

William
Shakespeare's
The Tragedy
OF
Othello

a card game by
John S. Brussolo

The Play's the Thing

In *The Tragedy of Othello*, you and your opponents are actors auditioning for the lead role of the villainous Iago, trying to impress the casting director with your ability to embody Iago's treachery and deceit!

You will play script cards from the cast of characters to gain points as you advance Shakespeare's script. Play staging cards, intrigue tokens, spotlight tokens, and character coins to disrupt the play of your rivals. Feeling treacherous? Go off script to wound any character in the play, kill them off, and revive them later for points.

When you control Iago, the lead character in each act, your opportunities to gain points increase. Alas, opportunities exist to steal points, so take heed! Opponents playing the other characters will try to upstage you.

Objective

The actor who accumulates the most points at the end of Act V steals the spotlight and wins the game!



The Characters

There are ten character tiles, one for each character in the story:

Othello – a general in the Venetian military, married to Desdemona.

Iago – Othello's advisor 🦋

Cassio – Othello's lieutenant

Roderigo – a Venetian in love with Desdemona

Brabantio – a Venetian senator; Desdemona's father

Desdemona – Othello's wife; Brabantio's daughter

Montano – the governor of Cyprus before Othello

Bianca – Cassio's lover

Emilia – Iago's wife; maidservant to Desdemona

Lodovico – a messenger from Venice to Cyprus

They appear in the following acts:

- I *Othello, Iago, Cassio, Roderigo, Brabantio, Desdemona*
- II *Othello, Iago, Cassio, Roderigo, Montano*
- III *Othello, Iago, Cassio, Desdemona, Bianca, Emilia*
- IV *Othello, Iago, Cassio, Desdemona, Bianca, Emilia, Roderigo, Lodovico*
- V *Othello, Iago, Cassio, Desdemona, Bianca, Emilia, Roderigo*

Setting the Stage

Before you begin, sort the script cards by act into five decks. Set the decks for Acts II–V on the Stage. Keep Act I in hand. Place synopsis cards atop the appropriate act decks. Have a player read the *Play Synopsis* and *Act I* synopsis cards aloud. Before each subsequent act, have a player read the synopsis card for that act aloud.

Act I 15
 I Desdemona confronts Brabantio
 I Iago conspires

Act II 22
 II Othello confronts Cassio
 I Iago conspires

Act III 24
 III Bianca confronts Cassio
 I Iago conspires

Act IV 23
 IV Iago conspires
 II Desdemona confronts Emilia

Act V 23
 V Othello confronts the truth
 I Iago watches Othello kill himself

The Stage

Script

Staging

Draw pile depletion tracker

Script card draw pile

Script card discard pile

Staging card discard pile

Staging card draw pile

Tokens & Prompt Cards

Give each player a spotlight token, three intrigue tokens, a prompt card, and a *Take the Lead* staging card.



Set the remaining spotlight and intrigue tokens in piles off stage along with the wound tokens, character coins, and handkerchief. Set the draw pile depletion marker on the stage in the space labeled, “Act Begins” (see p. 12).

Casting the Lead

Iago is the lead character throughout the game. Whoever controls Iago is considered the lead player, or *Lead*. Players who do not control the Lead are in the *Company*.

To begin the game, determine the Lead for Act I. Shuffle the six character tiles for Act I (see p. 2 or the Act I box on the stage) and deal one to each player until Iago is dealt. The player who receives Iago starts Act I as the Lead. Keep the Iago tile off the board and in possession of the current Lead. Arrange the remaining character tiles for Act I, black side up, on the stage for everyone to see.

For Acts II–V, the player with the fewest points starts as the Lead. In the event of a tie, the first player with the fewest points to the left of the previous Lead takes on the leading role.

Dealing

Shuffle the script cards for Act I. Deal them according to the table below, then set the remainder, if any, face down on the *Script draw pile* space on the left side of the stage. Shuffle the remaining staging cards and deal them according to the table below. Set the remainder face down on the *Staging draw pile* space on the right side of the stage.

Table 1

PLAYERS	SCRIPT CARDS	ADDITIONAL STAGING CARDS FOR ACT I	TOTAL NUMBER OF CARDS TO START EACH ACT	
			Acts I–II	Acts III–V
2*	4	2	Acts I–II	Acts III–V
			4 script 3 staging	5 script 3 staging
3	3	2	Acts I–II	Acts III–V
			3 script 3 staging	4 script 3 staging
4	2	1	2 script, 2 staging	
5	2	1	2 script, 2 staging	
6	2	1	2 script, 2 staging	

*Remove two *Take the Lead* cards from a 2-player game.

