

# The Trouble with Rose

by Todd Zircher (version 2.0)

Sigh, Rose has done it again and her father can stand it no more. As Rose's closest friends, will you comfort her, mend the damage, and perhaps pursue your own secret agenda?

*The Trouble with Rose* is a story telling game set around a common theme. The players are all friends and acquaintances of Rose. They work together to create a story/play full of Shakespearean drama, tragedy, comedy, and betrayal.



## Who is this Rose girl and why is she such a bother?

The character of Rose is decided by the players at the beginning of play. As the daughter of powerful father or perhaps an evil step mother, she has been exiled, banished, or otherwise set into flight.

Rose is a non-player character. While she can be and is often part of many scenes, she's not exclusively played by one person. It is also not a requirement that she be present in each and every scene since it is quite possible that some player controlled characters may be plotting behind her back.

Given that the setting can be historical, fantasy, modern, or futuristic, it's quite likely that Rose may be a Rosie, a Briar Rose, android ROS-218, or a Sakura<sup>1</sup>.

For examples I'll use Shakespeare's *Rosalind* (a Rose by any other name) and other characters from *As You Like It*.

1. Sakura means Cherry Blossom in Japanese. Bara (Rose) means stinging flower and is never used as a girl's name. It might make for a good name for a witch though.

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Players – These are the people that sit around the table and create the stories and the characters that live in them.

Characters – They are the personalities that inhabit the story being told. There are two types: player characters (PCs) and non-player characters (NPCs.)

PCs – Each player at the table will create one such character. Through their nature and those things that they have forsworn, they will craft the story about Rose and their secret agenda.

Orlando, who frequently interacts with *Rosalind*, would be an example of a PC.

NPCs – Rose and all the supporting characters in a play are not owned by a single player. They are included like props on a stage, but they can be given lines and actions to perform.

Charles the Wrestler, who only has a few scenes, is a good non-player character.

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## Setting the Stage (*What is needed: a deck of cards*)

At the start of the game, the players decide the setting for their play. In this phase, they work together to determine the time, location, and events that lead up to Rose being exiled. This can be as simple as a few sentences, but if the players are in a creative and loquacious mood, they're welcome to fill out the world with detailed locations, play out events, and provide characters relevant to the story.

To use *As You Like It* as an example; Rosalind, the daughter of the old duke, have been exiled by the new duke. He fears her strong influence on his own daughter and calls Rosalind a traitor. Modern in its day, it would now be classified as historical fiction.

If the players can't decide or are up for the challenge, they can draw a card at random to help determine the setting and nature of Rose's exile. The players still have some room in interpreting the meaning of the draw. For example, drawing a heart can be a forbidden love, fleeing an arranged marriage, or chasing after a heart's desire.

As part of setting the stage, the players can create other NPCs such as the Old Duke, Rose's parents, authority figures, and other characters that would be present during the opening scene(s). These characters have no attributes or statistics in the traditional game sense, they are props for the players to manipulate as elements of game play.

The first player tasked with setting a scene determines if the play starts at the brink of the daughter's exile or after the deed is done.

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Ace	Space, the great frontier
Two	Deuce, a noir setting
Three	The three musketeers
Four	Four winds of the Orient
Five	An occult symbol
Six	Six guns and dust
Seven	A casino or gambling den
Eight	Chaos is at the gates
Nine	Nine to five at the office
Ten	Math, science, and secrets
Jack	Jack in to cyberpunk
Queen	Off with her head!
King	Weary rests the crown

Hearts	Romance
Clubs	Defense
Diamonds	Theft
Spades	Murder

(See the appendix for more information.)

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## Player Character Creation (*What is needed: pencils, index cards or writing paper*)

After the setting has been determined, the players create the characters which are the friends and acquaintances of Rose. Each player is dealt a playing card face down and this is their secret agenda.



Hearts mean that the player is in love with Rose and seeks to win her heart.



Clubs charge you with defending Rose and perhaps clearing her name.



Diamonds uncover that you're really in it for the money, fame, or power.



