

Tragedy

Wherein players take on the roles of Shakespearian characters who die in most spectacular and lamentable ways.

By Eva Schiffer

Dedicated to my boyfriend, who endured me being an ass about this for the last two weeks.

Many thanks to my play-testers and volunteer editors:

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The character sheet used in *Tragedy* was designed by Shreyas Sampat and is used with his kind permission. (<http://njar.thesmerf.com/blog/>)



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I. Intro

Tragedy is the roleplaying game of Shakespearean tragedy for four to six players. Unlike many traditional roleplaying games, Tragedy is modeled on a three act play and requires no game-master. Since Tragedy can be as serious or silly as your group desires, it allows you to focus on serious stories and deep role-playing or just your own amusement. Each of the players takes the part of one of the main characters in a play. Each character has equal opportunity to be central to the story and all characters have an interesting mix of goals and motivations. The players work together to create an interesting and compelling tale, at the end of which most of their characters will die terrible, tragic deaths!



In order to play Tragedy you will need access to a printer, scrap paper, pencils, scissors, tape, and a deck of standard playing cards. If you have a printed copy of this booklet then a photocopier can be substituted for the printer. When the players are new to the game, things will run smoothest if you have printouts of the outline of play and playbills for all the players.

II. Rules of the Game

Playbill Sections

Each game of Tragedy is governed by a playbill. A playbill describes the setting, starting plot, play aspects, and characters (both major and minor). The example playbill for Twelfth Night (see the Example Playbills section) includes all of the expected sections and descriptions of each section are given below. Players should read through the playbill before choosing characters. This will give everyone equal knowledge of the characters and other details that may be helpful during the play.

Main plot - A short synopsis of the plot of the story as it stands at the beginning of the first act.

Setting - A short description of the setting of the play. This should be a general description and the action may leave this area as the play progresses.

Play Aspects - Any aspects of the play which the playbill writer wishes to clarify. Common aspects will be things like supernatural involvement, poison, and dueling. If an aspect is not prohibited or not mentioned you should feel free to include it in the play.

Characters - The cast of characters (both minor and major). The characters can be grouped in any way the playbill writer likes, but should be designated as major, minor, or those which can be either major or minor. The example playbill uses **bold for major characters**, *italics for characters who can be either major or minor*, and normal text for minor characters.

You will notice that each character has two numbers in parenthesis beside their name. These numbers represent the number of major and minor changes they can make to the story (in that order). The use of changes will be discussed in detail during the description of play. Characters who are more centrally placed in the web of relationships will usually pay for it by having fewer changes available to them. The number of major changes available to a character will always be an even number.

Character Sheets

Tragedy's character sheets reflect the internal flow of your main character's story. The first thing you should do when you get your character sheet is cut along the dotted lines. After cutting you should have three separate columns and twelve arrows. Each column includes the minor change circle in the upper right, a section to write in the appropriate motivations, actions, or consequences, and a place to write your shift themes.

The three columns represent both the acts and part of the internal driving force of your character. During the setup phase you will fill in your motivations column, and as you play through the various acts and intermissions you will gradually fill your actions and consequences columns. More detail on this is given in the discussion of phases of play.

The minor change circle in the upper right of each column is where you record the number of minor changes you can make in a given act. The "slide up:" and "slide down:" lines at the bottom of the sheet accommodate the two opposing themes that govern the direction your next act will shift. This will be discussed in more detail in the section on intermissions.

The left most of the three columns, labeled with "Because...", represents the first act of the play as well as your characters motivations. Good motivations should be short and distinct, such as "I love Jack", "I enjoy thrills", "I'm afraid of spiders", or "I'm jealous of Jane". The motivations that you fill in to the center lines of this column at the beginning of the game will help to give you a better idea of who your character is and what might drive them later on in the play.

Example motivations:

- I hate X
- I want revenge on X
- I fear X
- I love X
- I like X
- I don't want to hurt X
- I want to meet X
- I need X
- I don't understand X
- I can't stand X
- I want to protect X
- I want X
- I'm bored



In the example table, X might be anything from another character ("I want Ophelia"), to a creature ("I want snakes"), a thing ("I want the chest of gold"), a place ("I want Scotland"), or even

a concept ("I want power"). Varying the sort of noun that you fill in for your character will give you a wider range of possible pathways and more clues about what sort of person your character is.

The middle column, labeled with "I must..." represents the second act of the play as well as actions that your character may take because of their motivations. Good actions should be clear and proactive, such as "Kill Jeff", "Destroy the blue idol", "Catch the thief", or "Marry Jane". The actions you list in this column represent things your character may consider doing. It is okay if your character does only some or even none of these actions. You should feel free to seek out other actions which are not in your action column but are consistent with your motivations.

Example actions:

- Kill X
- Protect X
- Woo X
- Marry X
- Embarrass X
- Ruin X
- Flee the X
- Collect X
- Taunt X
- Harm X
- Get a/the X
- Gain X
- Destroy X
- Outshine X
- Assassinate X



While it sounds like X in the example table will often be another character, it may also be any other sort of noun. In fact actions like "Gain the thrown" and "Outshine the sun" will give you interesting conceptual goals to shoot for.

The right most column, labeled "Lest..." represent the possible consequences of a character's actions. These consequences should be things that your character would consider highly undesirable, such as "Die in my sister's arms", "Lose my sanity", or "Drive my lover to suicide". These consequences are especially useful in the third act as they give players final goals to reach for.

Example consequences:

- Die in X's arms
- Have X die in my arms
- Witness X's death
- Fail to protect X
- Be blamed for X
- Languish in a cell until my death
- Accidentally kill X

- Lose X
- Die in a duel
- Drown
- Poison myself
- Poison X
- Never see X again
- Die of a broken heart
- Drive X to suicide
- Die alone
- Commit suicide

As you play the game you will use your columns and arrows to form pathways between linked motivations, actions, and consequences. The more pathways you faithfully pursue, the easier it will be follow them to completion. This will be discussed in more detail in the section describing changes, conflicts, and pathways.



Outline of Play Phases

I. Setup

- A. Wrangle materials
- B. Choose Characters
- C. Fill in motivation column and allocate minor changes; optional free talk

II. Act One

- A. Draw cards for scene order
 - 1. each player gets two random cards
 - 2. each player chooses a card for order
 - 3. all reveal chosen card
- B. Play out scene owned by each player according to order
 - 1. determine remaining high card
 - 2. describe scene setting place and time
 - 3. announce major characters and suggested motivations

Note: You must include at least one major character with an face down card if there are any. Also, you do not have to include yourself in the scene.

- 4. announce minor characters with casting and motivations
- 5. act out scene
- 6. provide and assign actions for major characters in scene

III. First Intermission

- A. Place number of arrows corresponding to remaining major changes from act 1
- B. Vote on character importance order
- C. Vote on shift direction for each set of shift themes
- D. Shift action column according to importance and direction
- E. Fill action column and optional free talk

IV. Act Two

- A. Draw cards for scene order
 - 1. each player gets two random cards
 - 2. each player chooses a card for order
 - 3. all reveal chosen card
- B. Play out scene owned by each player according to order
 - 1. determine remaining high card
 - 2. describe scene setting place and time
 - 3. announce major characters and suggested motivations

Note: You must include at least one major character with an face down card if there are any. Also, you do not have to include yourself in the scene.

- 4. announce minor characters with casting and motivations
- 5. act out scene
- 6. provide and assign consequences for major characters in scene

V. Second Intermission

A. Place number of arrows corresponding to remaining major changes from act 2

Note: At this point you may wish to "save" some of your major changes for the third act, and therefore reduce the number of arrows you place.

