

Caliban's Reuenge



*An RPG in One Act
by C. Eleri Hamilton*

The Stage is Set

An empty library...

A single oil lamp flickers beside a large, open tome. The pages rustle and settle, as if a breeze has disturbed them, or the reader left the seat in haste.

If you were to gaze closely, you would see the text waver and blur, shifting into the image of a rocky shoreline, a storm looming just out to sea...and an aged man in robes lays battered in the sand.

"I have done nothing but in care of she,
Of her, my dear one, her, my daughter.
And now she is taken from me
By art greater than mine own
I am struck low, and she gone. "

"Er'e mine arts fade as I go, I employ them now
To call forth some brave souls
and bid them free mine Miranda "

From the image, a strange chanting begins, a silvery blue glow begins to spread. The book shudders, the pages turn wildly

The chant and glow crescendo in a burst of bright sound.

And lying on the sand next to the dying man are several more dazed figures...

Enter the Company

"All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players"
Jaques ~ As You Like It

Thus begins Caliban's Revenge. You, the Player, will take up the role of one of Shakespeare's classic characters, pulled by strange magics from your usual story into the world of The Tempest, where the former Duke of Milan, Prospero, and his daughter Miranda have spent 12 years in exile. Something has gone terribly wrong in the famous tale, and it is up to you & your companions to put it right.

Recommended for 3-5 Players plus a Director. You will need: This booklet with pre-generated characters. Pencils with erasers. Coins, tokens or stones for Cosequence Counters. A standard deck of cards with the Jokers, 8s, 9s and 10s removed.

Choosing a Role

We have provided for you pre-made versions of several of Shakespeare's characters -both men and women- so you can get started playing right away. There's no gender requirements, no expectation of being Laurence Olivier or Kenneth Branagh skilled at Shakespeare- just choose the Role you would most enjoy 'being' for a few hours. If you want to build a Role that isn't there, simple instructions for creating your own are included. Read over the Role's description, and then move on to the statistics, where you will be customizing your character's abilities.

The Nurse: Romeo and Juliet

Juliet's nurse has been with her since she was a baby, and is a doting, mother-hen sort of person. She's not too bright, but not an idiot either, and she does the best she can for Juliet. And while she'll go out of her way to further the cause of Love, she's not above supporting the practical, too. Not quite as jolly as Falstaff, she has that same go-to quality that makes her a confidant and sympathetic shoulder.

Brawn ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **Wit** ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **Bardic** ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Viola: Twelfth Night

One of Shakespeare's favorite tropes, the 'cross-dressed girl in hiding', is realized in Viola. Alone in the world, dressed as a boy for safety, she finds herself caught between her love and loyalty for her Duke, and the pursuit of the lady the Duke fancies. Throw in an appearance by her twin brother, a couple of mistaken identities, and Viola is constantly having to talk her way out of trouble.

Brawn ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **Wit** ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **Bardic** ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Hermia: Midsummer Night's Dream

Hermia gets handed the hard choices, and tries to work out the best solution, even if it means defying people she cares about. She's loyal, and determined, and genuinely hurt when accused of betrayal and mockery. She has a bit of a temper, and does not take comments about her diminutive height well, at all.

Brawn ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ **Wit** ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ **Bardic** ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Lady Macbeth: Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is the epitome of power-behind-the-man ambition. She drives her husband to do things he never would imagine on his own, and once he's fully involved, steps back and lets him dig his own grave. She rails against being a woman, knowing herself equal in strength and character to men. Despite her cold ambition, guilt stalks her and haunts her when she is most vulnerable, driving her to her end.

Brawn ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Wit ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ Bardic ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

Falstaff (aka Sir John Falstaff) : Henry IV I&2, Merry Wives of Windsor

Falstaff is the jolly sort, fat and sassy, often drinking, and full of mirth and puns. He seems almost a court jester, always entertaining the young Prince Hal, and getting him into trouble. Yet, he is also the Prince's confidant and adviser- for sometimes the person who seems the least serious, is the one with the best advice. He is both clown, and unexpected philosopher. Falstaff isn't particularly brawny; he knows which end of a sword to hold, but he'd rather hold a tankard. However, be on the receiving end of his tongue, and you'll find it cuts like any blade.