Spades reveal that you're secretly working for Rose's down fall (whether out of jealousy, scorn, or perhaps on the orders of another.)

Each player gets to assign six descriptive attributes to their player character in addition to a name and perhaps a little back story. The first four of these attributes are generally positive traits that define the nature of the character. For example, Celia from *As You Like It* could be written up as:

- |                         |                   |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Daughter of Fredrick | 3. Courtly graces |
| 2. Loyal to the end     | 4. Fair of face   |

The number assigned to each of the natures will become important during play.

Each player character also has two negative traits or strong personal oaths. These are oaths that character has made to others or themselves that they would be hard pressed to break even when it puts them at a disadvantage. When they appear in a scene, the character may be forced to choose a path don't want to go down. Celia's negative natures could be:

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 5. I am my father's daughter. | 6. I'd never betray Rosalind. |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|

To offer a comparison between "Daughter of Fredrick" and "I am my father's daughter", the first trait reflects the power and respect that she is given as the Duke's daughter. The second trait is her darker side when blood is thicker than water and she carries some of Fredrick's paranoia. That's it for player characters; a quick list and an easy guide to playing that role.



## The Play is the Game (*What is needed: a set of Double Six dominos*)

With a setting for the stage and player characters in hand, we're ready to make the game and our plays come to life.

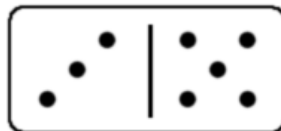
Flip face down and scramble the dominos, each player secretly draws five dominos that they can look at and organize as they see fit. This will allow for three to five people to play. There are 28 dominos in a pack. For a larger game with six or seven players, only draw four dominos each.

The play begins with the owner of the dominos. However, the owner can pass that starting role to anyone at the table if it is desired and accepted. Play moves around the table in a clockwise manner from that starting position.

The first player describes the scene details (landscape, props, weather, plus any number of PCs or NPCs that may be present.) Then, they can play one of their hidden dominos. Depending on what pips are shown, the player has to advance the story based on their character's nature and oaths.

For example, Ted is playing Orlando whose secret agenda is Hearts.

1. In touch with the earth
2. Too shy with the ladies
3. Young and robust
4. Natural gentleman
5. I'll force my brother to educate me or he'll pay what he owes me.
6. The blood of Rowland de Boys runs in my veins.



Ted describes the farm where Orlando labors and adds in Old Adam, the family's elderly man servant. Orlando bids Adam to hide while he confronts his older brother, Oliver. Ted reveals a 3/5 tile from his hand. Using the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> natures of the character, Ted describes how Orlando goes into a rant over Oliver's mistreatment and

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A few words on framing a scene - The rules for *The Trouble with Rose* allow the player to use a large brush. With broad strokes they can create a grim and bloody battlefield or a dew kissed glade. With that creative power does come some constraints and guidelines.

The player (and audience) should only add props and characters to the stage if it improves the story. If you need for the character to be in Arden, it happens. That knife in the bodice, the horse waiting for your expeditious retreat, it's there. Just pay heed to where the story is headed. If the point of a scene is for the player character to be threatened by a dangerous wrestler, deciding that your character has a sword is probably the wrong choice.

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even lays hands on Oliver in an attempt to intimidate him. If Ted pulls in one of the other player characters from around the table, they can add their own lines to the scene, but they do not have creative control until it is their turn to play a domino and set the scene. Can Orlando use "In touch with the earth" or "Too shy with the ladies" in this scene? Yes indeed, they are part of his nature, but they are not included for scoring purposes.

If the player would have turned over a tile that was a double, it would have had some wild and major effect on the story based on the indicated nature or oath.

If the played domino has a blank, it is treated as a wild card (it matches any pip) or a random event. But, it's always narrated as a failure and the player character may even end up being hurt. If any player has to play the double blank (it should always be played last from their hand), that character is in for trouble. They are usually taken out of the story in some tragic way; poison, prison, falling on a sword, etc. But, as a double wildcard, the player pretty much has a blank check to bring as much drama and tragedy to the story as they want for their character.