B. Vote on character importance order

C. Vote on shift direction for each set of shift themes

D. Shift consequence column according to importance and direction

E. Fill consequence column and optional free talk

VI. Act Three

A. Draw cards for scene order

1. each player gets two random cards
2. each player chooses a card for order
3. all reveal chosen card

B. Play out scene owned by each player according to order

1. determine remaining high card
2. describe scene setting place and time
3. announce major characters and suggested motivations

Note: You must include at least one major character with an face down card if there are any. Also, you do not have to include yourself in the scene.

4. announce minor characters with casting and motivations
5. act out scene
6. declare and handle twist shift during scene as desired/appropriate



Phases of Play

Condensed to its very simplest a game consists of three phases: setup; the three acts; and the two intermissions. Each of these phases will be discussed including the details which differ between the three acts and two intermissions.

Setup

The setup phase occurs only once at the beginning of the game. You will want to begin the setup phase by giving each of the players copies of the playbill, character sheets, and pencils. Make sure that there are enough scissors and tape to go around.

All of the players should review the playbills before you begin choosing characters. Players should take turns choosing characters, starting with the youngest player. Players may choose from any of the characters marked as major or those marked as either major or minor. Characters who are marked as "only major" must be picked by someone as they can not be relegated to more minor, non-player roles.

Note: Characters marked as major or minor who are not picked by players become minor characters in this particular production of the play.

Now each player will want to deal with the initial setup of their character sheet. Everyone should cut out their character sheets along the dotted line and fill in their first act column (labeled with "Because...") with their character's motivations. You can make these motivations as deep or frivolous as you desire. A table of example motivations is given in the character sheets section.

Additionally, players must allocate their allotted minor changes between the three acts. The number of minor changes you want available in each act should be recorded in the minor change circle in the upper right of that act column. Players should note that they do not allocate major changes in this manner. Each player will have half of their major changes available to them during the first act and half available to them during the second act. If they voluntarily chose not to place all of their remaining changes as arrows during the second intermission they will have these unused major changes available to them during the third act.

Finally the players must chose shift themes for their first act column (labeled with "Because..."). Shift themes will be used later on to determine the direction of shift during each intermission and for twist shifts. The shift themes should be a pair of themes which are in some way opposite, such as "Love/Hate", "Jealousy/Trust", or "Betrayal/Loyalty". Once you have decided on a pair of shift themes, fill them in to



the "slide down" and "slide up" spaces. A list of suggested shift theme pairs is given in the Intermissions section which discusses filling and free talk.

At any time after characters have been chosen and before the beginning of the first act, players are allowed to engage in free talk. The purpose of free talk is to allow players to plot the twists and turns of the story that they can work together to achieve. Keep in mind that free talk is out-of-character plotting and all the important in-character action must happen "on stage" during a scene. If you find the social plotting aspect of this game amusing, you can use free talk as an opportunity to form secret alliances and counter-alliances while planning when to stab your friends in the back (figuratively, of course). Alternately you can simply try to convince your friends why certain plot twists would be cooler or more amusing than others. If none of this sounds appealing to you, free talk is an excellent time for the procuring and consuming of tasty snack foods.

Acts

Each act encompasses one third of a play and is made up of one scene owned by each of the players. This allows each player to exercise some control over the direction of the story. Before the first scene can be played, the players must first determine the order of scene ownership for the act.

Each player draws two cards from a shuffled deck of normal playing cards. Players can look at their own cards but they must not show them to others. Each player picks one of their two cards which will determine their place in the scene order. Once all of the players have decided which card to use for scene order, players reveal their scene order cards simultaneously.

The player with the highest card will own the first scene. The player with the second highest card will own the second scene and so on. The ordering of cards is determined first by card number and then by suit. So an eight will always beat a four, regardless of suit. The order within a suit is the standard: A > K > Q > J > 10 > 9 > 8 > 7 > 6 > 5 > 4 > 3 > 2. The order between suits is Clubs > Spades > Hearts > Diamonds. This can be summarized as "round beats pointy" and "black beats red."

Players should hold on to the card that they did not use to determine scene ownership order and place it face down beside their character sheet. This card will be used during the scene to insure that all players have the opportunity to take part in at least two scenes in a given act.

Scenes

Once the order of scene ownership is determined, each scene is played out as follows.

Before the scene proper begins the owning player must set the scene. Setting the scene includes describing the setting (both time and place), choosing the characters who will be present, assigning actors for minor characters, and giving direction to the players who will be taking part in the scene.

When setting the scene keep in mind that you can not go back in time or to a location that is unreasonably far away from previous action in the play. Likewise while you can jump forward hours or days, you can not expect important player driven actions to have taken place "off stage" in the intervening time. As a rule of thumb, only things that your character or other minor characters could have reasonably achieved can be assumed to have happened "off stage" between scenes. If another player can get majority agreement



that a proposed off stage action could have been reasonably interrupted or otherwise tampered with by other characters you must bring the action on stage if you want it to occur.

When the scene owner includes minor characters in their scene, they must keep in mind that they will need to ask a player who's major character is not present in the scene to take on the role of each minor character. Each player may only play one character at a time in a scene. If that character exits the scene or is killed the player can return to the scene in a different role.

Note: If a player is currently in a scene in the role of a minor character, the player's major character can not be brought into the scene until after the minor character exits it, thus freeing the player from this role.

For each minor character that the scene owner brings into a scene he or she must give an explanation for how the character came to be there and as well as explicit directions about the motivations of the minor character at the beginning of the scene. A player who is given the role of a minor character should try to faithfully play the motivations they are given. This is not to say that minor characters can not change their minds or goals during a scene, but such changes are explicitly regulated by the major and minor change rules and should not be made on a player's whim.

Note: When setting a scene the scene owner may include a character as an eavesdropper. See the section on eavesdropping below for more details.

If there are any remaining players with face down cards, the scene owner must include one of their major characters in his or her scene. The scene owner does not count as a player with a face down card for this purpose. At the beginning of the in-character action of the scene, all players who do not own the scene and are playing their major character in the scene must discard their face down card. This means that each major character should be cast into at least one scene that is not owned by their player during an act. Minor characters get no such guarantee and may be ignored for as many scenes as the players like.

When the scene owner includes major characters in their scene they also need to explain each character's presence and motivations. However, a player does not have to accept the explanations given for their character. If they wish, they may counter these suggestions by declaring an explanation and/or motivation that they prefer. If a player does not declare alternate explanations/motivations before the beginning of the scene, they are assumed to have accepted the explanations and motivations provided for them and will be expected to act accordingly. Unlike minor characters, the players of major characters may chose to change the feelings and goals of their characters whenever they like during a scene or between scenes. Such changes are not regulated by the change rules; being instead the purview of each player's artistic license.

Note: The owning player is not obliged to cast their own major character into the scene. If they wish the owning player may assign themselves the role of a minor character or no character at all.

