



The Don has a secret, a terrible secret. By the end of this meeting the secret will change everything, that is, unless you do something about it. You all had a week to prepare, was it enough?

# ***Don's Secret***

A game made for the Golden Cobra Challenge 2014

*by* **Guilherme DR**

# Intro:

## *An offer you can't refuse*

*Don's secret* is a game about the past defining the future. In it, players are in a meeting with the Don (the Mafia's boss) talking about and describing events that occurred last week.

As you might have guessed, this somewhat limits the experience (for instance, no one in the room will die in past scenes), but can also bring some nice twists to the plot ("so you thought I died when you shoot me, well, it turns out I was wearing a bullet proof suit all along").

The game works by players asking each other questions about the past week, and using points to better define and improve their characters, so they can beat the challenges presented. Neat uh?

It's not a game about wining, but a game about telling an interesting story. Maybe your character doing something stupid will be fun to watch, maybe the Don will help players defeat him, maybe some players will form groups and fight each other, maybe... well, anything really. Make it memorable.

### **To play it, you will need:**

- 3 to 8 players.
- Paper, pieces of it anyway.
- Something to write.
- Little bags, or something to randomly draw pieces of paper from.
- A timer, for time.
- Last case scenario, a coin.

### **With it, you will make:**

- Four piles of pieces of paper, a Job, an Element, a Scenario and Day pile.
- Notes about characters.
- A big piece of paper holding the Secret somewhere.

*Let's get started then.*

# Terminology:

*Word is Gold*

## *Element:*

An Element is something or someone that can be used, handled or given. It has a purpose to the story, and might enable Characters to do certain things (a gun to shoot, someone sexy to seduce, money buys and a ticket gives access, etc.). Things and assets are Elements.

**Examples:** Gun, Bodyguard, Informant, Policeman, Locked Door, Coffin, Car, Suit, Bullet Proof Vest.

## *Quality:*

A Quality is something that defines a character, for good or bad or both. It represents a skill and mindset, a way of operating and limits that the character has. A good advice is making them as specific as possible, to avoid problems with the Don.

**Examples:** Brute, Coward, Paranoid, Charming, Fast Fingers, Strong, Networked, Cripple, Seductive, Unstable, Kung-Fu Master.

## *Job:*

Jobs are single words that describe what the character usually does in his, Mafia or not, environment. They should be as descriptive as possible, and work exactly as Qualities, except that characters start the game with a job and they are known by all characters.

**Examples:** Driver, Hitman, Actor, Cooker, Butcher, Cleaner, Speaksman, Accountant, Comedian, Drunk.

## ***Scenario:***

A place / environment where something happens. Specifics about the place might or not be included.

**Examples:** An office, a dirty warehouse, the dark woods, a Chinese restaurant, a luxurious hotel room, train rails, inside a car.

## ***Scene:***

A moment in time, where characters interact and things happen. In this game usually it is a memory of the past, but the meeting itself might be considered a Scene.

## ***Questioner:***

The one that started the Scene. He guides it, by describing the environment, characters and events, as well as presenting and resolving conflict.

## ***Respondent:***

The protagonist of a Scene. The questioner must focus the events of a Scene around the Respondent, unless of course the Respondent changes.

## ***Action Points:***

Points that a players must spend to execute certain actions. Free actions are actions that don't spend APs.

# Getting the game ready:

*We can build on that. For their sake, let's try.*

First we need to define who is going to be the **Don**. He will be the Player defining the *Secret*, and thus setting the tune for the whole story. You can do this by any means you like, just keep in mind this guy will have a huge impact in the story told.

*Let's split the pre-game in 2 jobs, Don's and everybody's else:*

## *Don's job:*

The Don needs to define the *Secret* and write it down on a piece of paper. No one except Don will know the *Secret*, but everyone must be able to see the paper. The *Secret* needs to be something huge, but not necessarily something bad. In fact, it can even be something funny. Some examples:

- The Don is retiring, and whoever brings him his old father's clock will be the next Don.
- The Don is ratting on everyone, and the meeting is being recorded.
- The Don decided it's time to forget about this whole Mafia thing, and open an Ice Cream business. Who can come up with the best flavor? All according to Don, of course.