Each player gets to play only one domino on their turn. Before the player's turn ends, the other players at the table get to act as the rowdy audience. The audience has two tasks; one optional and the other required to end the turn.

Scene Building: Optionally, the audience at the table can collaborate and embellish the story or perhaps add a bit of a twist to the scene. In improvisational theater terms, this would be "Yes, and..." or "Yes, but..." techniques. The audience can't radically change the player's scene or veto it, but they put a spin on it if they all agree.

By way of example from *As You Like It*, the audience decides that Ted did a great job of ranting at and threatening Oliver. They add in a consequence to Orlando's bold act, the brother plots with Charles the Wrestler to get Orlando's neck broken.

Scoring: The audience also gets to act as a critic (no hissing or throwing of vegetables, please.) Based on the player's storytelling, they decide if they gets to keep the tile played or if it is discarded. A kept tile adds to the player's score. If the player was able to only use one of the natures or oaths effectively, they only get a partial score based on the pips. A simple majority vote is all that is need to award a full or partial tile.

In our example, the 3/5 tile was played and the audience agrees that Ted played to both of Orlando's natures in the scene. Ted gets to add eight (3+5) to his score.

Play continues around the table as each player in turn adds to the story until all the players' tiles have been revealed and acted upon. After the last scene has been scored by the audience, the players reveal their secret agenda cards. By consensus, the players decide if each of the characters were able to achieve their secret agenda. If so, they're awarded an extra ten points on their score.

The player with the highest score gets to describe the epilogue and narrate the end of the story. This is the last scene of the game and the big payoff. Who gets the girl? Is justice served? Will villainy prevail? Are the ghosts avenged? The winner gets to narrate this and wrap up the game.

Everyone take a bow.

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## Sequence of Events *(The Trouble with Rose - short form)*

1. Determine the setting by consensus or draw a random card.
2. Each player is dealt a hidden agenda card.
3. Create characters that are related to Rose and/or each other.
4. Draw four (6-7 players) or five (3-5 players) dominos to form your hand.
5. Play begins with the owner or a suitable volunteer.
- 6a. Each player sets the stage and adds PCs and NPCs to act on it.
- 6b. The player then reveals their hidden domino and acts out the scene attempting to invoke the character's natures as indicated on the pips. They're free to narrate, soliloquize, or play out a dialog with the other player characters.
- 6c. At the end of the scene, the audience determines if the player keeps their domino and adds it to their score, it only merits a partial score, or if it is discarded.
- 6d. Play passes around the table clockwise until all the dominos have been played.
7. Players reveal their secret agendas and if the other players feel that they have accomplished their goal, they are awarded a bonus ten points.
8. The player with the highest score wins the right to narrate the epilogue and wraps up the story.
9. Take a bow (optional, but highly encouraged.)



## Appendix: Settings and More

The setting descriptions were kept short in the main text in order to not disrupt the flow of the rules presentation. Here, I'd like to expand on them and describe how they can be used to tell a wide variety of stories.

Ace	Space is a wide open setting ranging from the early days of space flight to galactic empires. Space can represent a new age of discovery, revisiting ancient tales in science fiction garb, or allow the players to explore human issues in a distant time and/or place such as racism, slavery, religion, or politics.
Two	Noir as a genre evokes images of mobsters and detectives. It is a great setting for crimes, investigations, corruption, drama and mysteries.
Three	The three musketeers are immediately associated with the French Court. But, the setting can easily be Spanish, Italian, or English. There are intrigues, betrayals, secret liaisons, and much swashbuckling. You can even take this setting to the high seas and the islands of the New World for a pirate spin on the play.
Four	Four winds of the Orient represent the ancient tales and settings of Japan and China. Stories of honor, arranged marriages, and duty abound. They are as powerful as any Shakespearean drama or tragedy. They can also be as light hearted as any Disney™ film or tale of the Monkey King.
Five	The pentacle and pentagon figure heavily as symbols of the occult. Witches, demons, and black hearted cultists threaten our protagonists. Is Rose the escapee of some dark ritual? Is she the bearer of a demon soul? Are those rumors of witchcraft true?
Six	Six guns and dust color the old West. Tales of greed, revenge, and the battles over land and resources are plentiful. Caught in the cross fire are the honest and hard working people of the West, the US Army, as well as the native Americans.
Seven	Lucky seven is understood at gambling dens and casinos world-wide. Exotic locals such as Las Vegas, Macao, and Monte Carlo make the setting where luck, high stakes gambling, crime, and the jet set lifestyle meet. Big entertainers and show girls rub elbows with the high rollers.
Eight	The eternal war between Chaos and Order sets the stage for battle, strife, betrayal, and revenge. From ancient and fantastical times to the dark future, Rose finds herself at a pivot moment in the struggle. Is she running away from destiny, carrying dark secrets, or forbidden technology?