Brawn ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Wit ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ Bardic ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

Troilus: Troilus and Cressida

Troilus is a young, idealistic man; with all that implies. He's vocally patriotic in his support of the Trojan War, but waffles on if he's going to battle or not. And like many of Shakespeare's young men, he is harshly subject to Cupid's arrows- falling madly in love, and then falling apart when that love is betrayed. Despite this, he is a valiant warrior, and an honorable man. As the son of the King, Troilus is well trained in combat and well educated; he's able to speak with conviction and fire.

Brawn ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ Wit ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bardic ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

Benedick: Much Ado About Nothing

Benedick is the trusted companion of Don Pedro, and has just returned with the Prince from an unnamed war. He is an unrepentant bachelor, and an utter show off; he's always making cutting comments or pithy speeches to show how clever he is. He's not entirely insufferable, just very very sure of himself. All this pomp and posturing just might be a cover-up for his true feelings, including being in love with a woman who can match him barb for barb.

Brawn ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ Wit ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Bardic ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

Petruchio: Taming of the Shrew

Petruchio is a loud, boastful, selfish man, out to get a rich wife. He meets his match in the form of a loud, aggressive, insulting woman. It is hard to say if he sets out to tame her out of a need to dominate, or because he truly likes her. Whatever his motivation, humiliation and out-maneuvering are the tools of his trade, with a decidedly misogynistic undertone. Like all Shakespearean men, he is assumed skilled with a blade, although he only waves it at Kate.

Brawn ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Wit ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ Bardic ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

Getting Into Character

Now that you've chosen a Role, think about how they act in their own play- now imagine them in a completely different setting, with an entirely different story going on around them. How would they act? What will they say and do?

To help this along, and to resolve Encounters, your character has three statistics: Brawn, Wit and Bardic.

Brawn is your character's physical prowess- Are they skilled with a sword? Wrestling? Acrobatic? It also might include how short a temper your character has, or how easily they get their fires lit.

Wit is your character's smarts- Can they think their way out of a situation? Are they clever, sneaky, or wise? Whenever your character wants to use their brain to get out of a situation, this is the skill they use.

Bardic is your character's way with words- How they turn a phrase, if they can talk their way out of anything, or make an off-the-cuff inspiring speech. Anything that needs a clever tongue falls into this skill.

Each character has 5 total Base Points, with up to 3 Base Points in each skill, based on how they present themselves in their home play. These are the filled in circles.

You also have a pool of 6 Flex Points that you can assign to the three stats, for a maximum of 6 points each. Choose where you would like to use those, and mark those circles in pencil.

Romeo has a Brawn Base score of 2 (he is but a teenager, after all), but Player Fred wants to buff him up a bit, so he takes two Flex points and moves them to Romeo's Brawn score. Now Romeo has 4 points in Brawn, and Fred has 4 more points to spend in Wit and/or Bardic.

Once you've assigned Flex Points where you want them, your character is ready to go!

Creating Your Own Character

It is entirely possible to use your own favorite Shakespearean character to play Caliban's Revenge. Just choose a character, write up a simple paragraph about them (or, gasp, grab the Cliff Notes description). Then decide what, based on Shakespeare's depiction of them, their 5 total Base Points in Brawn, Wit and Bardic are. Once you have those filled in, add your Flex Points as you would for a pre-made character.

Character Name

Character Description

Brawn ○○○○○○ **Wit** ○○○○○○ **Bardic** ○○○○○○

Stage Direction: Encounters

Encounters between the Players, and any situations or characters that the Director puts before them, are handled using the Players skills, and a riff off the Elizabethan-era card game 'Primero'.

"I neuer prospered since I forswore myself at primero." Falstaff- Merry Wives of Windsor

The Player decides which skill (Brawn, Wit or Bardic) they are drawing on for the Encounter. The Director then deals (from the modified deck- no Jokers, 8s, 9s or 10s) the Player 2 cards for each Base Point in that stat. *With 2 Points, the Player would be dealt 4 cards, 3 pts; 6 cards, etc.*

They then decide if they are going to spend any of their Flex Points on more cards. They must use the Flex Points in the skill they are drawing on for the Encounter, before their other skills. For every 2 Flex Points they spend, they get 1 card, up to maximum of 10 TOTAL cards. Those Flex Points are erased, and the Player must earn them back through gameplay.

