

FORSOOTH!

A role-playing game of Shakespearean proportions

by

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*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts...*
-As You Like It Act 2, scene 7, 139–143

Act I

On Making Characters and Preparing to Play

Forsooth! is a game inspired by Shakespeare, wherein players control multiple characters with disparate motivations to, together, improvise a tale of Shakespearean scope. Unlike traditional RPGs, Forsooth! uses no “game master” or “story-teller.” One man in his time plays many parts, so we are all storytellers, all actors, all directors, all playwrights. As an ensemble, the players will tell the tale of a group of Exiles. Whether that story is comedy or tragedy, history or farce, is up to the players to decide as the game runs its course. Along the way, the players’ characters may scheme, fight, deliver moving soliloquies, question their mortal nature and even forswear their solemn oaths, all in the name of applause. The action begins when the first character enters, and ends when all the Exiles are either married or dead.



What You Need

All you’ll need are some pencils, some poker chips or other items to use as Applause Chips (*see Pause for Applause in Act III*), and some character sheets (which are included at the end of this document). You may also want some knick-knack to keep track of who is the bard for the current scene.

Setting The Stage

The default setting of Forsooth! is a nondescript castle, to which at least some of the characters have been banished. There are many places within the castle that the action can play out, but like in Shakespeare’s work, the action can also range all over the world. A list of locations within the Castle, by which players may be inspired, follows in the Appendix. However, if players all agree on a different setting — say the deep woods or a deserted island — they should feel free to do so.

Cast Creation

Players each control a small cast made up of 1-3 characters at any given time. At the start of the game, each player creates their cast in a strength dependant on the number of players in the game.

Three Or Four Players: 3 Characters each

Five to Six Players: 2 Characters each

Seven or More Players: 1 Character each

Creating a character in Forsooth! is a snap: all you need is a Name, a Nature, an Oath and a Fate Score.

Name: Your Character’s Name. You may also wish to come up with a small background and announce it to your fellow players. If the character is an Exile (*see Fate below*), decide why he or she has been exiled, whether they have committed some crime, annoyed the King, or are falsely accused.

Example: “Col. Giacomo is a military leader who was exiled after losing a major battle.”

Nature: Select two words from the Natures list (found in the Epilogue) in any combination to determine your character’s nature. Is he a Thoughtful Fool? Melancholy Schemer? A Rakish Braggart? You decide, but no two characters you control can have the same word in their nature, so, for example, if you have one Scheming character, none of your other characters may be Schemers. These natures serve as roleplaying cues and may come into play if a Message is delivered.

Example: Col. Giacomo is a Boastful Crusader

Oath: Pick something your character has sworn to do. Try to come up with both a goal and a method of achieving it, with interesting implications about the character. A poor Oath might be “I will avenge my father’s death.” It’s a good goal, but doesn’t tell us how far the character is willing to go, or how he might go about it, or how he might fail. Better examples include “I will avenge my father’s death or die trying,” “I will make [Character] suffer, even if I have to suffer myself to do it,” and “I will improve my social station no matter the cost.” In order to encourage action that will spur the game to its end, some of your Oaths should involve death, love, or another, opposing character, and all three wherever possible!

It is possible—and sometimes dramatically or strategically appropriate—to break your Oath. If that happens, check off the “Forsworn” box on your character sheet.

Name; Col. Giacomo

Nature; Boastful Crusader

Oath; I will ruin the conniving liutenant who cost me my command, even if it kills me.

Fate B

Forsworn

Soliloquy

Aside

Applause

Col. Giacomo's Oath: "I will ruin the conniving lieutenant who cost me my command, even if it kills me."

Fate Score: Each character has a Fate Score between 1 and 3. You assign these numbers amongst your characters without repeating, so in a three-character cast you will have a 1, a 2, and a 3. Your Fate 3 character is your Exile, who could be considered your protagonist, tragic hero or what have you. If you have fewer than 3 characters, don't use the lower values (ex., if you have just two characters because it's a 5-player game, you will have a Fate 2 and a Fate 3 character—your exile).

Col. Giacomo has a fate of 3. He is his player's Exile.

Soliloquy and Aside: Check off these boxes when your characters perform those actions. Each character gets one Soliloquy and one Aside they may use during the game. (*see Special Actions in Act II*)

Applause: Each time a character wins applause, check off the applause track. This will determine who wins the game.

