

CHAUCER'S DAUGHTER LOST: A SHAKESPEAREAN ROLE-PLAYING PLAY

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In order to claim the title as England's Bard, Shakespeare travels back in time and kidnaps Chaucer's daughter, Agnes. As ransom Chaucer must go into exile and not write *The Canterbury Tales*. From his death bed, King Edward III dispatches a small group to accompany Chaucer while he searches the Royal Forest for Agnes.

SET UP

Gather four to eight players (actors). Go to a room big enough for all eight to walk around. Set up a row or two of chairs for the audience at one end and designate the rest as the stage. When an actor isn't playing a character in a scene, he sits in the audience. Everything else happens on the stage and all actors project to the audience. Print out 10 character sheets and enough actor sheets for the number of players. Cut up a bunch of scrap paper the size of Post-it Notes. Grab one mug and pencils for everyone. Print out the game.

CHARACTERS

Divide out the characters to all the actors. King Edward III plays a small part, so his actor should get another character. Agnes is bound to certain scenes, so her actor should also get another character.

- **King Edward III**, King of England: Temperamental, kind, warrior, on his death bed.
- **Chaucer**: Poet, government bureaucrat, gets a gallon of wine a day for free from the king, future author of *The Canterbury Tales*.
- **Agnes**, daughter of Chaucer: Courtly, aiming for status, looking for a good marriage.
- **Sir Duncan**, a chivalrous knight: Armored, tough guy, all chivalrous, courtly and such, but worried about his place with the new king.
- **Rolaund**, a constable: Enforcer of forest law, eater of wild boar, cool 'stash, loyal to the King through all.
- **Fitch**, a serjeant-in-fee in the King's Forest: Patroller of the forest in exchange for land, vigilant offender catcher, weasel.
- **Brook**, a ranger: Poor, underpaid, grubby enforcer of forest law, a woman hiding as a man.
- **Shakespeare**, playwright: Pompous, insecure, fame-loving fool with a good sense of the language.
- **John Dee**, astronomer, magician, consultant to Queen Elizabeth, friend of Shakespeare: Crazy, off his rocker, too smart for his own good, genius, time traveler.
- **The Friar**, poor holy man: Twisted, corrupt, knows the dark arts and owes Chaucer one.

MINOR CHARACTERS

There might be minor characters or groups of characters in a scene. If so, any actor that plays one gains a move.

PLAYING

You play a role-playing play in acts and scenes. Each play has five acts, which each contain a number of scenes. At scene's end you get to make one move that influences plot elements of the next scene. You use your character(s) to dialog with other characters and get their actors to support your move. The other actors can support you, oppose you or ignore you in support of their own move. See the Scene Flow Diagram for more details.

You also play out any plot elements required by the scene by acting out in dialog and actions. Imagine being in a Shakespearean improv play. If you play your character that way, you're doing it right. A scene ends when you finish acting out all the plot elements and all the actors are ready to make a move.

MOVES

You use your move to pull the levers or turn the dials in the next scene. By doing this, you can customize the scene to your desire. The other actors also have a move to make. If you persuaded them, they'll support your move. If they have other desires, they'll oppose your move or do something else.

You make one of four moves at the end of a scene:

1. You can **pull a lever** or **hold it in place**, which turns a plot element on or off in the next scene. If you pull a lever and no one tries to hold it in place, it happens. If you pull a lever and someone holds it in place, it doesn't happen. If more actors pull it than hold it, it happens.
2. You can **rotate a dial right or left**, which changes the intensity of a required plot element in the next scene. Other actors can rotate it too. Once it hits the right or the left end it stops, it doesn't completely spin.
3. You can **support another actor's move**. I.e. you're going to pull the same lever.
4. You can **oppose another actor's move**. I.e. you're going to keep a lever in place.

At the end of the scene, write your move on a small slip of paper and put it in a cup. You can use any extra moves that you earned or save them for later. After everyone puts their slips into the cup, remove them and make the necessary changes to the next scene.

