Questions (Answered in collaboration with the CG)	Items / Abilities (Located in the Benthic Sorceries and Equipment sections)	Bonuses / Penalties (To rolls made in the attached context)
Scion of The House	Who's an ally of your family? Who's an enemy?	Pistol 25 Marks	+2 Grandstanding (allies) -2 Grandstanding (enemies)
Soldier	What was your rank? Who did you fight for?	Sabre Lamellar 5 Marks	+1 Additional dice when assisting
Community Pillar	What good deed are you known for? What bad deed are you hiding?	Stave 10 Marks	+1 Interacting with your community
Scholar	What's your field of study? Is it your true passion?	Rapier Vellum	+2 Field of study -2 Threat assessment
Tradesman	What's your trade? Where did you learn it?	Dagger 15 Marks Mark of The Tradesman	+1 Trade knowledge
Occultist	What event changed your worldview? What evidence of the otherworldly did it leave you with?	Ritual Blade (Damage as Sabre) Protection Talisman	+2 Occult knowledge -2 Scientific knowledge
Gang Affiliation	What gang are you pledged to? What's their crime?	Dagger 5 Marks You know of hideouts, secret passages and hidden routes in your gang's territory	+1 Intimidation
Merchant Ties	To what industry are you tied?	Crossbow 10 Marks	+1 Haggle or Negotiate

	What do you dream of doing instead?		
School of Hard Knocks	Who taught you to brawl? Who did you have to fight?	Baton 5 Marks	+1 Unarmed Attack and Damage pool
Urban Acrobat	What drove you to the rooftops? Have you ever fallen?	3 Throwing Knives Travelling clothes	+2 Acrobatic Feats -2 Interacting with law enforcement
Civic Soul	Why does the city speak to you? Are you afraid to listen?	When you enter a new place for the first time, roll 1d6. On a 6, you gain an otherwise unknowable insight into the place's nature.	+1 Insight
Cryptozoologist	Which of The Denizens have you seen? Why do you hunt them?	Evidence of The Denizens Pistol	+1 Occult Knowledge
Fugitive	What crime are you running from? Why do people believe you did it?	Pistol Travelling clothes	+1 Hiding or blending in
Riches To Rags	Why did you lose it all? Whose fault was it?	Pauper's clothes Dagger	+2 Etiquette and tradition -2 Something a servant would do
Industrial Accident	How were you injured? What did you lose?	Sabre Protection Talisman 5 Marks	+1 Interacting with colleagues and workers
Scandalised	What did you do? How did the world find out?	Rapier Dagger 3 Marks	+2 Charming People Who Don't Know -2 Interacting with People Who Know

Playing The Game

Structure Of Play

You can imagine a game of Sarosa as a film or theatre production. The story is split into scenes; discrete but connected moments in which characters interact, come into conflict, and raise or resolve tensions. Generally, a scene follows this format:

- The **CG** sets the scene, describing the location and people present in as much detail as would be readily noticeable.
- Players describe actions they take, with the **CG** calling for checks or use of abilities where relevant.
- Based on the results of rolls and abilities used, the **CG** describes the consequences or how the scene progresses.

The latter two steps repeat until the scene is resolved or play moves to a new scene. Sometimes the resolution of a scene is combat, solving a puzzle, or completing a conversation with another character or non-player character (NPC).

Dice and Terminology

Dice can be:

- **Committed** - Rolled with the expectation of **Sacrificing** some or all of them.
- **Sacrificed** - Removed from their pool or sub-pool as damage, recoverable during a rest.
- **Banished** - Removed from their pool or sub-pool permanently, or until specific conditions are met.
- **Spent** - Removed from their pool or sub-pool until the start of the next combat round (see the Combat section).

Checks

During a game, players will want to perform difficult tasks. When they are unlikely to go smoothly, the **CG** calls for a Check: a dice roll for which they specify the stat, threshold, and quantity of dice required for success. Players **Commit** any quantity of dice to a check from the relevant pool. Dice that meet or exceed the threshold of the check are considered successes. Rolling enough to meet or exceed the required quantity results in succeeding the check.

Difficulty ☒ Complexity ☒	<i>Threshold 2</i>	<i>Threshold 3-4</i>	<i>Threshold 5-6</i>
<i>3-4 Successes</i>	Routine		Gruelling
<i>5-6 Successes</i>		Difficult	
<i>7-8 Successes</i>	Specialist		Miraculous

Risk Level	Committed dice Sacrificed on a Failure (rounded down)
Minor	1/4
Moderate	1/3
Major	1/2
Extreme	All

Succeeding a check allows players to retain all **Committed** dice. Failing reduces the relevant pool's current quantity by the check's Risk level.

Critical Successes occur when all **Committed** dice pass a check's difficulty. Critical failures occur when all **Committed** dice fail to do so.