Players take turns creating characters one at a time and announce them to the group so that Oaths may be interconnected throughout the cast in fun and interesting ways. For example, one character might want to find his lost son, while another wants to prevent this, and a third IS that son.

Act II

How to Perform Your Play

Curtain Up, Begin Scene

Now that you have your cast, the Bard can set the scene. Though there is no "Storyteller," it is up to the Bard, who changes from scene to scene, to provide roleplaying prompts to start things off. Randomly decide who will be Bard first. After that, the responsibility rotates clockwise after each scene. The action of the play can take place anywhere in the world as long as it makes sense to the players. The default setting, as you may recall, is a castle to which at least some of the characters have been banished, though you needn't set your first scene there. A list of possible settings for scenes can be found in the Appendix.

Example Scenes Set By the Bard:

"Hamlet and Ophelia are in the garden."

"Macbeth stands alone in the throne room."



"Oberon is in the forest yelling at his servant Puck."

From there, the players who control the onstage characters improvise the scene.

At any time, a player may have one of his characters enter or exit (just say "[Character] Enters" or "[Character] Exits"), but no player can have more than one character onstage at a time. You may wish to physically move the character cards on and off-stage (the center of the table) to keep track of who is currently acting.

If none of your characters are onstage and you don't want one to enter, you can have non-player characters enter under your control. This character can be anyone you wish to introduce, from a lowly messenger to King Henry, as long as he is in no other player's cast. These characters never win applause, however, are considered to have Fate 0, and can't deliver soliloquys or asides. You may also introduce plot complications and cues (ex. "You hear the sounds of hoofbeats approaching"), that the other players must react to. It's a good idea to do this if a scene seems to be stalling out.

Ending Scenes

Scenes end when all characters exit, as the players direct, whether they slowly trickle off one at a time, or decide to Exeunt All, Flourish. This should happen naturally, but sometimes might require a push in the form of a cue from an offstage player. Once the stage has cleared, the next Bard then sets a new scene, and the process begins anew.

Special Actions (Soliloquies and Asides)

There are special actions characters can perform that will affect the story in subtle ways: Soliloquies and Asides. Each character may make one Soliloquy and one Aside each game.

Soliloquy: To use your Soliloquy, just say "[Character] begins a soliloquy," and then deliver one! This is a time to trot out your best (over)acting, since players might want to applaud you if you do well.

Soliloquies can accomplish one of three things:

- 1) Foreshadow death of a character (*see Death in Forsooth!*)
- 2) Set the next scene, even if you wouldn't be the next bard. (*Example: "I'll take this note straight away to Lady Iggles, and convince her to have Jacques beheaded!"*)
- 3) Swear a second Oath. At the end of the game your character gets an extra 2 applause if he kept both his Oaths, but loses 2 applause if he breaks either.

Aside: Characters can add secret information to the scene or contradict information established by another character by delivering lines as an aside. For example, if Polonius is behind a tapestry, unseen, and Hamlet wants to spot him, he might say "Aside: Mark that interloper quivering behind the tapestry!" Polonius is then spotted, and Hamlet can do as he will with this information, unless Polonius uses his aside to counter ("Aside: Luckily, I know that Hamlet will not betray me!").

Resolving Conflicts

Other than through asides, players should liberally use the “Yes, and…” philosophy of improvising their scenes, so if someone says “The stars are out,” one should not reply “No, they’re not,” but mayhaps rather “Aye, and I’ll warrant it’s an ill omen for the Queen’s nuptials.”

That being said, disputes will inevitably arise. If players can’t or don’t want to use an Aside, yet a conflict persists, compare the Fate scores of the characters in conflict. The higher wins, simple as that. In the case of a tie, The Bard has the ability to break it. The only exception is death.



Death in Forsooth!

No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church-door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve: ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man.

Romeo and Juliet, Act 3, Scene i

There comes a time in any character’s life when he decides to draw his sword and run a knave through. Or run himself through. Whatever. How do you accomplish this, when murder is considered so rude in most circles?

Any character can foreshadow the death of any character by using his soliloquy. Thereafter, in a later scene, any character can kill the marked-for-death character at any time. Characters can also kill themselves offstage in between scenes, as long as

it’s been foreshadowed. Characters who die get the chance to have a “death scene” in which they can gain applause from the other players for the dead character, which still qualifies for winning the game.

In a pinch, any player can at any time say “I kill [character name]” as long as they are in a scene together, even if their death has not been foreshadowed. However, this opens up options for the character you are killing.