A good *Secret* represents a big change and gives players some objective to pursue (to avoid / ride the change). It also needs an *Element / Quality* with which players can avoid/defeat/use the *Secret*, and in this case the *Secret* functions as a *Challenge* (more about *Challenges*, *Elements* and *Qualities* in *Terms* and *Defining a Challenge* chapters). In the first *Secret* example the father's clock was this winning element.

The second pre-game job of the Don is to define 3 special *Challenges*, called *Leads*. These *Challenges* will effectively work as case leads and solving them will bring the players closer to acknowledging the *Secret*. Solving only 1 *Lead* should not be enough to fully understand the *Secret*, 2 should enable players to understand and prepare for it, and 3 should give them an effective advantage. Of course, you can't know which *Leads* will be solved, or in which order, so plan and adapt accordingly.

It's not mandatory to write down or precisely define the Leads right away, but for each *Lead* a new *Element* *must* be defined and added to the Element Pile. This *Element* must somehow be marked as special, so the player that picks it must recognize it as part of a Lead (a simple way to do this is to write these elements in red). Some Lead examples:

- An old clock-maker, who knows the importance of the clock for the Don.
- Some old transaction record between the Don and the police.
- One Italian Chef closes his restaurant and starts trying out strange receipts.

## ***Other player's job:***

The players will build the game's paper piles.

Each player must create and add an *Element*, a *Job* and a *Scenario* to their respective piles. The Days pile will have a paper piece for each day of the week (Monday, Tuesday, ..., Sunday).

All players must randomly pick a Job from the *Job* pile and announce it to everybody. The game then starts.

# Starting the game:

*You gotta make the money first.*

To start the game, the Don takes the timer, sets it to 1 hour, and starts it. By the end of the hour, the meeting will be over and the *Secret* and its consequences revealed.

Following that, the Don asks a free question about last week to anyone, and in consequence starts a Scene.

Every player starts the game with 3 Action Points, which can be used to:

## ***Ask a question / Start a Scene:***

Effectively the same thing. The player picks a random Day from the pile, and asks a question about it to another player except the Don (the Don answers to no one), thus becoming the Questioner for the next Scene. The question can be very simple (something like “How was your Sunday?”) or incur some details that will necessarily be included in the answer (“I heard you and Player B were collecting *taxes* last Thursday, tell me more”).

The Respondent (the player answering) randomly picks a Scenario from the pile, and starts a describing the Scene using it. It can be a simple description (“Well, Sunday I was walking through the beach”) or he can add other characters and flavor (“Me and Player B were in the basement, all we could hear was silence and we knew something was wrong”). *The Don can't be included in a Scene by another player.*

The Questioner will randomly pick an Element from the pile, and pass it along to the Don. This Element must be included in the Scene by the Questioner, and the Don will use it to create a Challenge.

From this point until the Scene ends, the Questioner controls and leads it. He will describe and present events, control characters other than the players and resolve situations. If it's unclear how a situation should play out, or if players disagree, the Don's words are final. More on it in *Making a Scene*.

Anything taken from any pile is not returned to it unless the pile is empty. If that happens, the pile is renewed fully with all the previous paper pieces.

## ***End a Scene:***

Players *in* a Scene can use an Action Point to end it, usually saying something like “this isn’t really important, let’s move on”.

## ***Add a Quality/ Element:***

Any player can use an Action Point to add a new Quality / Element to any Player except the Don. Qualities are permanent, and can’t go against any other Qualities the character already has. For instance, a character can’t be Brave and Coward at the same time. Elements can be added to a Character or a Scene, as long as they make sense. This can only be done during a Scene.

## ***Negate a Quality/Element:***

Any player can negate a Quality or Element of any player in I Scene by using an Action Point. “You are a Coward, but this time you won’t run away”. “So I guess your gun is not working properly today, uh?”.

## ***Include himself in the Scene:***

Only if it makes sense for the narrative.

## ***Take over a Scene:***

Any player NOT in a Scene can take over the Questioner role for a moment. This is usually done by saying “Excuse me, I think that” and describing what happened.