On a critical success, the player completes their task perfectly and regains 1 die to the relevant pool (if any are missing). On a critical failure, they cannot complete the task and lose 1 additional die.

Contests

Sometimes players need to roll against another player or NPC. In these cases, the **CG** calls for a Contest. Contest Rolls have a Risk Level, but determine victory by comparing the number of 6s rolled rather than exceeding a preset quantity. If no 6s are rolled by either party, 5s are compared instead, and so on. The losing party **Sacrifices** dice from their pool equal to the Risk Level.

Assistance

An assisting player may **Commit** 1-3 dice from their own pool to checks being made by allies. On a failure, the assisting player **Sacrifices** 1 die and the primary player suffers the usual effects of failure.

Combat

Rounds and Turns At the start of combat, players may choose to **Sacrifice** any number of dice from any pool. NPCs have a characteristic representing the number of dice they would typically **Sacrifice**, but can use more at the CG's discretion. Turns are taken in order from the most dice **Sacrificed** to the least, with players winning ties against NPCs, and tied players determining between themselves. A round passes when every combatant has taken their turn.

Dividing Pools At the start of each round, players split each of their Stat pools into Offensive and Defensive sub-pools in any ratio. On their turn, players may use any number of dice from either of these pools on relevant abilities, actions, or spells. There's no limit to the amount of actions a player may undertake on their turn, but **Spent** dice don't refresh until a new round begins. Each die expended represents a half-second of exertion.

Attack and Defence When making an attack, both Attacker and Target **Commit** a number of dice to the roll from the relevant stat-pool (ATK for Attacker, DEF for Defender), adding bonus dice from weapons or abilities. When attacking, only 6s are counted as successes. If neither combatant rolls 6s, they compare 5s in the same manner, and so on. If the scoring numbers are equal, both attacker and defender remain locked in combat dramatically, and must repeat the roll.

Damage Should the Attacker exceed Defender's successes, they deal damage equal to their Weapon Dice (WD) + the number of successes rolled. Should the Defender exceed the Attacker's successes, they deal damage to the Attacker equal to the number of successes rolled. Damage is taken by **Sacrificing** that amount of dice from the pool used in the interaction. If that pool is empty, they're **Sacrificed** from the pool to the right (->Mind->Body->Soul->).

Movement Movement costs 2 dice per significant movement, removed in any combination from the player's Body ATK and DEF sub-pools.

Benthic Sorceries

Benthic Ink is a pearlescent black substance extracted from strange hadal creatures found in the waters around Sarosa. It is the catalyst to cast Benthic Sorceries.

All Benthic Sorceries have a cost. This cost is the number of Vials of Benthic Ink used, Dice you **Banish**, and the number of hours resting required to create the sorcery. Different disciplines of Benthic Sorcery require you to **Banish** dice from different pools:

- Atramancy = Body
- Contramancy = Soul
- Graphomancy = Mind

Your character can have active sorceries of each type equal to the related stat pool divided by 3 (rounded up).

Atramancy

Atramantic Signs are arcane tattoos, bonded to a host with needle and ink. Work with the **CG** to determine their appearance. When gaining a new sign, **Banish** Body Dice equal to its cost. Dice **Banished** this way are not refunded: tattoos are very permanent.

You must **Sacrifice** a number of Body Dice equal to its cost to Summon a Sign, and all Summons persist until destroyed, dismissed (**Sacrificing** 1 die), or dispelled by another effect.

Some Summons have specific stats, which are displayed in the format Mind/Body/Soul.
Eg: Rat (1/3/1).

Non-creature Summons have the same durability as their real-world counterparts.

Signs

Sign Of The...	Cost	When activated, summons...
Tradesman	1	A non-combat tool.
Rat	1	A Rat (1/3/1), which can be commanded once per turn for free.
Lamp	2	A spectral light, allowing you to see reasonable distances in the dark.
Melody	2	A catchy tune, emanating from a point in line of sight.
Sprinter	3	Winged boots, allowing you to move unencumbered by simple obstacles.
Mask	3	A perfect replica of another's face, fitting seamlessly over your own. Dispelled when you next

		take damage.
Dispatch	4	A bird to which you may speak a single sentence message and the recipient's name. The bird will locate them and deliver the message.
Hidden Blade	4	A dagger, sabre, or rapier.
Sentinel	5	Strange armour granting -4 DMG until the end of your next turn.
Companion	5	A small creature (4/4/4) you share a psychic bond with, which can be commanded once per turn for free.
Fragile Wings	6	A set of wings allowing you to fly instead of walk when moving. Dispelled when you next take damage.
Amphibian	6	A set of gills allowing you to breathe underwater. Dispelled when you next take damage.
Swarm	7	A cloud of insects (3/3/3 +1WD Sting), blocking line of sight.
Tusk and Horn	7	A set of tusks, horns, or antlers allowing you to headbutt a nearby structure to break it.
Hunter	8	A slaving beast (3/5/4 +2WD claws) which can be commanded once per turn for free.