- 1) The player says “You have killed me!” He then gets to enact his death scene, and possibly win applause.
 - 2) The player says “I fight back and escape wounded.” He immediately exits, and cannot bring on a substitute character from his cast.
 - 3) The player says “And I kill you.” He dies, but kills the attacker in the process, and they share a death scene.
- Other players applaud whoever they thought was better. You may also applaud your killer if you wish.

Dead Characters

If a character dies, he is not necessarily out of the game. He will still come back at the end to take his bows, and possibly earn more applause. Dead characters can still win the game despite being dead.

In addition, players can have dead characters enter scenes as ghosts. For gameplay purposes, ghosts act just as live characters, can deliver soliloquies or asides, win applause and so on. Each player may introduce only one ghost per game.

If all of your characters are killed and the game does not seem likely to end soon, you may create a new character, or make a character card for a previously introduced minor character. The Fate of a character introduced in this way is always 1, but otherwise he or she is exactly like any other player character.



Messages

In Shakespeare, news is often delivered by message. Players are welcomed to introduce new information in this way. You can have a messenger bring news of anything you can think of.. And if you can’t think of anything, you can use a stock message from our List O’ Messages.

Alternatively, you can put yourself in the hands of the gods. Choose a message from the list at random and deliver it! You receive an extra applause chip (to award to another player, not for one of your characters) for your trouble.

Each message on that list includes a happening and a character nature. It’s up to whoever delivers the message to decide which character it refers to, and to embellish the action in a way that makes sense in the context of the play.

(Example: Jane draws the message “a fool has been spotted.” She declares that Lord Quarto, the Foolish Tyrant, has been spotted down by the river with Lady Triana)

If there is no character in the game that fits that nature, treat it as a wild, and name any character you please.

Act III

On Earning Applause and Winning the Game

Pause for Applause

*Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 5, Scene ii

Fact: All actors crave applause. In Forsooth!, applause help you win the game. At the end of each scene, each player applauds the character of his choice, and the character's controller marks that applause on that character's sheet. You cannot applaud a character you control. You should applaud the character you think roleplayed the best, or amused you the most, or did something noteworthy for the plot... whomever you think deserves recognition. Consider also stating why you are giving out your applause, so the other players know what you like and what you don't like.



Additionally, each player starts the game with 4 applause chips to award to other players' characters at appropriate times. If you haven't given away all your applause by the end of the game, any leftover chips are worth -1 applause for all your characters.

You can award extra applause:

- 1) When a character exits
- 2) When a character dies
- 3) After a Soliloquy

Note that it is the character, not the player, who earns the applause. It is possible for two different characters controlled by the same actor to earn applause in the same scene. Applause totals are also theoretically hidden; you never need to tell an opponent how much applause you have. Strategically applauding the character who you believe has the least applause (and hence is least likely to win) is considered unsporting; you should applaud with your heart, not your head.

Ending the Game

The play continues on, scene by scene, until all of the Exiles (Fate 3 characters) are either Married or Dead. At the end of the scene where the last Exile dies or is wed, the curtains close and the play is over. There is then a Bows Round in which each player will award two last applause to the character or characters he felt did the best, whether they be alive or dead.

Two characters, one Forsworn (who broke his Oath) and one True (who kept his Oath) with the most applause both win the game. It is possible for one player to control both winning characters. If this happens, he receives a Standing Ovation.

Roleplaying Tips

Players are encouraged to have as much fun playing their characters as possible; after all, this is a game and meant for fun. It is encouraged that players make an effort to speak with Shakespearean flourishes, but it's not necessary that all characters speak in perfect Elizabethan English at all times. Characters aren't required to suddenly break out in iambic pentameter, though if they did, this would be very impressive, and almost certainly deserving of applause.

What do I do if I can't think of what to say?

It's not essential that everything you say be perfect, witty and worthy of Shakespeare, so just say whatever comes to mind. Still drawing a blank? You can call "LINE!" and one of your fellow players will whisper a suggestion to you. You must use whatever suggestion is whispered first.

What do I do if my fellow players are bombing on stage?

If the scene playing out appears to be going nowhere, or the players are grasping for dialogue, feel free to spice things up. You can have a messenger enter, introduce one of your characters, or have a minor character walk in with a knife in his back... be creative. Another option is to use stage directions or cues. Saying "A clock chimes" is a good indication that the scene should probably wrap up, and gives characters a reason to exit.