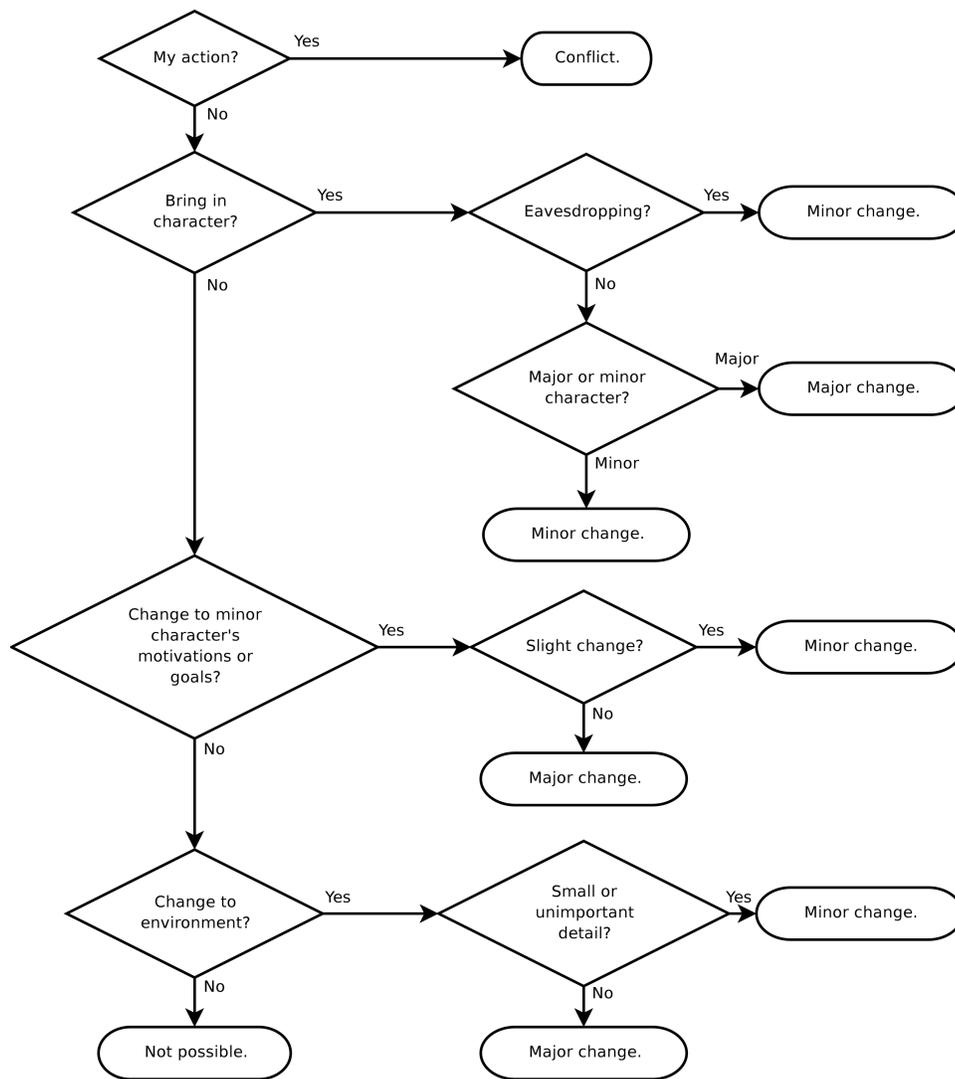
Changes, Conflicts, Pathways, and Bull

Once the scene has been set and all players have been given a chance to comment on or replace their explanations and motivations, the scene proper begins. Much like other roleplaying games, scenes in Tragedy allow players to declare their character's actions and speak as their character's voice. Additionally, all players, even those not playing a character in the scene, have a limited amount of control over how the environment and minor characters change throughout the course of the scene.

All players, even those not acting in the scene, should feel free to offer short suggestions for actions or changes if a player in the scene is hesitating or the action has stalled because no one is quite sure what to do next. In general lengthy negotiations should be handled during free talk.

When a character wishes to make a change to a scene that is outside of the direct control of their major character or is beyond the given motivation of the minor character they are currently playing, they are required to use their major or minor changes to pay for the change. Each player has a limited pool of minor changes in a given act, and the use of major changes draws from the pool of arrows the player would otherwise place between the columns of their character sheet. This means that if you wish to make a change to a scene you are essentially sacrificing your character's future flexibility to change the story or have more motivation/action/consequence pathways available to them.

Additionally, if an action falls under the direct control of a player's major character, but might be altered or stopped by another major character in the scene, the characters involved are facing a conflict rather than a change. Since the distinction between major changes and minor changes can be a bit confusing, the flow chart below helps to clarify what situations constitute which of the two.



A flow chart describing the differences between conflicts and major and minor changes.

Minor Changes

Minor changes include small or unimportant changes to the environment, small changes to the motivations, emotions, or goals of minor characters, or bringing an absent minor character into a scene. For example a minor change could change the weather from warm to ominously chill or cause a minor character to shift from barely contained fury to anger of a less violent variety. The flow chart at the end of this section attempts to clarify the factors that go into determining what sorts of changes fall into which category. Keep in mind that a minor change can never directly change a major character.

If player A wishes to enact a minor change, they declare so and describe the minor change to the other players. If any player contests the minor-ness of the change all the players must vote on whether they believe the change to be major or minor. If the majority of players do not agree that the



change is minor, the change is escalated to be a major change. For the purpose of breaking ties, the scene owner's vote is counted as one and a half votes. At this point player A may decide that they do not wish to pay so steep a price and relinquish their desire to make the change. In this case no one pays any changes and the proposed change does not occur. Otherwise the process continues just as if player A had originally proposed the change as major (see major changes below).

If the change is not contested or it is contested but is not successfully escalated, the other players have the opportunity to veto the change if they desire. If player B chooses to veto the change, player B and player A each pay one minor change and the change does not occur. If no one chooses to veto the change, then player A pays his/her minor change and the change does occur.

Keep in mind that the number of minor changes a player has in each act are allocated at the beginning of the game. If a player runs out of minor changes, they can not make minor changes or veto other player's minor changes.



A flow chart describing the process of using major and minor changes.

Special Case: Eavesdropping

There is one form of minor change which cannot be escalated. If player A declares that they are adding a character (either major or minor) to a scene for the purpose of eavesdropping the other players may not escalate this change. The addition of eavesdropping characters may be vetoed as normal.

Additionally, any time a character is eavesdropping on a scene any player may pay a change to allow the character to join the scene. This cost will be a minor change if the eavesdropper is a minor character or a major change if the eavesdropper is a major character. This same cost can be payed to allow characters in the scene to "find out" the eavesdropper. The change made for the purposes of finding out an eavesdropper or for the eavesdropper to join the scene can not be vetoed, so be careful who you allow to eavesdrop on a scene.

Once characters in a scene have paid to find out an eavesdropper they can chose to reveal or ignore the eavesdropper at their discretion. Either way the character who has found out the eavesdropper is considered to know of his/her presence. Unless the eavesdropper has been revealed

or has explicitly paid to join the scene proper they can not take any direct part in the action, only listen to and watch the other characters.

When a scene owner casts a scene they may place characters in the scene as eavesdroppers. In this case the inclusion of the eavesdropper cannot be vetoed. Players may later pay to find out the eavesdropper or have him/her join the scene as normal.

Major Changes

Major change include any large shift in the plans or feelings of a minor character, large shifts in the environment or the shifting of the setting to an adjacent place (this movement must be explained through the motion of the characters), or the appearance of a major character in a scene where they were not originally included. The later is often referred to as scene stealing. This does not imply that the intruding character will necessarily become the center of attention, but the other players should do their best to incorporate the intruding character in some interesting way.