Are his wits safe?
Is he not light of brain?



Acts & Scenes

The *Tragedy of Othello* progresses through five acts. Each act includes multiple scenes, each with four phases:

Pre-placement



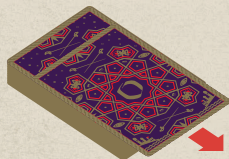
Placement



Reveal



Draw



Pre-placement: Starting with the player to the left of the Lead and progressing clockwise, players may play as many character coins as they choose.

Placement: Each player selects either a script or a staging card from their hand and plays it, face down, in front of them. Once everyone has placed a card down, players that have character coins, starting with the player to the left of the Lead and progressing clockwise, may once again play as many of these as they choose. The Lead may now be different than at the start of the scene if one or more players has played an Othello coin. In that case, there will be a new player revealing first during that scene.

Reveal: The player to the left of the Lead reveals their card and follows the instructions. Play progresses clockwise until the last player has revealed a card. If a script card is successfully played, the player keeps the card and gains points. There are more opportunities to gain points as the Lead. (For more on script cards, see page 6.)

However, opposing players, starting with the player to the left of the player revealing a card, can interrupt play with a Seize card or spotlight token. Character coins (except Desdemona) cannot be used to interrupt another player's turn. Example: a player cannot use an Othello coin to take the lead when the Lead reveals an Iago script card.

Put any script cards that were not played successfully, face up, in the discard pile next to the script card draw pile. Put any played staging cards in the discard pile, face up, next to the staging card draw pile.

Draw: Starting with the Lead, each player will draw a card to replenish their hand according to Table 1. If a script card was played, draw a staging card; if a staging card was played, draw a script card. It does not matter if the script card was played successfully or not unless it was seized.

When a Seize card is successfully played on either a script or staging card, the player of the Seize card draws from the staging pile. The player whose card was seized draws from the script or staging piles, regardless of the card they played. If either draw pile is depleted, shuffle the corresponding discard pile to form a new draw pile. When no script cards remain, draw staging cards.

Continue until the act's *Full Curtain* card is played.

Script Cards

Script cards progress the plot and earn points. There are five types: *confronts*, *convinces*, *conspires*, *wounds*, and *kills*.

Confronts & Convinces No special instructions

Conspires These cards can be seized but cannot be blocked by spotlight tokens.

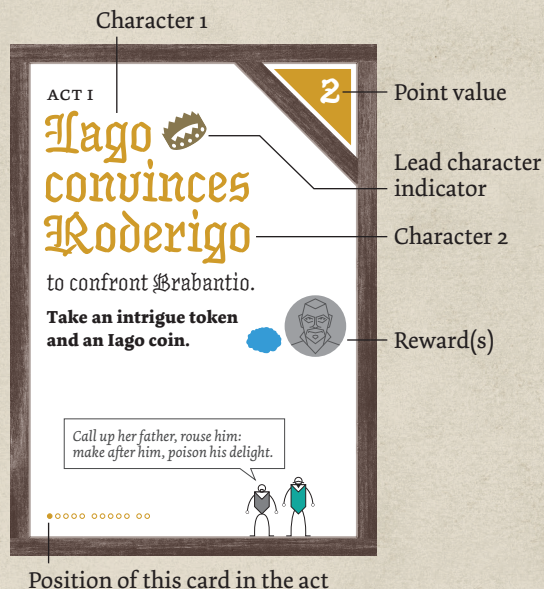
Wounds Place a wound token on the wounded character's tile.

Kills Take any wound tokens on the dead character's tile. Turn that tile over to the red side.

On all script cards, Character 1 acts upon Character 2. If you control Character 1 and play a script card successfully, you earn points. Iago cards, marked with a crown, can be successfully played only by the Lead. Cards without a crown can be successfully played only by the Company. Each player should keep their successfully played script cards face up in front of them so that other players can see them. Take the reward(s) listed on the card.

Specific script cards referenced in these instructions are notated as "Act.Position." Examples: The fifth card in Act I is notated I.5; the first card in Act V is notated V.1.

The progress of the plot is noted by the sequence of dots in the lower left of each script card.



The number of script cards in each act varies:

- I 12
- II 12
- III 15
- IV 15
- V 16

*My wayward husband hath
a hundred times woo'd me to steal it.*



Staging Cards

Staging cards add strategy to the game.

