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Game Chef 2011

Cardenio's Daughter

OR "Follow the Lady" or "Apprentice"

A Game by Nick Wedig

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“Mad let us grant him then. And now remains
That we find out the cause of this effect
Or rather say, the cause of this defect,
For this effect defective comes by cause.
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus.
Perpend.
I have a daughter”

—William Shakespeare, **Hamlet**

Perhaps this is the bottom line to mental illness: incomprehensible events occur; your life becomes a bin for hoax-like fluctuations of what used to be reality. And not only that—as if that weren’t enough—but you ... ponder forever over these fluctuations in an effort to order them into a coherancy [sic], when in fact the only sense they make is the sense you impose on them, out of necessity to restore everything into shapes and processes you can recognize. The first thing to depart in mental illness is the familiar. And what takes its place is bad news because not only can you not understand it, you also cannot communicate it to other people. The madman experiences something, but what it is or where it comes from he does not know.

—Philip K. Dick, **Valis**

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Cardenio has a problem. He seems to be slipping between realities. In one moment, he is Duke Cardenio, exiled to Spain after a disastrous civil war. In the next, he is aging literature professor Marcus Cardenio, dealing with his estranged daughter and a lost play of Shakespeare's. And then just as suddenly, Cardenio flashes to a world where he is a foolish old rogue, hiding out in his daughter's attic from the villainous Sheriff Vortigern. Though Cardenio remembers all three of these realities, no one else experiences these changes of perspective. Has Cardenio gone mad? Which one of the three is the true reality?

This is a story-telling game for three to five players. In it you will tell three parallel stories that add up to one larger tale. The three tales are an epic tragedy, a slice-of-life drama and a tale of comic folly. Each will influence the others, and over the course of the game you will learn much about the focal character Cardenio, his relationship(s) with his daughter(s) and the nature of his predicament. It should take two or three sessions to play out in its entirety, depending on how long you take to play.

3-5 Setup

First, you need three to five players, including yourself. The roles in play will depend on how many players you have. Three of you will be **Ambition Players**. If you have four or five players, one person will be dedicated to playing **Cardenio** himself. If you have five players, one person will play **The Daughter** consistently. If you have fewer players, then those roles will transfer from player to player.

You'll also need a few cards from a standard playing card deck. You'll need the **Jack of Spades**, the **Jack of Clubs**, the **Queen of Hearts**, the **Queen of Diamonds**, the **King of Diamonds**, the **Two of Hearts**, and a **Joker**. Separate out **the remaining twelve spades** in another pile.

Each player can choose their role, or the roles can be decided randomly. If you want to assign roles randomly, take the King of Diamonds, the Two of Hearts, and a Joker from the deck and shuffle them. If you need, add the Jack of Spades and/or the Queen of Hearts. Deal out the cards, and turn them over. Whoever receives the King takes on **The King** role, the Two will play **The Deuce**, and the Joker becomes **The Fool**. The holder of the Jack of Spades will play **Cardenio**, and the holder of the Queen will play **The Daughter**.

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Ambition Players

The King, the Deuce and the Fool are called **ambition players**. These players will embody Cardenio's hidden desires. They will speak out loud his internal thoughts, which even Cardenio's player may not realize.

The King speaks for Cardenio's **Noble Ideals**, which impel Cardenio to great, dramatic acts.

The Deuce voices Cardenio's **Mundane Desires**, which impel Cardenio to small, everyday acts.

The Fool plays his **Terrible Flaw**, which impels Cardenio to stupid, self-destructive acts.

The Three Worlds

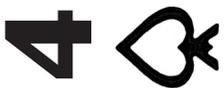
The three ambition players will also control one of the three realities that Cardenio experiences. Each ambition controls a world where Cardenio lacks their specific desire. Ambition players can thus modify the world to illustrate how this lack is Cardenio's downfall.

"Controlling the world" means describing setting, creating and roleplaying minor NPCs, and having final say on the details of the environment.

The King controls the world where Cardenio is a **clever, old rogue**, hiding out from the authorities in his daughter Rowena's house. Following a criminal caper gone wrong, Cardenio has come to his daughter Rowena's house to hide out from Sheriff Vortigern. Cardenio the rogue lacks the Noble Ideal that the the King usually advocates.

The Deuce controls the world of **Duke Cardenio**, who is ruled by grand ambitions and terrible flaws. Duke Cardenio has been exiled to Spain, following a disastrous civil war in England. In the war, his daughter Rowena sided with Prince Vortigern, against Duke Cardenio.

The Fool controls the world of **Marcus Cardenio**, a modern literature professor who has found a lost play that may be Shakespeare's. Professor Cardenio's life is torn between large, abstract ideals and his everyday concerns. Cardenio has stolen a manuscript from Thomas Vortigern, his academic rival and husband to Cardenio's daughter Rowena. Cardenio believes the manuscript to be a lost play of Shakespeare's, called **The Cardsharps**, or "**Follow the Lady**".





