The Daughters of Verona

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A storygame of Shakespearean comedy
by Wilhelm Person

The Daughters of Verona

The Daughters of Verona is a storygame of Shakespearean comedy for five players. The story in the game is a play. The play is divided into acts and scenes. The character gallery is not larger than that it could be played by a small troupe of actors.

The game uses two decks of cards[1]. The first is the Character deck with characters for the story, each card shows a face and a name to go with the face. The second is the Story deck which contains seeds for scenes and suggests places to stage the scenes in.

The truths

Let the following truths guide your story, they are tropes that will give your story the feel of a Shakespearean play. Everyone should learn them before the story starts.

- The story is a comedy, comedies end with a feast and marriages for the lovers.

- Do not describe in third person what you can say in the first. Audience at the back might not see your props, but they will hear your voice.

- It is through their words and actions that we learn who the characters are, not by elaborate back stories.

- Anachronisms are to be expected. After all, time was short and no research has been done.

- Everyone dress in contemporary clothing, no matter where or when the story is set.

- Heroines sometimes dress like men to hide their true identities.

- All the roles are played by men, heroines disguised as men are therefore men dressed as women dressed as men. This is hilarious.

- If identities can be mistaken, they are. Mistaken identities are hilarious.

- Infidelity is hilarious, even if it is only implied.

Verona

The game is set in Verona. Not that it matters of course, it is the anachronistic and unresearched Verona we're talking about. The city may lay on the Adige, but if you want it to, Verona can lie on the coast or at the top of a mountain. What matters is that it is far away and exotic, yet at the same time familiar.

The Characters

Each player plays two to four different characters. The character cards contain only a name and a face. Explore the characters while playing, filling in the details needed as you go. In these stories the characters are not defined by rich backgrounds, instead we learn who they are through their actions.

There are different kinds of characters; Lovers, The Fool, Blockers and Minor characters. They all do different parts of your story.

Lovers

The lovers are the main protagonists, the heroes and heroines. It is the resolution of their complicated love that drives the story forward, and in the end they will marry, usually each other.

Fool

The conscious fool can speak the truth without fear. He helps to solve the lovers' problems. The other characters may think the Fool lacks intellect, but he is actually the wisest of them all.

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[1]You need to print and cut the cards out before you can play. They are about the same size as the cards from a popular collectible card game about wizards. I use card sleeves for such cards to make my own cards more durable.

In any dispute between the players the Fool is the arbitrator. His decisions can only be overruled if all the other players agree.

There can be only one Fool character in the story, but many characters may be foolish.

Blockers

In the first act the blocking characters put boundaries or rules into play which present obstacles for lovers. Without the blocking characters there is no conflict, and no story. Some blocking characters feature prominently throughout the story, others are only seen in the beginning and in the end.

Minor characters

Not all characters are pure Lovers, Fools or Blockers. But the minor characters are important to the story as well. They are the people that surround the Lovers, servants, friends, family, relatives, acquaintances or even enemies. They are not bound to the wedding in the final act and populate their own plots. The minor characters' sub plots are intertwined with the main plot of the Lovers, yet separate.

Before you play

Before the play starts, do the following steps together.

Assign the players their roles

Assign the roles to the players however you like. You could simply shuffle the Character deck and deal characters at random. But maybe you would rather spread them all out face up on the table and pick and choose. Do however you please. Two characters is good to begin with, veteran players may have three or even four if they want to.

Put aside any remaining Character cards, they will not be needed during the rest of the game.

From the chosen characters, identify the Fool. Then the other players select one character each for a Lover. Now you have the main characters of the story. Remaining characters are either Blockes or minor characters.

Draw a diagram of relationships

Draw a diagram of the characters and their connections or relationships. The diagram will show who are related, who the servants serve, who are

blocking the lovers, and so on. It will serve as an aid during play to help everyone remember how the characters are connected.

Make very a short presentation of each character and discuss the initial relationships.

Start by connecting each main character to an other character. It is a good idea to make the initial connections between the Lovers' into a love triangle or other unsustainable and complicated configuration.

Then make one connection for every minor character. After that, if any character should not have connections to at least two other characters, add the extra relations needed.

Name the play

Give your story a name. The name is something for you to rally around, and will give the story it's initial momentum.

While playing you may find that the name you first gave the story wasn't very fitting of the way the play actually turned out. That is fine, just change the name.

Draw initial scenes and locations

Shuffle the Scene deck and place it in the middle of the table. Turn up three cards and place them side by side where everyone can see them, it is from these three cards that scenes will be set.

Then turn up the four more cards and arrange them in an overlapping cross so that the location on the bottom on each card can be seen. These are the locations or sceneries that are available for the upcoming scene.

The Acts

The game follows a five-act structure[2], where specific things happen at specific times.

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[2]I found Andy Rutter's description on http://andyrutter.com/5-act-structure helpful in explaining what happens in each act.

Act I - Introduction

Introduce the main characters, most importantly the Lovers. Show what everyone wants. Show why the Lovers can't have each other, usually in the form of Blockers who stand in the way of their love. The act ends with an inciting moment, something that kick starts the story. Make it something that breaks the daily routine, something that the Lovers must react to, or a decision made by the Lovers not to accept the current situation.

Act II - Rising action

Complicate the Lovers' situation as they struggle towards the goal. Introduce the remaining characters. Minor adversaries may act in consort with the main Blockers or independently for their own goals.

Act III - Climax

Things start to go well for the Lovers. It may even seem like they will succeed, but things will turn for the worse. In the middle of the act things are desperate and the happy marriage is suddenly very far away. But at the end of the act the Lovers confront the Blockers or the obstacle to their love and succeed.