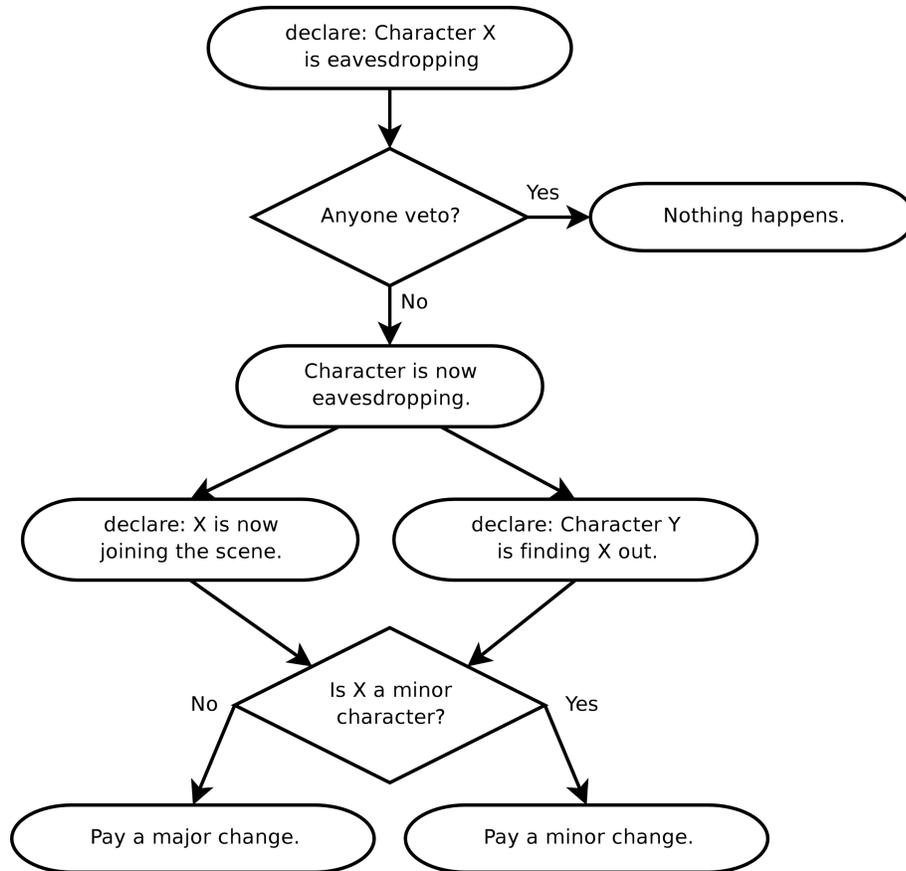


Note: Any player may spend a major change to try to bring any major character into a scene, as long as that character's player is free to take on the role.

Keep in mind that there are special rules for the incorporation of a character for the purpose of eavesdropping only (described above). Additionally, if a minor change is escalated to be a major change, it is then handled as if it had originally been proposed as a major change. A player may propose a small change as a major change and skip the escalation step if they are willing to pay the higher price a major change requires.

Once a major change is proposed, all of the players are given the chance to veto the change. If player A proposes a major change and player B vetoes it, players A and B each pay a major change and the proposed change does not occur. If player A proposes a major change and no one vetoes it, then player A pays their major change and the proposed change occurs.

The number of major changes a player has available to them in the first and second acts is one half their total number of major changes. Players will not want to use all of their major changes however, as unused major changes allow them to place arrows during the next intermission. If a player wishes to have major changes available to them during the third act they must voluntarily place fewer arrows during the second intermission to keep some of these major changes available. Remaining major changes that are not used in the third act are simply lost; there are no more opportunities to place arrows once the third act has begun. If a player runs out of major changes, they cannot make major changes or veto other player's major changes.



Flow chart describing the process of bringing a character into a scene as an eavesdropper.

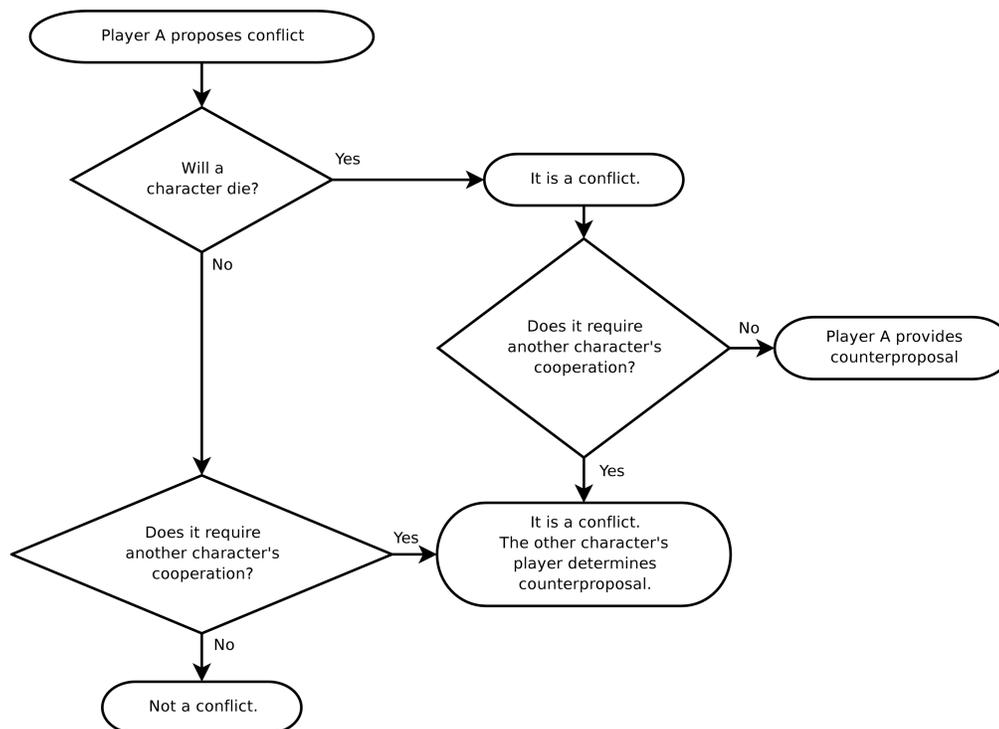
Conflicts

There are two circumstances where a main character's actions may cause a conflict. If a main character's proposed action would directly cause the death of a character or when a main character's proposed action would require the "cooperation" of another player's major character. This does not mean that the other player necessarily wants to cooperate. It is possible for both of these circumstances may be true at once.

Example Conflict	Who makes counterproposal
player A proposes that their character is going to jump in a river and drown tragically	player A
player A declares that they are stabbing minor character Y and Y will die from the wound	player A
player A declares that they are struggling with player B's major character and wrestling an object from them	player B
player A declares that their main character is drawing their sword and attacking player B's main character and after a vicious duel player A's character will lie stabbed and dying on the cobbles	player B

Once you have determined which of the circumstances apply, you can determine who gets to declare the counterproposal. The counterproposal is what will happen if the proposed action does not take place. The counterproposal should be in some way opposite of the proposed action. More specifically, if the proposed action requires the death of a character, the counterproposal must allow that character to live. It is okay for the counterproposal to cause the death of a different character.

If the proposed action does not include another main character, the proposing player determines the counterproposal. If the proposed action does include another major character then that major character's player determines the counterproposal.



Flow chart describing the process of determining whether something is a conflict and who would make the counterproposal.

Once the proposed action and counterproposal have been declared the players vote on which of the two will take place. It is considered good form to vote for the action you believe will best advance the story. Whichever action receives the majority vote will take place. In case of a tie, the vote of the scene owner counts as one and a half votes.