Romeo is going up against a rival suitor in a sword duel- So Fred draws on his Brawn Skill- he gets an automatic 4 cards for his Base Points, and he spends the other two Brawn Flex Points to get 1 more card, giving him 5 cards he can use to build his 4 card Primero hand.

The Player then looks at all their cards, and builds a 4 card Primero hand, based on the point values below. This hand is then placed face down in front of them. While the Player is building their hand, The Director deals out the same number of cards as the player got to themselves, and also builds a 4 card hand, placing it face down. *This is a basic Encounter, special Encounter rules are in the Director's section of the book.*

When both Player and Director are finished, the hands are revealed, and the **highest scoring hand** wins the Encounter. The Primero card point values are as follows:

Face cards **10** points

Aces **16** points

2 through **5** are **10** plus their value, thus a **4** counts as **14** points
6s and **7**s are three times their value, thus a **7** counts as **21** points

Special hands add to the point values of the cards

Numerus is two or three cards of the same suit **+2** points

Primero is one card of each suit **+3** points

Maximus is the Ace, Six, and Seven of one suit **+4** points

Fluxus is all four cards of the same suit **+5** points

Chorus is four of a kind **+6** points

If the Player loses the Encounter- The Player takes a Consequence Counter and places it in front of them, indicating a -1 Point penalty to their next 2 Primero hands; ie, 2 Encounters. After 2, the Counter is removed, and the penalty ends. (A player can have more than one Counter in effect- the impact is cumulative!)

If the Director loses the Encounter- The Director draws 1 card less than the Player in the next Encounter.

If multiple Players are engaging the same Director character or situation, treat each Player as having an individual Encounter.

Recovering Flex Points

Players will never lose or spend their Base points, only their Flex Points. If a Player has used a flex point in an Encounter, then they need to earn it back, by doing something suitably impressive for their character in that Skill.

For example, a Player cast as Henry V might snarl out "I was not angry er'e I came to this island!" and the Director rewards them with a new Brawn point. Or the Player might give an impassioned speech to their fellows, and the Director gives a Bardic point.

In the case of truly epic Shakespearean role-playing or above-and-beyond gaming the Director may give a bonus point to a Player in any Skill. This point is added to the Player's Base Points, can not be spent like a Flex point, and expires at the end of the adventure.

Using these Encounter instructions, your own ingenuity and imagination, and not a little luck, you'll traverse Prospero's island, find the missing Miranda, and return all to where it should be.

Goode Player, read not further! Here there be spoilers!



Behind the Scenes

Directing the Play

Like any play, you, as the Director (game master), will have your hands full; even more so as our version of the Tempest will require you to write the scenes and action yourself.

First, let's review The Tempest:

In this, Shakespeare's last known work, the action centers around the efforts of Prospero, the former Duke of Milan, and his efforts to both gain revenge for his unfair island exile, and secure a future for his daughter Miranda.

Also on the island is Caliban, the part-human son of the witch Sycorax, and Ariel, an 'airy spirit' imprisoned by the same witch. Caliban, despite being raised by Prospero, once attempted to rape Miranda, and was sworn to be Prospero's slave. Ariel was freed by Prospero, only to be bound to his service instead.

Prospero uses his magic to wreck the ship of his brother (and usurper of his throne) Duke Antonio, stranding Antonio and his son Ferdinand on the island. With the help of Ariel, Prospero arranges for Ferdinand to fall in love with Miranda, Antonio to feel horribly guilty for deposing Prospero, and in the end everyone lives Happily Ever After.

Our version of the story, however, is very different.

The Script

Prologue:

The resentful **Caliban** has found a cache of his mother's magical supplies, and has used them to defeat Prospero and kidnap **Miranda** to another part of the island, likely to continue his original plan to "people the island with Calibans".

Prospero, lying wounded on the shore, casts a spell to summon help- which has the unintended effect of drawing characters from other Shakespearean plays onto the island.

Scene 1: The Beach

Our Players wake up on the island, confused and lost. They should encounter Prospero, who is on the brink of dying. Prospero should explain to them what has happened, setting them to the task of defeating his former slave Caliban and rescuing Miranda. The players can attempt to save Prospero from death; however even if they do his magic will be gone, and he is a weak old man without it.

"Now my charms are all o'erthrown, And what strength I have's mine own."

The Players will need to get to know each other, and decide how to go about their quest.