Mirror	8	A silver mirror, causing the next attack targeting you to deal damage to you and the attacker equally. Dispelled at the end of your next turn.
--------	---	--

Contramancy

Contramancers deal in two related fields:

- **Bonds:** Contracts between a contramancer and another mortal, binding one or both parties to say, not say, do or, not do something specific.
- **Pacts:** Contracts between contramancers and supernatural creatures in which the sorcerer exchanges a portion of their soul for power from the creature.

All contracts are made between the bearer of the physical contract and a signatory. Dice **Banished** during the formation of a Contract are refunded upon its completion or breaking.

Forming Bonds

Bonds cost the caster 1 Vial of Benthic Ink and 1 **Banished** Soul Die per week they wish the contract to last. Both individuals party to a Bond must be aware they're signing something, but Bonds made under duress are still binding. When forming a Bond Contract, work with the **CG** and other players to figure out and write down the specific requirements placed on each participant. Bond requirements must be possible to fulfill by both parties.

Forming Pacts

To form a Pact, a Contramancer summons an entity to bargain with. To do this, they form a summoning circle from Benthic Ink, and **Banish** 1 Soul Die to power the ritual. The contramancer then rolls a D66 (2d6: one representing 10s and the other units) once to determine the Appearance of the creature they summon, and again to determine the domain over which it holds sway. Contramancers may also **Sacrifice** additional dice to adjust their roll by up to twice the number of dice **Sacrificed**.

Roll	Appearance	Domain
11	Ornate	Vermin
12	Spectral	Conspiracy
13	Ethereal	Mist
14	Ragged	Light
15	Smouldering	Steel

16	Frosted	Shadow
21	Blustering	Bone
22	Slimy	Sewers
23	Pearlescent	Fortune
24	Broken	Wayfinding
25	Metallic	Thresholds
26	Growing	Brick
31	Glowing	Weeds
32	Looming	Advertisements
33	Obscured	Dreams
34	Hazy	Pain
35	Hollow	Pleasure
36	Unsettling	Community
41	Beautiful	Festivals
42	Inhuman	Sustenance
43	Mundane	Burglary
44	Wet	Inspiration
45	Dry	Music
46	Glimmering	Change
51	Terrible	Memory
52	Troubled	Shelter
53	Antiquated	Charity
54	Brooding	Warmth
55	Riotous	History

56	Mechanical	Stagnation
61	Visceral	Art
62	Shattering	Winds
63	Quixotic	Moonlight
64	Mercurial	Solace
65	Invisible	Travel
66	Glorious	Decay

When a creature is summoned, the Contramancer and **CG** work together to determine the contract forged. Every Pact has:

- A name
- A duration
- A benefit to the contramancer (Usually a supernatural ability or item)
- A cost to the contramancer (Usually a task or action benefiting the creature, and a number of **Banished** dice)

Pacts can have additional stipulations, and either party can choose to end negotiations at any time, in which case all dice are refunded.

Breaking Contracts

Contracts break if the requirements of the contract become permanently impossible to meet, such as if a party is killed or incapacitated, the object of a contract is destroyed, etc.

If a contract is destroyed, the physical contract crumbles to ash, those involved are released from any requirements they were being held to, and they lose any benefits they received from it.

Graphomancy

Sigils are the domain of the Graphomancer; arcane symbols scrawled in Benthic Ink on walls and floors and windows across Sarosa. They grant their creators the power to warp the world, and academic debate rages as to whether their effects are physical, or purely an excitement of perception.

Gaining Sigils

When Sigils are cast, triggered, and expire, they lose all arcane potency but the physical symbols remain. Studying these symbols during rest allows players to replicate and cast them. When a character learns a new Sigil, **Banish** dice equal to its cost.

Swapping Sigils

If you discover a new Sigil while at your maximum, you can choose to replace one of your known Sigils with the new one, learning it as normal, and **Banishing** or refunding the difference in cost.