Exchange (5) Select a random card from another player's hand or pay three intrigue tokens—into the pile of unclaimed tokens—to look at their hand before choosing a card to take. Give a card from your hand in return. You may look at the chosen card before choosing one to give, but the chosen card cannot be returned unless the chooser already has a copy of that card in their hand. **Note:** *Exchange* may be played from the hand.

Miscue (3) This card causes another player of your choice to change their unrevealed card. The targeted player must swap their face-down card with another from their hand. They cannot improv to swap out this new card. The player who revealed *Miscue* discards it, draws a new staging card, and selects a new card from their hand to reveal.

No Drama (3) Pay an intrigue token—into the pile of unclaimed tokens—to reveal this card from your hand to block all other players from performing any action on you for the rest of the scene, including giving you the Lead. Selfless as it may be, you cannot protect another player with a *No Drama* card. Leave the card face up on the table as a reminder until the end of the scene. After playing a *No Drama* card, immediately draw another staging card to replenish your hand.


Take the Lead (7) Take the Iago character tile from the Lead. If you are the Lead, give the tile to another player. The lead change occurs immediately and may affect an opponent's ability to play a card successfully.

Seize (5) Pay an intrigue token—into the pile of unclaimed tokens—and reveal this card out of turn to nullify any card earlier in the scene except *No Drama* or another *Seize*. If you seize a script card, take it (along with any rewards) and add it to your pile of successfully played script cards at full point value. If you seize a staging card, take a spotlight token as your reward; the other player's turn ends with no action. **Note:** *Seize* cards cannot stop non-card actions such as improv, spotlight tokens, or character coins. If more than one player attempts to *Seize*, then the player closest in turn order after the player whose card is being seized, takes precedence. There will be occasions when a player cannot play a *Seize* card successfully because a player before them has played a *Seize* or *No Drama* card. In such instances, perform improv (p. 10) or exit the scene (p. 11).

Villainy (3) If you have Iago coins, inflict up to two wounds or reduce a character's wound limit by one. With this card, the Lead can inflict up to three wounds or reduce a character's wound limit by two. For that extra power, company players must pay three intrigue tokens. Wound limit reductions are only valid during the scene in which *Villainy* is played and do not persist.

Revive (3) This card allows the Lead to bring a character back to life at no cost. To play a *Revive* card, Company players must pay three intrigue tokens. Turn the revived character's tile over. Take any script cards set aside for that character and add them to your pile of successfully played cards. **Note:** If any of these cards are *Wounds* or *Kills*, immediately wound or kill characters as directed. You do not get the rewards listed on these cards.

Playing Cards Successfully

A card is played successfully if the appropriate conditions are met and another player does not seize or otherwise block the card. The Lead can only successfully play script cards featuring Iago as Character 1, as indicated by the crown  icon. Company players can successfully play script cards in which any other character is Character 1. For detail on cards starring dead characters, see p. 11.

There will be occasions when you have no option but to play a script card that does not correspond to your role (e.g. you're in the company but only have an Iago card). In such instances, exit the scene (p. 11) if possible, and discard the card. Do not collect rewards other than the intrigue token for exiting. Exited script cards are not scored.

Tokens



Intrigue (42) The game's currency, intrigue tokens are required for improv and to play some staging cards. You earn them by playing most script cards or by exiting a scene.



Spotlight (24) When any opponent plays a card, uses a coin, or performs improv, you can say, "I'm stealing the spotlight!" and pay a spotlight token to block that action.



Wound (24) Place these on a character's tile to wound as directed by a script card or Iago coin.



Handkerchief (1) This coveted token is awarded when you successfully play script cards in the handkerchief subplot.

Character Coins



There are six coins associated with six characters in the play: Iago, Othello, Cassio, Desdemona, Emilia, and Roderigo. When you play a script card successfully for one of these characters, you gain a corresponding coin. For example, if you play *Desdemona confronts Othello* (III.4), in addition to the standard rewards, you will get a Desdemona coin. Note: Iago coins are only awarded when Iago *convinces* or *conspires*. The powers of each character coin are listed below, as well as on the coin:

Iago (12) Wound a character in the current act

Othello (5) Take the Lead

Cassio (3) Improv, without paying an intrigue token

Desdemona (3) No Drama, without paying an intrigue token

Emilia (3) Take a character coin (except Emilia) from another player

Roderigo (3) Exchange

Character coins are a limited resource. If there isn't one available when you successfully play a card, you don't get the coin. Tokens, however, are unlimited. If you exceed the provided quantities, use a marker of your choice instead.