Scene 2: The Island

Soon after setting out, the players should encounter **Ariel**. Ariel is a genderless sprite or spirit of some sort, with magical abilities. He has been treated badly by Prospero, who promised Ariel freedom over and over, if only

Ariel does just 'one more task.' It should be ambiguous to the players, at first, who's side he's on.

With Prospero down for the count, some of the witch's creatures also seem to have returned. Scatter a few of these about the island for the Players to encounter. Any strange and mythic beasts will do.

As they wander the island, the Players should discover clues to:

Miranda's status: Is she hurt? Enchanted? Gone willingly? (Caliban is the only other person she knows...)

Ariel's allegiance: Is the spirit hindering them with magic, or helping them along? What has Ariel told them about Caliban?

Caliban's whereabouts: How do they get to his cave, and how is it protected? The answers to these questions are up to you, the Director.

Scene 3: The Cave

Once the players have discovered how to get to Caliban's cave, they should make their way there- perhaps encountering puzzles, traps and monsters along the way. Once they reach Caliban, will they attack immediately? Or will they try to figure out what Caliban was up to, and if he can be talked out of it?

Other Potential Cast

Stephano: The drunken, scatterbrained butler of the illegitimate Duke of Milan. He's been pulled here prematurely by the same spell that brought the Players. He's not much of a fighter, but he might have overheard something, you know how people ignore the drunk person. Or, being in unfamiliar surroundings, he might be an angry drunk.

Iris, Ceres, Juno & the nymphs: Spirits that Prospero occasionally calls upon for entertainment, with three of them appearing as the classic Goddesses. Prospero was going to use them to distract Miranda and Ferdinand from the idea of the wedding night- who knows what they might do to distract someone? They are nymphs, after all.

Director Run Characters & Encounters

Simple DRCs do not need anything beyond a physical description, and whatever personality or motivation you give them. They will not need individual statistics for Encounters- you will use the 6-card rule explained in the Player's section. Simple DRCs include: Beasts and Monsters, Spirits & Nymphs, and other humans (like Stephano) that might have been summoned to the island. Tailor these DRCs to the storyline you have developed.

Caliban, Miranda and Ariel are more complex characters, they each have Base Points like the players, and these give cards at the same rate as the players- if the Players are drawing on Brawn, so will the DRC, etc. However, because NPCs do not have flex points, their Base points can be a maximum of 5, rather than 3.

Romeo is trying to get information from Ariel, who does not want to tell any secrets. Ariel has a Bardic of 5, so the Director draws 10 cards (2 for each Bardic point Ariel has) to build a hand with. Romeo, on the other hand, only has 2 Base points in Bardic, and no Flex points- so the Player will only get 4 cards. Romeo is going to need a really good hand to get anything out of Ariel!

As with simple Encounters, if more than one Player is engaging the DRC at the same time, each player is treated as a single encounter (complete with deck shuffling between), but the Director loses one card for each loss.

CALIBAN *"You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse."*

Caliban is the son of a witch and an unknown creature. He is very animalistic in nature, and seemingly simple-minded, although he can be very perceptive, and even eloquent. Having found tools of his mother's he has used their power to reclaim the island as his own- the irony that a deposed duke raised and deposed him is not entirely lost on him. He knows he can't be king of an empty island though, so he has taken Miranda to be his queen, whether she likes it or not.

BRAWN:5 WIT:1 BARDIC: 2

ARIEL *"You fools! I and my fellows, are ministers of Fate "*

Ariel was held captive by the witch, and then held in thrall by Prospero, who dangles the promise of freedom- and the threat of imprisonment- before the spirit like a carrot. Like any air spirit, Ariel is a flighty, impish being, if its magic helps or hinders the Players is up to you. Ariel hasn't any real physical form, so it can't do physical damage, or be physically attacked- dealing with Ariel will take more than brute strength. It can, however, easily arrange for physical mayhem to happen to others.

BRAWN:0 WIT:4 BARDIC: 5

MIRANDA *"O brave new world, that has such people in't!"*

Miranda is Prospero's daughter, having been set adrift with him when she was just a toddler. As such, she knows nothing about the outside world, and is incredibly naive. Her reaction to seeing other human beings is likely to be shock, especially if it is a handsome male character. She is not without spunk however, she stands up to her father several times in the play, and has a strong sense of just action.