What if I'm the Bard and don't know how to start a scene?

A scene can start any way you can think of, so just pulling random characters on stage works. If you are really strapped for ideas, you can look at the List of Messages and use one of them as a scene prompt. For example, if you use A Lover Challenges a Tyrant to a Duel, you might bring a lover and a tyrant onstage and try to lead the scene towards a duel, or simply put them onstage with swords drawn.



Epilogue

Appendixes and Supplemental Material

Natures

Here are the natures currently available. For each character, you'll pick two, listing one as an adjective, the other as a noun (*example: Scheming Tyrant*). The order you place them in is inconsequential; a Tyrannical Knave, for example, counts as both a Tyrant and a Knave for all purposes, including messages. You are free to interpret the natures as you choose; they are primarily role-playing cues.

Lover / Loving	Crusader / Crusading
Tyrant / Tyrannical	Thinker / Thoughtful
Braggart / Boastful	Miser / Miserly
Knave / Knavish	Brute / Brutish
Fool / Foolish	Villain / Villainous
Schemer / Scheming	Sophisticate / Sophisticated
Rake / Rakish	Dullard / Dull
Helper / Helpful	Puritan / Puritanical
Moper / Melancholy	(Wo)Man of Honor / Honorable

Settings

Here is a list of places in and near the castle to give you ideas when you're drawing a blank for where to begin a scene.

The Dungeon	The Haunted Meadow
The Great Hall	The Riverbank
The Garden	Apothecary
The Courtyard	A Tomb
The Street	The High Road to Shropshire
Deep in the Forest	The Stables
The Keep	An Ale House
On the Parapets	The Barracks
_____’s chambers	A Woodland Hideout
The Harbor	A Hallway
The Chapel	A Secret Passage
The Arena / Jousting Pitch / Archery Range	The Kitchen

Messages

Here are some suggested messages to reach for when you need a quick plot development. The numbers in front of them are for use when throwing your fate in the hands of the gods. (*See Messages in Act II*) Choose a random number between 1 and 50 in any manner you choose. You could either pluck a number out of the air without looking at the chart, or, if you have dice handy, roll 1d6 and 1d10, using the d6 as the tens-place digit (treating 6 as 0) and the d10 as the ones-place digit.

- 1). A braggart has been captured
- 2). A knave has been injured
- 3). A miser has gone bankrupt
- 4). A tyrant has fled
- 5). A moper is approaching
- 6). A rake has been discovered plotting treachery
- 7). A moper has proposed to someone
- 8). A fool has challenged a to helper a duel
- 9). A thinker needs help
- 10). A miser bids you come to him/her
- 11). A miser is in his/her cups and most wroth
- 12). A miser has been summoned to the King's keep
- 13). A thinker has been ambushed
- 14). A fool has been spotted
- 15). A lover has been captured
- 16). A knave has been injured
- 17). A helper is missing
- 18). A crusader is victorious
- 19). A schemer has fled
- 20). A tyrant approaching
- 21). A schemer has been discovered plotting treachery
- 22). A lover is pregnant or has sired a child
- 23). A rake has proposed to someone
- 24). A braggart has challenged a tyrant to a duel
- 25). A braggart has been defeated
- 26). A thinker bids you come to him/her
- 27). A tyrant in his/her cups and most wroth
- 28). A lover has murdered a (minor non-player character)
- 29). A schemer has been summoned to the King's keep
- 30). A knave has been ambushed
- 31). A crusader has been maimed
- 32). A schemer has been spotted
- 33). A crusader has been captured
- 34). A helper has been injured
- 35). A fool is missing
- 36). A tyrant is victorious
- 37). A braggart has fled
- 38). A lover is approaching
- 39). A helper is plotting treachery
- 40). A rake is pregnant or has sired a child
- 41). A thinker has proposed
- 42). A schemer has challenged a miser to a duel
- 43). A crusader is defeated
- 44). A moper bids you come to him/her
- 45). A moper is in his/her cups and most wroth
- 46). A knave has murdered a (minor non-player character)
- 47). A lover has been summoned to a lord's castle
- 48). A thinker has been ambushed
- 49). A helper has been blinded
- 50). A fool has been spotted

Character Sheets

Name;

Nature;

Oath;

Forsworn

Soliloquy

Aside

Applause

Name;

Nature;

Oath;

Forsworn

Soliloquy

Aside

Applause