Using Character Coins

Character coins can be used as soon as they are earned or at almost any point during a future scene. A player may use as many character coins as they have during a scene, except for Iago coins, which a player may only play once per scene—unless they have a *Villainy* card. Spotlight tokens can block all coins except Desdemona's. Return used character coins to the pile of unclaimed coins after use. Unused character coins have no point value between acts and at the end of the game.

Wounding a Character

Iago coins are a way to rewrite Shakespeare and wound any character you want during the play. Each character has a wound limit listed on their tile.



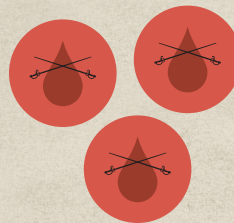
Wound limit

- Montano** (1)
- Brabantio** (2)
- Lodovico** (2)
- Bianca** (3)
- Emilia** (4)
- Roderigo** (4)
- Cassio** (5)
- Desdemona** (5)
- Iago** (6)
- Othello** (6)

He's almost slain.



To use an Iago coin, any player may (immediately before, during, or after their reveal phase) turn in their Iago coin for a wound token, then select a living character on the stage and place the wound token on that character's tile. These wounds remain on the character tile across acts. Once a character has suffered enough wounds to reach their limit, they die. Turn the character's tile over to the red side. The player who landed the fatal blow takes the accumulated wound tokens and adds them to their collection of scored points. Some characters only appear in one act, so any wounds inflicted on these characters are lost if the character is not killed by the end of the act.



Wounds on Iago's tile follow the tile as the Lead changes throughout the game. If Iago is killed, turn his character tile over and continue to pass his tile, red side up, to the new Lead as before. This does not affect the assignment or actions of the Lead.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

No Drama

After the No Drama action, play resumes with the player who would have continued their turn before the *No Drama* card or Desdemona coin was played. A *No Drama* card or Desdemona coin can successfully block an opponent from taking the handkerchief. In that case, the player who revealed the script card while attempting to claim the handkerchief still successfully plays the script card and collects the other rewards. Note: *No Drama* cards cannot be seized or blocked. Desdemona coins can be used by a player to block a *Seize* card or spotlight token.

Seize

If an opponent reveals a card, any player that follows them in the turn order may reveal a *Seize* card if they have played one, without waiting for their turn. Play resumes with the next player who would have taken their turn before the *Seize* card was revealed. When the turn order gets to the player that completed the successful seize, they take no additional action since they already revealed their card, and play continues with the player after them. A *Seize* played facedown can stop an *Exchange* card that is played from the hand during the reveal phase. Standard player turn order rules apply for who gets to play *Seize* first. Note: *Seize* cards cannot stop *No Drama* or *Seize* staging cards or non-card actions such as improv, spotlight tokens, or character coins.

Stealing the Spotlight

If any opponent reveals a card, uses a coin, or performs improv, you may say, “I’m stealing the spotlight!” and pay a spotlight token to block their action. Blocked cards and coins go into the discard pile with no effect. Play resumes with the next player after the blocked player. Note: Spotlight tokens cannot block a Desdemona coin, *No Drama* or *Seize* staging cards, *Conspires* or curtain cards, or another spotlight token.

Improv

Once per scene, you may improv. There are two ways:

1. During the pre-placement or reveal phases, you may pay an intrigue token to swap a card with one from the draw piles. If you swap a script card, draw either a script or staging card. If you swap a staging card, draw a staging card. Place your old card, face down, on the bottom of the appropriate draw pile.
2. Between the placement and reveal actions, you may pay an intrigue token to swap your unrevealed card with another from your hand. Play resumes as normal.

Note: Improv can be blocked by a spotlight token. A player cannot improv to counter a *Miscue* staging card, unless it is used to swap in a *Seize* that is used immediately to seize the *Miscue*. If a *Seize* is swapped in, not using Improv, then it may be used on another player later in the turn order.

Dead Characters

Dead characters can't talk, let alone in iambic pentameter. So for the rest of the game, players do not keep and score any script cards they successfully play starring the deceased as Character 1 (see p. 6)—unless those characters are revived. Instead, set such cards beside the stage. Players still earn the reward(s) indicated on the cards, but the wounding actions on *Wounds* and *Kills* cards do not take effect. **Note:** Script cards starring the deceased as Character 2 are played and resolved normally.

Example: When the *Othello kills Desdemona* card (V.9) is played successfully in Act V, turn her tile over. If, later in the act, a company player reveals *Desdemona confronts Othello* (V.8), the card is set aside and not scored but the player gets a Desdemona coin and the handkerchief.