Pathways

As you play through the various acts filling actions, arrows, and consequences on your character sheet you will begin forming causative pathways across the three act columns. These pathways represent both goals and useful boosts to your control in a scene.

You will want to try to pursue the causative pathways on your sheet, because they will allow you to use both free vetoes and to negate vetoes. The boosting power of pathways comes into play when you have completed the left end of the pathway and are pursuing the right end.

When you pursue a one arrow pathway, it will allow you one free veto per scene, where the veto is directly supporting your pursuit of the right hand side of this pathway. Since one arrow pathways can be motivation -> action or action -> consequence, they may be used in either the second or third acts.

For example, perhaps Hamlet's player has set up the pathway:

"I love Ophelia" (motivation) -> "marry Ophelia" (action)

In this production Ophelia is a minor character. During the second scene of the second act, one of the other players proposes a major change that Ophelia will sour in her affection to Hamlet and join a nunnery. Since this would directly oppose Hamlet's attempt to marry Ophelia, Hamlet's player veto's the major change using this pathway. Hamlet's player will not be able to use this pathway for a veto again until the next scene. If Hamlet's player has openly declared that he hates Ophelia or otherwise shown no sign of love for her, other players might very well call bull on such a use of Hamlet's pathway.



When you pursue a two arrow pathway, it will allow you to nullify one veto per scene. Not only will this stop a particular player from vetoing an action, it disallows any other attempts to veto that action. If someone has already declared that they will veto the action when you state that you are using a two arrow pathway, they must pay their change as if they had vetoed it, but the action still occurs. Since two arrow pathways must be motivation -> action -> consequence, they may only be used in the third act. When using a two arrow pathway, not only must you have achieved the action in the pathway, spurred by the motivation, but you must be directly pursuing the consequence.

For example, perhaps Hamlet's player has set up the pathway:

"I love Ophelia" (motivation) -> "marry Ophelia" (action) -> "die in Ophelia's arms" (consequence)



In this production Ophelia is a minor character. In the second act Hamlet managed to successfully marry Ophelia in secret, calming her growing insanity. During the fourth scene of the third act, Hamlet lays bleeding to death as the result of a lost duel. Hamlet's player proposes the minor change that Ophelia enters the scene looking for Hamlet and another player vetoes this change. Hamlet's player declares that he is activating his two arrow pathway and nullifying the veto. The vetoing player and Hamlet's player must pay their minor changes and Ophelia arrives in time to witness Hamlet's death.

A given pathway may only be used once during a scene. This includes the case where part of a pathway has already been used. For example, if the two arrow pathway "I love Ophelia" (motivation) -> "marry Ophelia" (action) has already been used for a veto, the three arrow pathway "I love Ophelia" (motivation) -> "marry Ophelia" (action) -> "die in Ophelia's arms" (consequence) may not be used to nullify a veto until the next scene.

Bull

Sometimes players will get overly wacky and whimsical when playing Tragedy. Wackiness is okay if this is the sort of game that everyone wants to play, but there is still a limit on the weird things that the players are going to be willing to accept. If Romeo has been pining for Juliet for two acts and Romeo's player suddenly declares that Romeo commits a lovers' suicide pact with the male baker... well, it's fair to say that the other players might not believe that 180 degrees is a reasonable turning radius for the story.

If a player wants to call bull on someone's character action or major or minor change they simply declare that they think the character's action is unreasonable/crazy/dumb/whatever-adjective-will-not-offend-the-youngest-player-present. The accusing player is putting their changes on the line here (a major change if the accused was using a major change; a minor change if they accused was using a minor change; and a minor change if the accused was simply making an in-character action).

Note: A player who accuses someone of a silly action must have the free changes required to pay up if the majority does not agree with them. If you do not have the required changes then you cannot call bull.

All the players vote on the reasonableness of the accused' action. If a majority agrees that the action is not reasonable then the action is branded as silly, it does not take place, and the accused

must pay up their change as if it did. However, if a majority does not agree that the action is unreasonable, the accuser must pay up (on the same scale as the accused) and the action occurs anyway.

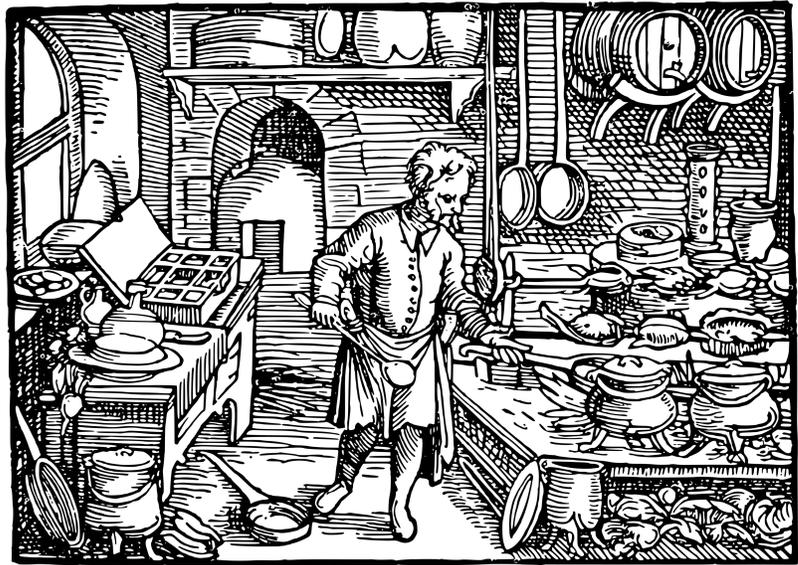
Note: If player A calls bull on player B's change, but the change is found to be reasonable, the further phases of the change, such as escalation and vetoing, may proceed as normal.

Please keep in mind that this rule should not be used very often. By and large you should agree with the other players on the level of silliness that will be included in the game. If you think the other players are veering off into too serious or too strange, talk to them about this issue openly and out-of-character.

The Plot Thickens

A scene ends when all the players involved agree that there is nothing important left to do in the scene, or all the characters have exited the stage. Even after the on stage action has ended there are further tasks which must be accomplished before moving on to the next scene. During the first and second acts, the players whose main characters took part in the scene will get suggestions for actions or consequences to fill the next scene's column with. During the first act the players will give and receive action suggestions and during the second act the players will give and receive consequence suggestions. During the third act no suggestions will be given, since all the columns should be full.

Each player must come up with one suggestion for each player whose main character was in the scene. These suggestions should be vaguely based on things that happened during the previous act. All players should think up suggestions simultaneously and write them down on scrap paper. Then each player whose main character was present in the scene should be told all of the other player's suggestions for them. A player receiving suggestions must accept at least three of the proffered suggestions and write them into the appropriate column wherever they like. If a player already has nine suggestions filled into their next column, they are not obliged to fill in any more, though they may continue to accept suggestions if they wish.



If a player already has nine suggestions filled into their next column, they are not obliged to fill in any more, though they may continue to accept suggestions if they wish.

For example, Romeo and Juliet have just finished the infamous balcony scene. They are very much in love, but as of yet haven't done much about it. Romeo might receive suggested actions like "Woo Juliet", "Protect Juliet", "Marry Juliet", "Elope with Juliet", or "End the Feud".

Intermissions

During an intermission the players have an opportunity to begin to link their character's motivations, actions, and consequences into pathways. These pathways will make completing in-character actions or out-of-character changes easier as the play progresses.