Sigil Of The...	Cost	Target	Trigger	Effect
Pig's Eye	1	A peephole.	A named individual or one in a police uniform enters its sight.	The caster is notified of the triggering entity.
Crystal Fountain	1	A water-pipe.	The sigil is inscribed.	Water passing through the target is made safe to drink, and tastes faintly of a flavour of the caster's choice.
Whispering Bulletin	2	Advertising depicting a person or animal.	A named individual passes close by.	The triggering entity hears a message (of up to 3 sentences determined by the caster) spoken by the target.
Unwanted Entrant	2	A doorbell, chime or	The sigil is triggered by the	The target repeatedly produces sounds as though

		knocker.	caster.	used by a person in a frantic hurry.
Twisted Doorframe	3	Up to two openings in a building.	An individual passes through the target.	The triggering witnesses their worst fear, Sacrificing 2 Mind Dice.
Covert Shadow	3	A natural patch of shadow large enough to stand in	The sigil is inscribed.	For the next 24 hours, entities passing into the target are rendered invisible to those outside.
Shattered Lantern	4	Up to three manufactured light sources	The sigil is inscribed	The target glows brightly for an instant, blinding anyone nearby for 10 minutes.
Looking Glass	4	A wall	The sigil is inscribed	A window appears in the target, granting normal vision from the surface the sigil is inscribed on, but remaining invisible from the other side.
Sunken Street	5	A 10 meter square area of ground	An individual enters the target area	Any entity entering the affected area must spend their entire turn to leave.
Unseen Alcove	5	A wall alcove	The sigil is inscribed and a keyword spoken.	The target and any items placed into it disappear, but can be summoned to any suitable target by the caster.
Impermeable Edifice	6	A stone wall	The sigil is inscribed	The target extends a short distance, blocking pathways or crushing pursuers (dealing 3 Body Dice).
Twinned Conduit	6	Two sewer grates	The sigil is inscribed on the second target	The targets are connected, allowing instantaneous travel between them for 1

				minute.
Folded Street	7	A wall at the entrance of an alleyway	The sigil is inscribed	The alleyway becomes invisible to anyone unfamiliar with it, but can still be accessed by those who know of, or accidentally enter, it.
Living Stone	7	A gargoyle or statue	The sigil is inscribed	The target becomes sentient for the next 24 hours, and follows commands given by the caster if able.
Closed Crescent	8	A road surface	The sigil is inscribed	The street the target is a part of appears to endlessly loop back on itself for the next hour.
Hidden Home	8	The door of a building owned by the caster	The sigil is inscribed on a door	The inscribed door transforms into the target for 1 minute, leading to where the target does.

Advice For City Guides

Sarosa Is Yours The game is yours to shape. Sarosa is a suggestion of a city at best. You can take that suggestion in whatever direction you like and run with it. Make it the version of the city your group finds the most interesting, and disregard any or all of the prescribed qualities this book gives it.

Drama Trumps Rules... Usually. The rules are here to shape play, not constrain it. If something conflicts with the group's idea of a fun, engaging, creepy mystery, ignore it or have something you prefer happen instead. The rules are secondary to the experience. So long as everyone's enjoying the game, you're playing it correctly. "Breaking" the rules should never undermine player agency and choice, however, so messing with the rules should benefit the group more than it benefits their enemies.

Consistency Is Key Sarosa is a strange place, not a nonsensical one. Keeping your plans organised and internally consistent has a huge impact on player experiences. The game encourages you to design your own creatures, places, artefacts, sorceries, and adventures, but it's important to make sure they add to the fun, not take away from it.

Keep The Table Safe Sarosa recommends using the X Card System by John Stavropoulos, but you should ensure you've discussed potentially triggering or upsetting topics that may come up during play with your group beforehand.

**Don't Forget
Your Own Fun**

Even though your role is different, you're still playing the game. Create stories that interest you, fun NPCs to interact with the players, do silly voices, let your players cathartically dismantle Sarosa's very pronounced class system... The game is for you as well.

Equipment

Keywords

Equip # - The amount of dice that must be **Spent** to equip the item.

Reload # - The amount of dice that must be **Spent** to reload the item.

Melee Weapons

Name	Type	Effect(s)
Knife	Mind	1 WD
Sabre	Mind	2 WD
Sword Cane	Mind	2 WD WD can be added to Mind DEF rolls
Zweihander	Body	3 WD Can target up to 2 enemies within 1 meter of each other simultaneously. Equip 2
Cudgel	Body	1 WD Ignore 1 point of armour.
Shillelagh	Body	2 WD Ignore 2 points of armour
Stave	Soul	2 WD
Baton	Soul	1 WD
Chain Whip	Soul	3 WD

Ranged Weapons

Name	Type	Effect(s)
Crossbow	Mind	3 WD Equip 2 Reload 4
Throwing Knife	Soul	1 WD
Pistol	Soul	3 WD Reload 4
Musket	Mind	4 WD Equip 2 Reload 6
Blunderbuss	Body	5 WD Equip 2 Reload 6

Armour

Name	Type	Effect(s)
Lamellar	Body	-3 DMG Equip 2
Cuirass	Body	-2 DMG Equip 2
Riding Leathers	Body	-1 DMG
Tricorne-Skullcap	Body	-1 DMG Damage taken in a critical hit is reduced by 3 (to a minimum of 1)
Sanctified Vestaments	Soul	-2 DMG
Protection Talisman	Mind	-2 DMG