## ***Take an action during the meeting:***

It's one way of ending a Scene. This can be anything, from making a loud noise while drinking one's coffee or slapping someone. We are brought back to the present and the past Scene ends. Players can use any Qualities or Elements they acquired during the Scenes. In case of conflict or doubt, Don's words are final.

## ***Continue a Scene:***

Any Scene that still has a Challenge can be restarted, and this doesn't count as a new Scene. This can be done by the original Questioner ("AS I was saying...") or by any other player ("But please, continue your story").

**To Sum it up, ways of spending APs:**

- **Start a Scene;**
- **End a Scene;**
- **Add a Quality/ Element;**
- **Negate a Quality;**
- **Include himself in the Scene;**
- **Take over a Scene;**
- **Take an action during the meeting;**
- **Continue a Scene;**

# Making a Scene:

*A smile and a gun will take you farther.*

At the beginning of every Scene, the Don gets 3 Action points.

Scenes are what move the story. They must revolve around the Respondent, and it's the Questioner job to make it interesting.

Players in a Scene always role-play they characters. Other players can still interact using APs.

Respondents and Questioners can change who the actual Respondent in the current Scene is. This is usually done by asking the new Respondent things like "So, what do you think we should do now?". This is a free action.

Scenes can spawn other scenes, especially when characters decide to split. This is done by asking the other player "So, what were you doing then?". That counts as a new Scene, requires an AP but doesn't require random draws from the piles. A new Challenge needs to be created using the same Element.

Qualities and Elements can only be added during Scenes.

There are 3 ways of ending a Scene: Being a character in Scene and using an AP to end it, doing something during the meeting or completing a Challenge.

If players succeed in a Challenge, every player in Scene and the Questioner gets an extra AP, and the most active player in the Challenge get 2 APs. If they fail the Don gets and extra AP.

# Defining a Challenge:

*Say hello to my little friend!*

A challenge is simple a conflict situation where players might succeed or fail, getting rewards and moving the plot forwards through it. It's the Don's job to define its general lines after receiving an *Element* from the *Questioner*, and return it to the *Questioner* so he can include it in the *Scene*.

To define a *Challenge*, the Don must write down using single words:

**Win:** *Qualities* and *Elements* necessary to win.  
**Lose:** *Qualities* and *Elements* that players shouldn't use.  
**Reward:** *Qualities*, *Elements*, information or anything players will get.

He can also add sentences and guidelines to help the *Questioner* to include the challenge in the *Scene*, but the *Questioner* is not obliged to follow them. The *Questioner* must follow the Win, Lose and Reward definitions.

An example of a **Bouncer Challenge** general lines:

**Win:** Charm, Money.  
**Lose:** Strength, Intimidation.  
**Reward:** Access to club, info

If players try to force the Bouncer, they might win but won't get into the Club.

In this Challenge, characters might gain access to the club through having and using the Quality Charm or the Element Money, and if they use Strength or Intimidation they will lose it. Everything else is up to the interpretation of the *Questioner* and/or the Don.

There is one special situation where the challenge is a *Lead*. In this case, the *Questioner* must give control of the *Scene* to the Don as soon as the players deal with the Challenge. This counts as a free action, and must happen because the Don is the only one that truly knows what the *Lead* is about.

## **Don's Role:**

*I always tell the truth. Even when I lie.*

It might appear that the Don is fighting against the other players. That's not the case. His job is to provide conflict and mystery, but *winning* is merely telling a good story.

For most part of the game, he will have more APs than the others. This puts him in the best position to add interesting "qualities" that define characters, and start or take over scenes. Indeed, he is the Questioner of the first Scene, and every time the Don starts a new Scene he will have even more APs than before.

He is also the final Judge of anything. If things get really messy and he wants to save face, using a coin is a good option. Or just man/woman up, you ARE the Don after all.

The best Dons are the ones that guide, help and add flavor to the story, but don't control it too much. As the only player that knows what the Secret is, he is the only one who can guide players to it.

## **Conclusion:**

*All right ramblers, let's get rambling!*

The meeting ends when 1 hour has passed, players (except the Don) have no APs left or something drastic happens. Either way, the Secret and its consequences are revealed, and players deal with those the best way they can.

***The End.***