SPECIAL MOVES

During a scene, you can play any of these special moves:

1. **Enter:** Enter a scene that didn't feature your character at the curtain's rise (beginning of a scene). Say something as an aside to the audience once you arrive about why you're there. You can only do this once per character. Agnes can't do this move.
2. **Exit:** Leave a scene. You can come back later for free. Agnes can't do this move.
3. **Soliloquy:** Relate your character's inner thoughts, relationships and goals to the audience, but not the other characters. Allows you to **add one plot element** of your own making to any future scene in acts 1 to 4. Include this as part of the soliloquy. Note: The plot element cannot be specific to any character. Make it general such as falling in love, showing hate, a death, a river full of fairies, etc. It can't be or counteract a plot element already in the scene. Note 2: You cannot do another soliloquy until another actor steals the stage with a soliloquy. Note 3: While you give a soliloquy everyone else must stop talking and listen.
4. **The Dark Arts** (John Dee and The Friar only): Once per game, completely change any scene in Act 2 to 4. During the change, all the actors pick a side, either John Dee or The Friar. Each side introduces one plot element and the scene is played with only those elements in the new setting. Any character can join the scene if John Dee or The Friar says it's okay.

PLOT ELEMENTS

Each scene contains a number of plot elements, some can be turned on or off via lever, you can change some in intensity, and you must include others. If a scene has a plot element, you must incorporate it somehow. For example, if the scene includes "Love" then the characters in the scene must somehow work that into the scene through action or conversation. Maybe one of the characters falls in love or maybe he talks about lost love. If it's an element it must happen.

If an element happens directly to an actor's character, the actor gains an extra move until he uses it. An element can happen to any number of characters.

THE DEATH OF A CHARACTER

Characters can die (except for Shakespeare or Chaucer). John Dee and The Friar have powers to revive any character as a ghost or a ghoul. They'll do it for a favor which you can negotiate during a death scene which occurs in a dark room with just John Dee or The Friar and your character unless someone uses a special move. Death scenes are like others, but only special moves work.

THE PURPOSE OF ACTS AND CRITICS

Each act serves a purpose in our play. As actors you try to complete the purpose by the last scene. At the end of each scene, one random member of the audience becomes a critic who assigns an arbitrary rating to the scene and states whether or not it accomplished the act's purpose. He cites a reason for the decision and awards one actor something to put on his acting resume. Each actor gains the arbitrary rating his resume. Think *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* For example, a critic might rate a scene worth 35 points, because of X. The actor playing Shakespeare showed excessive forcefulness. All the actors add 35 to their scores, and the actor playing Shakespeare gets the critic award of "forcefulness."

Act 1: Establish the Shakespeare vs. Chaucer conflict and sides. Set up the relationships and emotions.

Act 2: The sides make moves against the others.

Act 3: Make it look like Shakespeare might win.

Act 4: Chaucer's side acts but stops short of victory.

Act 5: One side wins.

ACTORS AND ACTOR MOVES

In a sense, the players play two characters at once. They play a Shakespearean actor playing a character in a play. Each actor wants fame. Therefore, they want large ratings from the critics for scenes in which they act. The actor with the highest rating is the most famous, and he wins. He gets to give a long speech to everyone at the end of the last scene.

Actors can excel in the areas for which a critic gave a reason. When an actor plays his character and pulls from his acting resume something a critic said was good, he gains a move. For example, if the actor gained "forcefulness," next time he plays a character with "forcefulness" he gains a move.

ACT 1 IS DIFFERENT

In act 1, actors use their moves to throw any level or turn any dial for any scene in acts 2 to 4. In the scene they appear, they must tell the audience what they want by the end of the play, what they won't ever do, and the names of two characters which they either love, hate, detest, or are jealous of. This is filled out on the character sheet. These items can change if an actor plays a plot element on his character. Plot elements are also more specific in Act 1.

THE PLAY

ACT 1, SCENE I BEHIND THE GLOBE

At curtain: Enter Shakespeare and John Dee. Agnes sits bound and helpless on the ground. The Friar hides in an alley. Rats scurry around.

Plot Elements:

1. Shakespeare and John Dee discuss their plan to make Chaucer not write *The Canterbury Tales*.
2. The Friar now knows the plan.
3. Agnes laments her situation.