BRAWN:1 WIT:3 BARDIC: 4

To Encounter or Not To Encounter

It isn't always necessary to have your Players go through a formal Encounter any time they want to do something that involves one of their skills. Just talking to someone wouldn't call for using the Bardic skill, trying to get information that someone doesn't want to give would. Tromping through the forest wouldn't need Brawn, having to hack through a tangled thicket would.

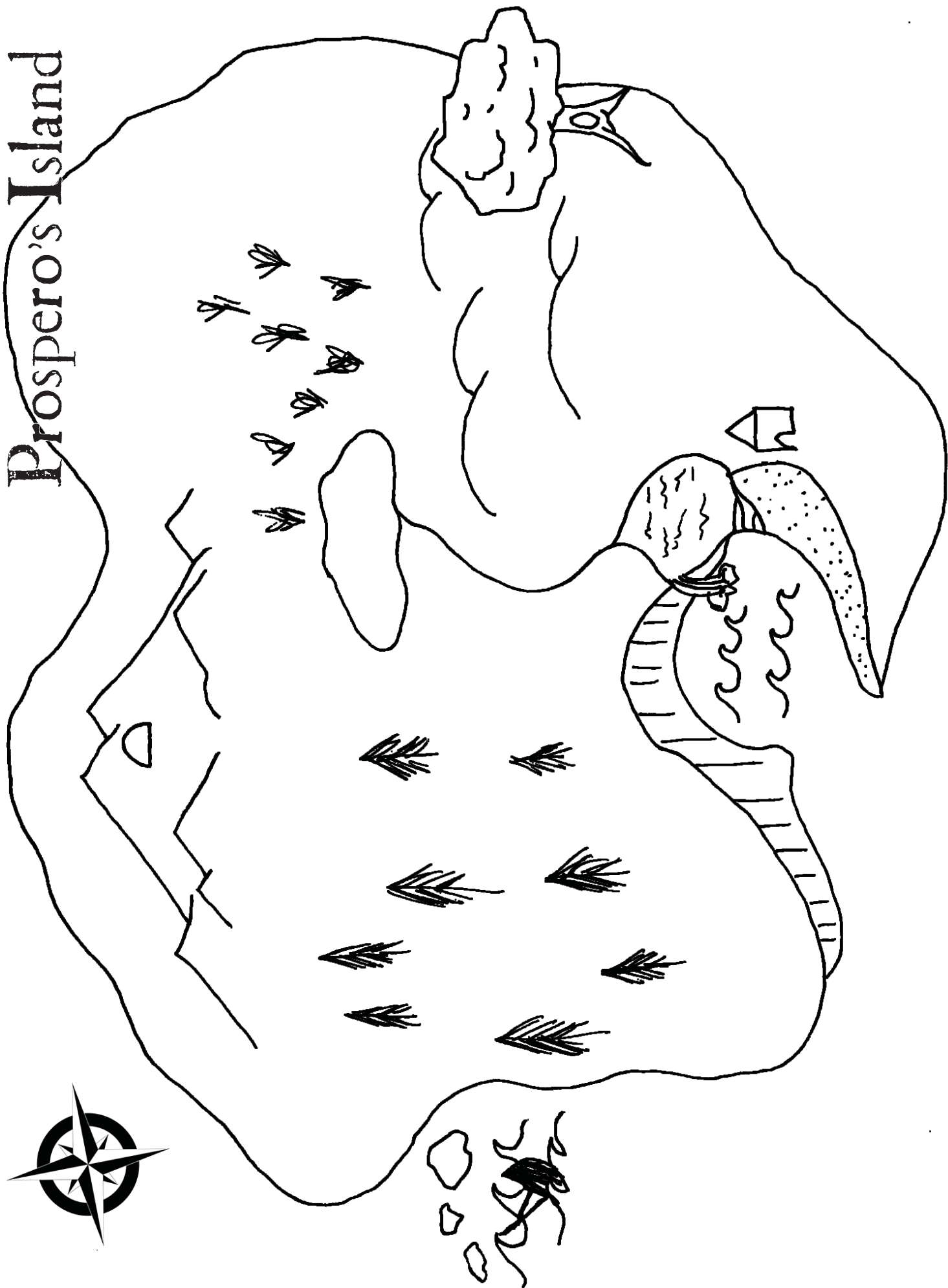
A good rule of thumb is *"How bad to they need it? Does it advance/change the plot?"* If getting through that thicket is vital to the story, or they really need Ariel to do something for them, then have them play out the Encounter. Otherwise, use storytelling and role play to advance the game.