The Daughter

The person playing The Daughter roleplays Rowena, in any of Cardenio's three parallel lives. The Daughter also has some special duties to play in the game.

The Daughter acts as dealer for the cards, though she need not be a fair dealer. The Daughter can deal cards out randomly if she wishes, but just as easily she can hand the cards out secretly according to her personal plans. She can also peek at anyone's card at any time. She can even switch cards around, so long as the cardholder hasn't offered a soliloquy for this scene.

If you have five players, one person will play The Daughter throughout the game.

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If you have fewer than five player, the role of The Daughter moves from player to player. In each scene, one of the ambition players will also act as the Daughter. You should have a token to identify The Daughter. The Queen of Diamonds from your deck of cards would work well as a token. At the end of each scene, the Daughter should give away the token to another player (not the player of Cardenio in the next scene). That player will act as the Daughter for the scene, then he or she will also give away the token, and so forth.

3-4

Creating Cardenio

or “What A Piece of Work is Man”

Before you begin play, you must define Cardenio and his situation(s) in more detail.

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If you have three players:

Each of you will take turns roleplaying Cardenio.

Go around the table, taking turns asking questions. When it is your turn, ask another player a question about any one of Cardenio’s three lives. Good questions will push the story toward interesting avenues of exploration and reveal new aspects of the drama. Ideally, questions and answers make Cardenio’s story into one a tale that interests you and your friends. This is also a good time to get detail on the desires, ideals, and flaws you will be speaking for.

When you ask a player a question about Cardenio, they get to answer in any way they like, so long as it doesn’t invalidate previously established information. Then they get to ask you a question in return, and you can establish new facts about Cardenio yourself.

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If you have four or five players:

One player will roleplay Cardenio throughout the game.

The question and answer process works the same, except all the questions are aimed at Cardenio’s player. Take turns having the ambition players and the Daughter ask questions of Cardenio. Every question is asked of Cardenio, and then Cardenio asks the questioner something in return.

Once everyone has asked and been asked a question, then you just need to put any finishing touches on the situation. If any new NPCs were introduced, you should give them names and such.

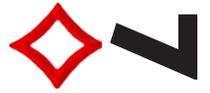
After Cardenio’s life has been defined, you will begin regular play. Don’t worry if some stuff is still vague; you can define it in play or gloss over it.

Example questions

- Which side of the civil war was Duke Cardenio on?
- Does Professor Vortigern realize the value of the missing manuscript?
- Does Rowena?
- Why is Rowena angry at Cardenio?
- Why does Cardenio Shakespeare wrote the play?
- Why did Rowena side with Vortigern in the war instead of with her father?
- What is the ancient feud between Cardenio and Vortigern?
- What was the criminal caper the roguish Cardenio botched?
- What is Cardenio’s greatest regret?
- Why is Rowena ashamed of her father?
- Which other criminal compatriots are angry at rogue Cardenio?
- Where is Duke Cardenio hiding out in Spain?



Starting Scenes



Before the first scene, the Daughter will take three cards: the **Jack of Clubs**, the **Jack of Spades** and the **Queen of Hearts**. She will deal those cards out to the three ambition players, who will hold it for the scene. If playing with three players, everyone should keep their card face down, without looking at it. If you have four or more, the ambition players can look at the cards they were dealt.

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4-5

The main body of the game consists of a series of several scenes. Each scene should only be about five to ten minutes. You can always return to a scene later if you want.

The first scene begins with the King player framing the scene. Thereafter, each scene will start with the person whose Cardenio card chose in the previous scene. E.g., if Cardenio chooses to listen to The Fool and give in to his Terrible Flaw, the next scene will be one set in the world of Professor Cardenio, which the Fool controls.

The framing player starts by describing where the scene is set, who is present and what is happening at the beginning of play. Thereafter, everyone else can jump in, roleplaying Cardenio, Rowena and various minor characters. Ambitions players can portray any other characters that become involved in a scene (the player controlling the world can pick who will play that character) The player who controls the scene will also describe the world, create new NPCs and narrate in sudden twists of fate. The scene plays out however seems most appropriate to the players, until eventually Cardenio is faced with decisions. At this point, the others can offer Cardenio **soliloquies**.

If you're playing with three players, whichever player controls the world will also play Cardenio for that scene.

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Soliloquies

At any point in a scene, the ambition players can offer Cardenio soliloquies. Soliloquies are speeches that the ambition player speaks, which represent Cardenio's internal desires. Soliloquies are always spoken in first-person, as Cardenio's own thoughts. By externalizing Cardenio's interior monologue, we all learn about his internal state.

Once everyone has heard the soliloquy, the other ambitions can offer their own competing soliloquies if they wish. Cardenio's player then gets to decide if that soliloquy is true or just a figment. If given several conflicting soliloquies, Cardenio can choose one or none to be true.