Nine	Nine to five at the office may not alter the course of nations, but there's plenty of room for romance, drama, comedy, and adventure. Perhaps your career is going out the door with Rose? The boss may be a jerk, but getting them back together is better than living in a cardboard box.
Ten	Mathematics, science, and secrets may not sound like a play for the masses, but knowledge is power and spycraft is required to save the day. From atomic secrets, to industrial espionage, to mad science and steam punk, this setting offers a wide range of stories to tell.
Jack	Jack in to the future that might be only a few years around the corner. Dysfunctional governments, dystopian cities, and mega corporations dominate this future. Everyone is out to make a deal or win that big score. Dropped in the middle of that is Rose. Is she your salvation, your ticket out, or is she just a symbol of everything that's wrong with life?
Queen	"Off with her head!" is just the beginning of Alice Rose's problems when you take on a more whimsical setting. Crazy characters and wild magic abound as the players try to stay one step ahead of the Queen's guard. Or was that flying monkeys? I'm sure dropping a house on the evil queen's sister was the last thing Dorothy Rose intended.
King	Weary rests the crown and sometimes painful decisions have to be made. To protect the crown, Rose must go. Carried on the winds of suspicion, lies, and a well placed rumor or two, it is not safe for her to stay.

Hopefully, these will spark some imagination in the players. One alternate to drawing a playing card is to draw from a tarot deck. While not required, the imagery and symbolism of tarot cards are a great source for inspiration.

Hearts\ Cups	Romance and affairs of the heart have driven Rose into exile or flight. For example, forbidden love, fleeing an arranged marriage, chasing after a heart's desire, or running from improper advances.
Clubs\ Wands	Defense reflects Rose standing up for herself even when things can (and do) go wrong for her. Defending a traitor or an enemy can get her banished or perhaps she was defending herself from an attack by someone. Bashing the horny old goat with a wine bottle was the right thing to do even if the 'goat' was Duke Ferdinand.
Diamonds\ Coins	Theft, whether true or baseless, can get Rose exiled. While gems and family heirlooms are at the top of the list; state secrets, magic, or even kidnapping can earn Rose the wrath of the authorities.
Spades\ Swords	Murder most foul is a traditional reason for fleeing the city. It could be an accident or even self defense, but there are powerful forces in play that want to see Rose blamed for the death.



## Suspense and Chaos

One suggested variant on game play is to not draw dominos from your hand, but to pull from the shared pile of face down dominos. This reduces some of the strategic elements of play in favor of offering more of a challenge to the players in creating a scene. The big 'gotcha' is that you may draw the double blank in the middle of the game. In such a case, the domino does not take the player out. Instead they get to share the grief with another player's character. Vicious sword battles, brutal brawls, disastrous scenes at court, or both players getting arrested for a drunken karaoke duel are all possible.

## Acknowledgements and Resources

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All images (except the domino) were provided by WikiMedia Commons:  
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/>

A Concordance of Shakespeare's complete works:  
<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/concordance/>

Structure of a Shakespearean Play by Owen Roberts  
[http://www.ehow.com/facts\\_6173760\\_structure-shakespearean-play.html](http://www.ehow.com/facts_6173760_structure-shakespearean-play.html)

Jeepform essays and terminology:  
<http://jeepen.org/dict/>