Placing Arrows

The players begin an intermission by placing arrows between the column representing the previous scene and the column representing the next scene. A player may place the number of arrows up to the number of unused major changes they have remaining from the previous act. During the second intermission players may voluntarily place fewer arrows than they are allowed. Any major changes that are not converted to arrows in the second intermission may be used as major changes during the third intermission. Saving major changes is a delicate trade off, since your character will have fewer pathways across their sheet. For more information on how pathways are used during play, see the pathways section above.

Note: Arrows must be placed so that they do not overlap. Arrows may not be trimmed so that they are smaller than the dotted lines that enclose them. Arrows must always point from left to right.

Importance Order

Once all the players are finished placing their arrows, they vote on the importance of the major characters in the previous act. Each player should write out the names of the major characters, not including their own, in order based on which characters they believe to have been most central to the story in the previous act.

One player should gather up the sheets, tally the votes and determine the overall order. To tally the order, simply sum up the place numbers given to a character by all the players. Once you have totals for all the characters, rank the characters from least to greatest total. It is possible that there may be some ties in the order and this is okay. If two characters tie for a place, for example second place, they are considered to only take up the one place in the order; so the character after them would be in third place.

Suppose the votes were:

- Romeo got three votes for first place
- Juliet got three votes for second place
- Tybalt got one vote for first place, one vote for second place, and one vote for third place
- Mercutio got three votes for third place

The totals would be:

Romeo	=	1 + 1 + 1	=	3
Juliet	=	2 + 2 + 2	=	6
Tybalt	=	1 + 3 + 2	=	6
Mercutio	=	3 + 3 + 3	=	9

Romeo would be in first place, followed by Juliet and Tybalt in second place, and Mercutio in third place.

Shifting

A character's place in the importance order determines how far they will shift the next act when determining alignment for purposes of arrow connections. The direction of shift is determined by the which one of their shift themes was most prevalent in the previous act.

Going around the table, each player announces his character's shift themes from the previous act. After each announcement, the players vote on which theme was most prevalent in the previous act. If there are an even number of players at the table then a player may not vote on their own shift themes.

Once the most prevalent shift themes have been determined, each player must shift the column representing the next act up or down according to which of their shift themes was chosen as most prevalent. The number of spaces that a player's next act will shift is determined by their character's ranking in the importance order. Take your ranking and subtract it from the number of players, this is how many lines you must shift your next act. Keep in mind that the next act starts out lined up with the previous act.

number of players - your character's ranking = number of lines to shift

Note: Before a normal shifting, columns should be aligned to the previous act.

For example, during the first intermission, player A's major character is voted second most important out of five main characters. Player A's shift themes are Loyalty (down) and Betrayal (up) and Loyalty is voted to have been more prevalent in act one. Player A calculates that they must shift three spaces ($5 - 2 = 3$). Now player A shifts the column representing their second act (labeled "I must...") three spaces down and tapes it to the adjacent arrows to fix it in place.

Once you are finished placing arrows and shifting you will want to tape your arrows and the adjacent columns together to avoid confusion or accidental jostling from destroying your pathways.

Twist Shifts

There is one form of shift that does not take place during intermission. Each character is allowed to declare one twist shift during one of the scenes in the third and final act of the play. When a player declares a twist shift, the prevalence of their shift themes is immediately voted on based on the action up to that point in the act. The player may then shift their consequence column by one or two spaces (their choice) from its current position in the direction of their more prevalent shift theme. This



shift may require cutting apart the previously taped sections. Be sure to cut between the ends of the arrows and the consequence column and re-tape the sections once you have finished shifting.

Filling and Free Talk

At this point the column representing the next act should be fixed in place and partially filled with the suggestions that were given for his or her character during the previous act. Each player may now fill in any remaining spaces in the column representing the next act. Blank spaces with arrows pointing to them should be filled in based on the actions or consequences you want to bring about in the next act. Players must also assign a new pair of shift themes for the next act. The themes a player picks for the next act may not be the same as the pair of themes that player used in the previous act.

While the players are filling in their next act column, they should feel free to engage in free talk or pursue snacks as they wish.

Example shift themes:

- Love / Hate
- Loyalty / Betrayal
- Patience / Action
- Revenge / Forbearance
- Kindness / Cruelty
- Law / Disorder
- Friendship / Strife
- Truth / Lies
- Want / Plenty
- Growth / Stagnation



III. Writing Playbills

There are two ways to approach writing playbills. Either an existing story and character set can be lifted from a play or other source, or the writer can use a story and characters of their own devising. The second strategy requires far more time and creativity. In general most Shakespearian plays can be turned into playbills in the span of an hour or two.

Setting and Plot

When describing the main plot and setting of the play try to be as general as possible while still giving the players hints that they can draw from. Keep in mind that the main plot only describes how the play stands at the beginning of the first act. It is a good idea to try to give the players some hints about what sort of places the story might branch off to, but ultimately it is the players' decisions that will determine where they end up.

Likewise, the setting should encompass the area where the writer expects the majority of the play to take place. It is okay if the players decide to foray off to a further clime, but the writer should pick a setting that will be general enough that it will probably be accurate for the majority of the action, while still being specific enough to be descriptively useful to the players.

Aspects

The aspects available in a play tend to be more freeform than the other sections of a playbill. There are many different aspects that a playbill writer can use. A list of common Shakespearian aspects is included below, but don't let this stop you from coming up with others. For each aspect the writer should include a sentence or two explaining the details of the aspect which are encouraged or not included in the play. The players will use the aspects to help them think of plot elements to bring into the story so being specific about the aspect details can help to generate more lively and interesting games. If you do not explicitly prohibit an aspect, then the players may decide to include it in their story as long as it fits with the overall plot and setting.

Table of suggested Shakespearian aspects and possible details.

Example Aspect	Example Details
supernatural	witches, gods, faeries, ghosts
poison	deadly, transformative, paralyzing
dueling	to first blood, to the death, mistaken, vindictive
magic	spells, wishes, all powerful, hermetic, technological
inheritance	money, title, throne
war	small scale, between kingdoms, on civilians
trickery	mistaken, friendly, vindictive, deadly

Characters

When writing character descriptions it is a good idea to try to give characters implied plots to take part in. For example, if you mention that Duke Orsino (from Twelfth Night) is pursuing the hand of Lady Olivia, you give the duke's player a goal to pursue from the beginning of the story. The more implicit plots which bridge the gaps between the players the easier it will be for players to find things to do early on in the game. It is also helpful to give some direction about the personality of the characters so that players have something to start with.

Overall it is a good idea to have at least two major only characters, four major or minor characters, and two to four minor only characters. It is alright to have more characters available to the story, but keep in mind that the more characters there are the fewer of their implicit plots will see the light of day. As a rule of thumb you probably do not want to write more than eight characters who the players will be able to pick as major characters.

Once you have come up with the names and descriptions of your characters, mark them in some way to differentiate the major only, major or minor, and minor only characters. Usually it is best to make the major only characters the ones who are most central to the story. The number and importance of a character's implicit plots is a good metric for how central they are to the story. It is



also helpful to consider how many of the other characters they actively know and have some sort of relationship with.

It is okay to suggest some further actions through directions in parenthesis. In general these should include the proclivities of characters to fall in love with each other or to hate each other. If you can find a way to avoid making these suggestions directly, by simply describing the character in more detail, it is usually better to do so.



Finally characters need a notation of their number of major and minor changes. The playbills included in this book take the strategy of giving the most central characters six major and ten minor changes. Less central characters were given eight major and twelve minor changes. Feel free to tweak the number of changes you give to the characters to promote a more or less contentious game. Six major changes should be considered a reasonable minimum that will allow interesting pathways, while still giving the player the option of using a few major changes. Remember that the number of major changes must be even so that they can be equally divided between the two intermissions.