Eventually, though, Cardenio will accept one of the soliloquies as being true. Cardenio will then try to follow the ideas expressed in the speech, and will act to pursue that desire for the rest of the scene. At this point, the person who spoke the successful soliloquy reveals their card. The value of the card will determine how the scene plays out for Cardenio.

Outcomes

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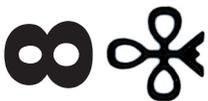
If the revealed card was the Queen of Hearts, then the scene ends well for Cardenio. Things turn out positively for him, possibly because of his choice and his actions, or perhaps because of blind luck.

Jc

If the revealed is the Jack of Clubs, then the scene works out poorly for Cardenio. Figure out how things can get worse, or how Cardenio can mess up whatever he was trying to do.

Js

If the revealed card is the Jack of Spades, then something weird happens. Cardenio is already questioning his sanity, and the Jack of Spades means that Cardenio's uncertainty is escalating. Surreal events, hallucinations, bleed over from one reality to the next, inconsistencies between established facts, false memories, something makes him doubt his own senses. However this scene plays out from here, Cardenio is less certain of his sanity than before. It seems more and more like this reality is a dream. Do whatever you can to increase paranoia, uncertainty and mystery.



Ending a Scene



Once the outcome of the scene is determined, you play out the rest of the scene, armed with the knowledge of how it should turn out. After you have made the scene sufficiently good or bad or surreal, look for a good ending point for the scene.

If the card revealed in the scene was a Jack, then the other players keep the cards that they may have. In the next scene, Cardenio's choices will be more limited, since he'll choose from one fewer cards. The Jack remains face up in front of the holding player, until the Queen comes out and the card are reshuffled.

If the card revealed was the Jack of Spades, then the person who controlled the world in that scene should put a (different) spade card face up in front of them. This means that that reality is more unreliable than before.

If the revealed card was the Queen of Hearts, then the Daughter takes all three outcome cards back and deals them out again.

Whoever's card was chosen will start the next scene, in the world that they control.



Ending the game

You reach the end of the game after each of the twelve (non-Jack) spade cards have been placed face up in front of someone. At this point, you will have three final scenes, resolving the storyline in each world. Count how many spades are in front of each player. The player with the most spades will have a scene, that resolves their world's plotlines. That scene must also show that their world was a dream or a hallucination or a fantasy tale that exists within the next world. Then the player with the next most cards will host a similar scene: the plotlines for that reality conclude, and that reality is smashed apart as an illusion as well. Finally, whichever reality had the fewest spade cards in front of them is revealed as the true reality. Have a scene resolving that world's plotlines, as well as Cardenio's insanity.

What about ties?

The Daughter can decide what order you go in. If you tie for fewest cards, you should definitely try for an ambiguous, *Twilight Zone* style ending. Leave it a question which world is the real one and which is the dream. Or have the two realities blend together in unpredictable ways. Maybe both are true in some way.



Option for a shorter game:

If you'd like the game to go one sessions instead of the expected two to three, then make one small change: at the end of any scene, you put a spade card in front of the player whose reality the scene was set in. If the revealed card was the Jack of Spades, place the spade face up. When the Jack of Clubs or Queen are revealed, put the spade face down. Keep playing until all twelve spade cards are distributed in front of someone. When determining the endgame, only count the face up spade cards. This will make the game go twelve scenes instead of the expected thirty or so.

Final notes and thoughts

This roleplaying game/story game/whatever it was made as part of the 2011 **Game Chef** roleplaying game design contest. Each year, a variety of game enthusiasts make experimental roleplaying games based off of a random list of ingredients. This game was made using the theme of "**William Shakespeare**" and the ingredients "**Daughter**", "**Exile**" and "**Nature**". The game came because I was thinking about how Shakespeare often has multiple intertwining stories, about people at different levels of society (e.g., the "rude mechanicals" in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*). And those tales reflect each other and parallel one another. So I made a game that is very much about making three intertwining stories that parallel each other. Duke Cardenio and old rogue Cardenio are intended to be examples of Shakespearean tragedy and Shakespearean comedy, while the modern professor Cardenio interfaces with Shakespeare in his own way, as a modern slice-of-life drama. As for the other ingredients, **Daughter** is obvious enough I hope. **Nature** relates to the central mysteries of the game: what is the nature of Cardenio's reality-shifting? What is the nature of his relationship with Rowena? What is the nature of the man himself? **Exile** might be the least obvious, but I wanted each Cardenio to be in a different sort of exile. Each has retreated from part of their life to avoid their past crimes. Perhaps Cardenio is fleeing his misdeeds by escaping into alternate realities. Cardenio is an exile in his own mind.

If you do anything cool like the game (even just playing it counts), let me know at nickwedig@yahoo.com