Dead characters cannot be further wounded by either a *Wounds* card or an Iago coin. However, a *Kills* card starring a dead character as Character 1 or 2 would be successful.

If a player revives a dead character, the player collects any script cards set aside for that character but not the rewards associated with those cards. Characters can be killed and revived multiple times, but they can only be revived if they are in the current act.

Exiting the Scene

Any player that cannot take or chooses not to take the action from their revealed script or staging card may instead *exit the scene*. The player gets an intrigue token as a reward. A player may not exit with a curtain card.

Blank Cards

This edition comes with three (3) blank cards for you and your gaming friends to write your own script or staging cards. Get creative and email a photo and description of your ideas to ttoo@nodramagames.com, and we'll share them on our blog. For best results, use an ultra-fine-point permanent marker rather than a ballpoint pen. Don't press too hard or you'll leave a telltale groove visible on the back of the card.

O Desdemona! Desdemona! Dead!



Curtain Cards & Act Endings

Each act ends when the act's *full curtain card* has been played successfully. This card may only be played if the act's *half curtain card* has been played successfully first. **Note:** The two cards do not need to be played in the same scene. If curtain cards are played by a dead character, the cards are still successfully played and end the act.

The point value of curtain cards depends on whether they are played by Iago 🦋 or the company:

HALF CURTAIN	POINTS	FULL CURTAIN	POINTS
	I.9 1 2 II.10 1 2 III.7 3 1 IV.3 3 1 V.13 1 2		I.12 3 1 II.12 3 1 III.15 1 2 IV.15 1 2 V.16 4 2

An act's curtain cards **must** be played by the specified role (Iago for Acts I, II, V; company players for Acts III, IV) while the script card draw pile has cards in it. Once the last script card has been drawn, move the *draw pile depletion marker* on the stage to the feather icon labeled, "Draw empty." Any player may now play a curtain card, although it may be for fewer points. Remaining script cards can still be successfully played only by the specified roles.

Note: In a 6-player game, Acts I and II will start with the script pile depleted after the initial deal.



To avoid interminable knavery, an act will also end if the staging card deck is depleted **twice** after the last script card has been drawn. To track this, if the staging draw pile empties after the script pile empties, move the draw pile depletion marker to the mask icon labeled "Draw empty" as shown above. If the staging draw pile then empties a second time, move the draw pile depletion marker to the mask icon labeled, "Final scene." The current scene immediately becomes the final scene in the act, even if the full curtain card has not yet been revealed. If the last staging card is drawn during the draw phase of a scene, then the next scene will be the final scene in the act. **Note:** Once the staging card depletion countdown begins, a discarded script card does not reset the countdown.

After the full curtain card for an act is revealed or the act ends due to draw pile depletion, gather all remaining unplayed script cards in players' hands as well as in the draw and discard piles and set them back in the act's box on the stage. Players keep staging cards in their hands and keep any script cards they successfully played or seized in a pile, face up, for scoring. If a curtain card was successfully played by a character other than the one specified, the player should place the card in their scoring pile sideways as a reminder to score the card accordingly between acts and at the end of the game.

Intermission

Using the score sheets, tally each player's current points as described below under *Scoring Between Acts*.

Between acts, a player may exchange three intrigue tokens for one spotlight token or vice versa. A player may make this exchange as many times as they want, provided they have enough intrigue or spotlight tokens.

Scoring Between Acts

Script cards are worth the value in the corner of the card. The value of curtain cards depends on whether or not they were played by the Lead (see *Curtain Cards* at left). Also tally points for the tokens and the handkerchief:

Intrigue tokens = 1 point for every three tokens

Spotlight tokens = 1 point each

Wound tokens = 1 point each

Handkerchief = 3 points

Character coins have no point value.

See p. 16 for an example of a completed scoring sheet.

Beginning Acts II–V

1. Place tiles for all characters starring in the act on the stage, black side up, unless they are dead.
2. Reset the draw pile depletion marker on the stage to the space labeled, "Act begins."
3. Each player discards staging cards of their choice until they reach the total number needed to start the act (see Table 1 under *Dealing* on p. 4). If a player has fewer than the starting amount, draw staging cards to reach it.
4. Determine the Lead (p. 4). Then shuffle the act's script cards and set them face down on the *Script draw pile* space on the stage. Starting with the Lead, each player draws script cards until they reach the total number needed to start the next act (see Table 1 under *Dealing* on p. 4).
Note: In 2- and 3-player games, each player draws one more script card than in Acts I and II.
5. Play resumes as before, starting with the player to the left of the Lead and progressing clockwise.