Replayability

The replayability of a playbill is usually determined by the number of choices players have in characters and the number of implicit plots they have to begin their story with. The more choices players have, the more likely they are to produce different, interesting stories. It is recommended that you rotate the playbills that you use so that your friends do not get overly bored of a given play.

Genres and Plot Seeds

In general you can look to nearly any of Shakespeare's play's for traditional plot elements and the core seeds of the story. Tragedies and comedies make particularly good starting points. Sometimes it is necessary to come up with additional implicit plots and characters to pad out the existing story.

Tragedy also works well with other genre's of dark comedy. Particularly the eighties high school drama and the traditional space opera can use many similar themes and plots while encouraging an entirely different style of roleplaying. Additionally, Goth subculture can proved many amusing overplayed and angst-laden stereotypes. For creative playbill writers, the sky's the limit. Any story that has interesting implied interaction and the potential for a messy bloodbath ending can become a great play.

Suggested plot seeds (use more than one if desired):

- two people or groups which have an ongoing conflict are brought together
- three people form an inconvenient love triangle
- unrequited love with the potential to lead to hatred
- the discovery of old crimes brings strife between groups or individuals
- insanity touches one character, upsetting or angering others
- one character seeks revenge and is willing to cause significant collateral damage
- one character seeks to rise in power, on the backs of others if necessary

Example of a Poor Playbill: Romeo and Juliet

See the playbill for Romeo and Juliet in the example playbill section.

The core problem with this playbill is that there is only one implied plot. Romeo and Juliet fall in love and their families as well as Count Paris get in the way. There is nothing inherently wrong with this plot, but it leaves little for Mercutio, Benvolio, Tybalt, and even Count Paris to do in the rest of the story. So much of the spotlight is on Romeo and Juliet themselves, that the rest of the story will be decidedly thin.

In addition, the playbill relies very heavily on parenthesized actions to move the story forward. The choices of the players are going to be rather secondary to the actions that the playbill writer has already choreographed. Even the aspects are rather thin, suggesting only the use of poison to the players. This might not be a problem if the writer had provided more implied plots for the players to draw from.



IV. Glossary of Terms

- Playbill** - The sheet containing a summary of all the important elements of a play, including: introductory plot, characters, setting, and aspects that may be present in the story.
- Act** - One of the three larger sections of the play. Each act consists of several scenes. In between the first and second acts and the second and third acts there are intermissions.
- Scene** - A small section of the play where the setting and time are continuous. For example If characters A and B talk in the kitchen for a continuous half hour and then A and C go for a horse back ride the next morning those would be considered two separate scenes due to the change of time and setting. Each scene has an owning player, whose character may or may not be present in the scene.
- Setting a scene** - An action taken by the owning player of a scene before the scene begins. When the owner sets the scene they must give the time and place of the scene, a list of the included characters, who will play the minor characters, and directions about how and why each of the characters is present.
- Intermission** - The break in between acts where shifting, filling, voting, and any free talk are conducted. Also a great time for snacks.
- Free Talk** - An opportunity for players to discuss their plots out-of-character. These discussions may include all the other players or a smaller subset. It is perfectly fine for players to hold secret conferences and negotiations during free talk.
- Shift themes** - The pair of opposing themes recorded for a character in a certain act. The prevalence of these themes in the act will determine the direction of shift during the intermission.
- Major Changes** - A large change to the story; this may include including or excluding a major character in/from a scene, greatly changing the feelings or intentions of a minor character, or making a large change to the environment of a scene.
- Minor Change** - A small change to the story that does not involve the inclusion or exclusion of a major character. Minor changes include things like a slight change to the weather, the appearance or disappearance of a minor character, or a small shift in the feelings or intentions of a minor character. If contested by the other players a change may be escalated to a major change.
- Arrows** - Arrows represent unspent major changes and are placed between the act columns during intermissions. Arrows always go from left to right.
- Act column** - One of the three columns on a character sheet, which represents one of the three acts. The columns are also referred to as the motivation, action, and consequence columns.
- Shift** - During the two intermissions the character sheet column representing the next act will be shifted up or down based on which of the character's shift themes is voted to have been most prominent. The number of spaces your column is shifted is determined by your character's place in the importance order for the previous act.
- Twist Shift** - During the third act a player whose main character is taking part in the scene may declare a twist shift. The other players will immediately vote on which of the declaring player's third act shift themes is more prominent. The declaring player may then shift their consequence column in the appropriate direction by one or two lines (their choice).
- Pathway** - A linking of motivations, actions, and consequences with arrows. The two kinds of pathways are distinguished by how many arrows (either one or two) are included in them. All pathways are read from left to right.

V. Example Playbills

There are several example playbills drawn from Shakespearean plots. The plots and characters have been tweaked slightly in an effort to make them more enjoyable for Tragedy players. Further playbills are available for free download on <http://www.digitalchangeling.com>



Hamlet

Main plot: After the death of the king of Denmark his widow remarries, beginning a dark and sordid series of events.

Setting: The capital of Denmark and surrounding climes.

Play Aspects:

Supernatural: There are supernatural elements in this play, including a ghost.

Poison: There may be deadly poison in this play.

Dueling: There may be duels in this play, including those to the death.

Trickery: There may be trickery in this play, especially that which is vindictive and deadly.

Characters:

(Major; May be either; Minor)

Prince Hamlet (6 / 10) - The crown prince of Denmark, Hamlet is a grown man and has just returned from school in Wittenberg, Germany when the play begins. Though he has a good heart, he has become melancholy and bitter since his father's death and his mother's remarriage. He is usually indecisive and hesitant, though at times he rushes forward with rash actions. He is an intelligent and clever man, perhaps at times too much so for his own good. He cares for Ophelia deeply but has been warned by his Uncle, Claudius, that she is an unsuitable match for him. (This character is the most likely to be approached by the Dead King.)

King Claudius (6 / 10) - The current King of Denmark, he is the uncle of Hamlet, the dead king's brother, and has only recently married Gertrude. Unbetrothed to her, Claudius is the one who caused the demise of her previous husband. Claudius hopes that the murder will not be discovered and things can proceed peacefully now that he has the throne and wife that he desired. Though he came to marry her through evil and cunning, he does love Gertrude deeply. He has no plots against Hamlet at present, but is wary that the smart young man may cause trouble for him in the future.

The Dead King - The ghost of Hamlet's father. He is furious that his murder has gone unavenged and even more furious that his wife has married Claudius. He can appear only to those of his blood and intends to do so soon.

Queen Gertrude (8 / 12) - Hamlet's devoted mother and Queen of Denmark. Grief-stricken after the death of her husband she accepted Claudius' proposal a scant two months after she became a widow. She cares for Claudius, but her son is first and foremost in her affections. Though she knows she has been accused of being a weak and heartless woman by many behind her back, Gertrude feels she has done what is best for Denmark in remarrying quickly and ending any strife which might otherwise have surrounded the throne.

Polonius (8 / 12) - The Lord Chamberlain and father of Ophelia and Laertes. He serves Claudius faithfully in his post as lord chamberlain. Polonius is at heart a kind and honest man. He fears the cunning of the new king and where it may lead, but does not have the bravery to stand up against him. He is also worried by his daughter's obvious feelings for Hamlet. He knows that the king would not sanction such a marriage and fears that Hamlet may take advantage of her feelings.