ACT 1, SCENE II KING'S BEDROOM

At curtain: King Edward III (in bed), Chaucer, Sir Duncan, Rolaund. Several servants move around the room.

Plot Elements:

1. King Edward III assigns Sir Duncan and Rolaund to Chaucer's quest to find his daughter.
2. Sir Duncan and King Edward III talk about his status and the king's passing.
3. Chaucer and Rolaund talk of trust and family.

ACT 1, SCENE III THE KING'S FOREST

At curtain: Enter Rolaund, Fitch and Brook. Bears roam the woods.

Plot Elements:

1. Rolaund recruits Fitch and Brook to help find Chaucer's daughter.
2. Love
3. Jealousy

ACT 2, SCENE I THE KING'S FOREST

At curtain: Enter the King's Team. John Dee hides behind a tree.

Plot Elements:

1. Lever: Rash Action (default: on)
2. Lever: A band of monks (default: off)
3. Dial: Heavy Planning, Planning, Talk about What to Do, No Planning (Default: Planning)

ACT 2, SCENE II A RENTED ROOM IN THE SECLUDED VILLAGE

At curtain: Agnes tied to a chair. Enter John Dee and Shakespeare.

Plot Element:

1. Dial: Interruption by Brook dressed as housekeeper or not (default: housekeeper)
2. Lever: Love (default: on)
3. Lever: Deception (default: on)
4. Hidden

ACT 2, SCENE III THE KING'S FOREST

At curtain: John Dee behind a tree. Enter Chaucer and Sir Duncan. Rolaund and Fitch at a fire.

Plot Elements:

1. Forsworn
2. Lever: Show Power (default: off)
3. Dial: The fire is explosive, magical, a viewing portal to Agnes (in scene then), warm. (default: warm)

ACT 3, SCENE I SECLUDED VILLAGE FAIR

At curtain: Brook meets Fitch at a booth. Shakespeare in a booth looking at goods. The Friar watches Brook from afar. Commoners visit booths. Booth owner.

Plot Elements:

1. Dial: Clue, red herring, corruption (Default: red herring)
2. Lever: Jealousy (Default: on)
3. Lever: Failure (Default: off)

ACT 3, SCENE II ON STAGE AT THE GLOBE

At curtain: John Dee holding a skull. Chaucer, Rolaund and Sir Duncan appear in a cloud of smoke.

Plot Elements:

1. Lever: Magic (default: off)
2. Lever: Feud (default: on)
3. Dial: Love, betrayal, falling from grace, anger, revenge (Default: betrayal)
4. Death

ACT 4, SCENE I VILLAGE TOURNAMENT GROUNDS

At curtain: Fitch, Rolaund, The Friar and Chaucer watch the games. Several knights joist.

Plot Elements:

1. Lever: Join (Default: on)
2. Lever: Sword fight (Default: on)
3. Lever: Death (Default: off)

ACT 4, SCENE II A RENTED ROOM IN THE SECLUDED VILLAGE

At curtain: Brook climbs a ladder to the window; Shakespeare sits in front of a bound Agnes. The Friar throws open the door. Sir Duncan bursts through the wall.

Plot Elements:

1. Love
2. Lever: Death (Default: on)
3. Dial: Poison, sympathy, lying, jealousy, back-stabbing (Default: back-stabbing)
4. Lever: Gender (Default: on)

ACT 5, SCENE I VILLAGE TOURNAMENT GROUNDS

At curtain: All characters

Plot Elements:

1. Death
2. Freedom
3. Betrayal
4. Exile

CHARACTER AND ACTOR SHEETS

Fill out your character sheets in the first act.

ACTOR SHEET

Name:

Score:

Critic Awards:

CHARACTER SHEET

Character's Name:

Role (from description):

Personality (from description):

I love/hate/detest/am jealous of _____(name character).

I love/hate/detest/am jealous of _____(name character).

I want this by play's end:

Something that I will never do is*:

*If you do it, you gain an extra enter move, or you can bring someone back from being a ghost or ghoul.

SCENE FLOW DIAGRAM