Act IV - Falling action

The aftermath of the confrontation in act III. Tie up loose ends in the story. There might be a final, sudden, obstacle for the Lovers to overcome.

Act V - Resolution

The last of the conflicts and problems are resolved. Any characters in disguise that have not previously revealed their true identity do so now. Any disruptive characters have either repented or been sent away.

Make it a happy ending. The Lovers finally have their wedding, but not necessarily in the constellations we saw in Act I. They should be better off than when the story started.

The Scenes

Each act consists of several scenes, and each player may frame at least one scene per act.

Once everyone has had the chance to frame one scene you can move on to the next act, or linger for a few more scenes if you want. You may find that a single scene per player is too little in act III and too much in act IV. Do what feels right.

Framing scenes

If there are fewer than three Scene cards visible (not counting the ones in the cross) turn over a new so that there are three to choose from again. Should the Scene deck run out, just save the visible cards from the cross and shuffle the rest to restock the Scene deck.

There is no specific turn order, take turns being the narrator as you get ideas for good scenes. Select one of the three Scene cards as inspiration for the scene. Place it face up in the cross, so that it covers one of the previous locations. The event on the card will occur in the scene, or has just happened when the scene starts.

Select one of the locations from the cross of Scene cards as scenery for the scene.

The narrator then frames the scene, e.g. `Act I, Scene I, In the count's garden`. It is expected that the location on the card is elaborated upon. It is not just a room, whose room is it? It is OK to add some extra details about the circumstances if needed, e.g. the time of day. You may also bend the meaning of the card to fit the story you are playing if it feels jarring as written.

Keep the framing short. A character belonging to the player that frames the scene should get the first few lines of dialogue to give the other players some sense of direction. Let a character speak about the situation.

Don't force setting scenes, if you don't have any ideas it's OK to pass. Even if you pass you may select one of the three Story cards and place it on the cross, and so rotate out any cards that don't fit the current story very well.

Add characters in a scene

When the scene starts the narrator invites the characters that are in it. `Enter Diana, The Count`.

Once the scene is under way any player may add any of his characters. `Enter Miranda`

Remove characters from a scene

Any player may remove any of his characters from a scene. `Exit Miranda`

Soliloquy

A soliloquy is like a monologue, except it is not addressed to anyone. The character thinks out loud. Other characters in a scene may overhear a soliloquy.

Any character can perform a soliloquy. To do so the player stands up and starts speaking. No one may

interrupt a soliloquy, it is over when the player sits back down. A soliloquy is a good way to explain the motivations of a character to the audience.

End the scene

The scene ends either when the last character is removed from it, or if the narrator says so. `Exeunt`

Trade characters

The players may at any time trade characters with each other. That way one character can speak and act with any other, without forcing the player to speak to himself.

Play the audience

If you are not playing a character in the current scene, play the role of the audience. Cheer when Fate smiles upon the Lovers, and pity them when things go badly. Laugh at follies. Boo at villains, but never at your fellow players.

Ask for help

If you find yourself stuck and don't know what to say next, you can ask your fellow players for advice. Repeat the line you were given out loud. `Line, please.`

Your first game

If you are playing for the first time and want a bit of help with building the characters and their relations you can use this setup.

The story is called *The Daughters of Verona*. It is about the wealthy merchant Orsino (Blocker) from Verona and his twin daughters Isabella (Lover) and Emilia (Lover). Orsino wishes to marry either of his daughters to the count Esclaus (Blocker) to gain titles for his grandchildren. The count Esclaus has not yet been able to decide which of the daughters he desires the most.

One day two brothers arrive in Verona, Claudio (Lover) and Grumio (Lover), both exiles from Venice and in hiding from their creditors.

The troubadour Leonardo (Fool) arrives together with the brothers, after having met them on the road.

Add the priest Iago, the daughters' nurse Bianca and Feste, an agent sent by the creditors, and you should be good to go.

Draw your own diagram of how the characters are connected and then the play can start ...

`Act I, Scene I, Without the city gates of Verona. Enter Claudio, Grumio.`

Designer's notes

And with that I end the description of how to play The Daughters of Verona, my submission for the Game Chef contest of 2011. All games were written around the theme William Shakespeare, and were to incorporate three of the four ingredients: Daughter, Exile, Forsworn, Nature. We find the daughters in the title, and as Lovers together with the exiles. Nature has found it's way into many of the locations on the Scene cards.

I could not find a way to fit any forsworn men into the game, at least not once I had started to write a game of comedy, romance and happy endings. If you want them in your stories, play a tragedy and kill everyone in act V instead of having the huge wedding. Otherwise, if tragedies strike your fancy I can recommend the brilliant game Montsegur 1244[3] by Frederik J. Jensen, from which I have borrowed much of the mechanics for this game.

The pretty illustrations on the Character cards are portraits of people from the Renaissance. Every single one of them was once a real, living and breathing person. The paintings are about a century older[4] than the plays the game was written to emulate. Anachronisms are to be expected.

I want to thank Frida Ullenius, Mikael Bergström, Rickard Elimää and Frederik J. Jensen, who all offered much advice and support during the development of the game.

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[3]http://thoughtfulgames.com/montsegur1244
[4]Search http://commons.wikimedia.org for "renaissance portraits" and you will find them.

The Daughters of Verona

Esclaus [B]

Iago

— Friend —

— Plan wedding —

Orsino [B]

Isabella [L]

— Sisters —

— Daughters —

— Nurse —

Bianca

Emilia [L]

Grumio [L]

Leonardo [F]

Feste

— Friends —

— Collector —

— Brothers —

Claudio [L]