Ophelia (8 / 12) - A sweet and faithful girl, Ophelia is the daughter of Polonius and sister of Laertes. She is deeply in love with Hamlet, but has been warned that the new king is unlikely to sanction a marriage between them. She hopes that if she is patient and befriends the Queen, she can eventually turn the tide more in her favor. Though she is trying to be patient and virtuous, she is heart-sick with her unexpressed affections.

Laertes (8 / 12) - Son of Polonius, brother of Ophelia and a great fencer in his own right. Laertes is a good man and unlike his father he is more than willing to stand up against those who wrong him and his. He is protective of his sister, but does not worry as much about her infatuation with Hamlet, as he feels it will pass with little harm to her.

Horatio - A fellow student in Wittenberg, he has come to be close friends with Hamlet. Horatio has no title or noble lineage of his own and very little in the way of initiative. He cares for Hamlet and will keep his secrets but does not have the backbone to be of much actual help.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - Old friends of Hamlet, these two are now courtiers in King Claudius' court. They are loyal to the new king, and not above abandoning old friendships for the favor of those in power.

Twelfth Night

Main plot: The twins, Viola and Sebastian, both believing the other dead in a shipwreck, have arrived in Illyria amidst a number of curious social situations.

Setting: A city on the island of Illyria somewhere in the sea.

Play Aspects:

Supernatural: There may be some supernatural elements but there are no witches or ghosts in this play.

Poison: There may be poison, possibly both deadly and transformative, in this play.

Dueling: There may be a number of duels in this play, including those to the death.

Characters:

(**Major**; *May be either*; **Minor**)

Duke Orsino (8 / 12) - Ruler of Illyria, he is a powerful and wealthy man. The duke is obsessed with gaining the hand of Lady Olivia in marriage, though she spurns his attention. He has admitted Cesario (Viola in disguise) to his household and trusts him implicitly.

Sebastian (6 / 10) - Twin brother of Viola, he is very similar to her in appearance. After the ship he and Viola were traveling on was destroyed in a storm, he was found and nursed back to health by Antonio. They have become close friends and Antonio has accompanied him to Illyria. Sebastian believes Viola to have died at sea. (Sebastian looks nearly identical to Viola in her Cesario disguise.)

Antonio (8 / 12) - A sea captain and close friend of Sebastian. Antonio found Sebastian and nursed him back to health after Sebastian's ship was destroyed in a storm. Antonio has accompanied Sebastian to Illyria despite the fact that he has been branded as a wanted criminal (for piracy) by the duke of the city. Unless the watch or duke recognize him he should be able to avoid trouble in Illyria.

Sir Toby Belch (8 / 12) - Olivia's uncle, he spends most of his time drinking and joking with Sir Andrew in Olivia's house. He is of a humorous disposition and enjoys playing practical jokes on the steward Malvolio as well as Sir Andrew and anyone else who is in the wrong place at the wrong time. His only serious streak is his protective inclinations towards his niece Olivia.

Sir Andrew - A loud, lewd, obnoxious, and rash gentleman, Sir Andrew is a drinking buddy of Sir Toby and often the unwitting butt of Sir Toby's pranks. He generally annoys Olivia with his inappropriate behavior, but Sir Toby keeps him around because Sir Andrew is so easy for him to manipulate.

Viola (6 / 10) - Twin sister of Sebastian, she is very similar to him in appearance. After the ship she and Sebastian were traveling on was destroyed in a storm, she washed up on the shore of Illyria battered but whole. She believes Sebastian to have died at sea. She entered the city and has fallen in love with Duke Orsino. She disguised herself as a man and has taken a place in his household in order to be closer to him. She has taken the name of Cesario for her disguise as a man. (Viola in her Cesario disguise looks nearly identical to Sebastian.)

Maria - Olivia's serving woman, she is patient and quiet. She disapproves of the drunken behavior of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew as well as the general snootiness of Malvolio.

Countess Olivia (8 / 12) - A beautiful, highborn countess, she is in mourning following the deaths of her father and her brother. She knows that the duke desires her affections but does not requite his feelings. She has retreated into solitude to avoid the duke and her other suitors. (Olivia is predisposed to fall violently in love with Cesario.)

Malvolio - Olivia's steward, a rather pompous man, he believes that Olivia secretly loves him. He is very vocal in his disapproval of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew.

Romeo and Juliet

Main plot: Two feuding families, the Capulets and Montagues, are graced with star crossed lovers to complicate their long conflict.

Setting: The fair city of Verona in northern Italy during the middle ages.

Play Aspects:

Supernatural: are no supernatural elements or ghosts in this play.

Poison: There may be poison, possibly both deadly and transformative, in this play.

Characters:

(Major; May be either; Minor)

Prince Escalus - The ruler of Verona. He has tried to mediate in the feud between the families as best he can.

Count Paris (8 / 12) - A young man of high social standing, he of kin to the prince. He desires the affections of Juliet, but he is more mature and patient than Romeo.

Mercutio (8 / 12) - Kin of the prince, he is a great friend of Romeo and often found in his company. He is a good man, but tends to be long winded and overly dramatic. Some see Mercutio as a man of great wit and imagination, others an equally vivacious satirist with a cutting tongue. Above all he scorns shallow, pretentious people who believe only in the the latest fashions and empty pass times.

Romeo Montague (6 / 10) - Son of the Lord and Lady Montague, he is a young man of 16 and still easily swayed by love. Though he is somewhat impulsive and immature, Romeo is a passionate idealist at heart. He is currently in love with a lady by the name of Rosaline, though she has sworn to live a life of chastity and refuses to see him. He persists in belaboring his feelings to his friends and has sunk into a great melancholy as a result. He is great friends with Benvolio and Mercutio. Romeo tends to be very loyal to those he cares about, to the point of rash and dangerous action. (This character is predisposed to fall violently in love with Juliet.)

Benvolio Montague (8 / 12) - Cousin of Romeo, he is a mild young man and is more likely to play the peacemaker in public than cause strife. Behind closed doors he sometimes of a radically different and far more vindictive temperament. He is worried about Romeo's melancholy mood of late and hopes to cheer his friend. He is great friends with Romeo and Mercutio.

Lord and Lady Montague - The wealthy heads of house Montague. They have done nothing over the years to ease or halt the feud with the Capulets. Their only child is Romeo.

Juliet Capulet (6 / 10) - Daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet, she is a young maid of 13, still easily swayed by love. Though Juliet has lead a sheltered life and is somewhat naive about the world, she can be courageous and headstrong when defending something or someone that she believes in. (This character is predisposed to fall violently in love with Romeo.)

Tybalt Capulet (8 / 12) - Cousin of Juliet, he has a sharp tongue and quarrels often. He is vain, fashionable to a fault, and easily swayed to anger. He is quite a good fencer, and is well aware of the fact. He cares dearly for his cousin and her parents and hates all Montagues passionately.

Lord and Lady Capulet - The wealthy heads of house Capulet. They have done nothing over the years to ease or halt the feud with the Montagues. Their only child is Juliet.

Juliet's nurse - Juliet's closest confidante, the nurse has cared for Juliet since she was a babe. More than anything she wants to be sure that Juliet is happy and safe.

The good friar - Always a believer that the power of love will heal wounds, he has a soft spot for scorned or ill-fated lovers and has been known to aid them. (The friar has a great deal of knowledge of herbs and potions. He is often called upon to prepare medicines for the sick or dying.)

Cut on dashed lines.



Because...



I must...



Lest...



- slide down: _____
- slide up: _____

- slide down: _____
- slide up: _____

- slide down: _____
- slide up: _____