The Final Act

In Act V, Desdemona, Roderigo, Emilia, and Othello can be killed by other characters in the game. When one of these characters dies in this fashion, turn their character tile over so the red side faces up. The player who killed the character takes any wound tokens on the character tile in addition to any other rewards listed. Note: For the rest of the game, cards played as these characters are set aside as described under *Dead Characters* on p. 11.

This is some minx's token!



Ending the Game

The game ends when someone reveals the Act V full curtain card, *Iago watches Othello kill himself* (V.16). As in other acts, no player may take another turn once the full curtain card has been revealed. Any script cards set aside for dead characters are not awarded to any player.

Final Scoring

After the end of Act V, each player tallies their points as they did between acts. To their act score for Act V, add the following bonuses, if applicable:

IAGO BONUS In the final scoring, you can earn up to seven points depending on the number of acts in which you successfully played an Iago script card.

COMPANY BONUS It's not all about Iago! You can gain additional points (two per character) if you played three or more cards from the same company character.

Winner

The actor who accumulates the most points at the end of Act V steals the spotlight and wins the game!

Tiebreaker

The player who controls Iago wins. If none of the winners control Iago, they share the win. An excellent courtesy!

Table 3

ACTS WITH A SUCCESSFULLY PLAYED IAGO CARD	BONUS POINTS
Two	1
Three	2
Four	4
Five	7

O, I am spoil'd, undone by villains!



GAME VARIATIONS

Table Read

As you play, read the cards and quotes aloud.

Playwright's Challenge

In this variation, script cards must be played in the order that Shakespeare wrote them. The sequence of the play is noted by the row of dots in the lower left of each script card.

To begin Act I, deal all script cards, one *Take the Lead* staging card, and additional staging cards as described in Table 1 under *Dealing* (p. 4) clockwise, starting with the Lead. To begin Acts II–V, deal all the script cards. In some acts, some players may need an additional staging card to have the same number of cards as other players at the start of the act.

Play continues like a standard game, with these exceptions:

- ◆ A script card can only be played if it is the next one in the act order.
- ◆ A player cannot exit the scene with a script card.
- ◆ Any script card can be played by any player, with the point values for curtain cards as listed. All other Iago cards are worth one point if played by the company, and vice versa.
- ◆ Script cards starring dead characters are still played in the act order.
- ◆ Script cards blocked by spotlight tokens are removed from the game, not discarded. However, they still count toward advancing the script.
- ◆ Regardless of whether a card is played successfully, seized, or removed from the game, read its full text and quotes aloud—and with drama!



CREDITS

Game Design

John Brussolo

Card Art and Package Design

Oliver Uberti

Special Thanks

To the playtesters at GenCon, in game stores, and in homes around the US. I also want to thank Oliver Uberti for his creative spark. His brilliant ideas and refinements inspired me to move forward. Finally, I want to share extra special thanks to the love of my life—my wife Eileen—our son Alan and his wife Fei-Fei, our daughter Maia and her partner Corey, and my two brothers, Allan and Bob. They encouraged my indulgence in game design and added inestimable value along the way. This project would not have been possible without their support, playtesting, and feedback.

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SCORING EXAMPLE

Player Name: *William*

	ACT I	ACT II	ACT III	ACT IV	ACT V	BONUSES	
SCRIPT CARD POINTS	2	+ 5 = 7	+ 4 = 11	+ 6 = 17	+ 8 = 25	4	
x 3 = +1	1	—	1	1	—	—	
+1 each	1	1	—	—	—	2	
+1 each	—	1	1	1	4	—	
Intermission: ↔		+3	3	—	—	—	
ACT SCORE	4	9	16	19	29	—	
BONUSES						TOTAL SCORE	35

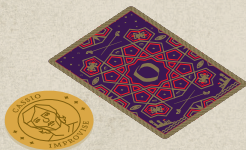
- Played an lago card in two acts = 1 point. Three acts = 2 pts. Four acts = 4 pts. Five acts = 7 pts.
 Played three or more cards from the same company character = 2 points.

TURN ORDER

Pre-placement



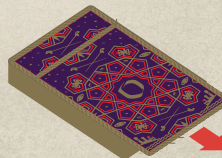
Placement



Reveal



Draw



For rules on how to score an act and how to set up a new act, see page 13.