Ending the Adventure

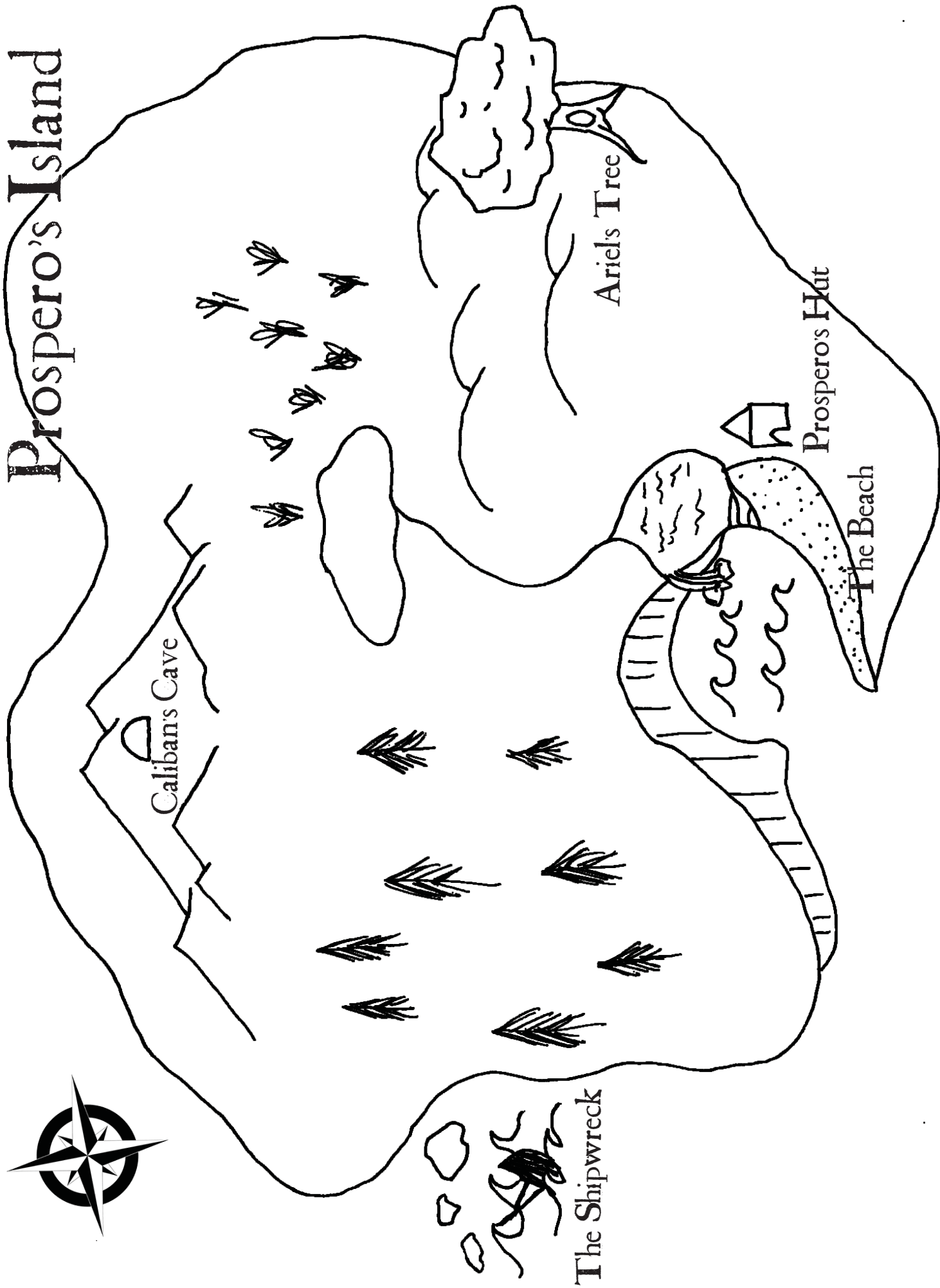
Once your Players have defeated Caliban, what then? Will everything go back to normal? Does Miranda fall madly in love? Will Prospero recover his magics enough to return them to their home pages?

Or will this intrepid band find themselves drawn into further adventures in some other play or literary work? The library is a large place, they could end up anywhere- it is up to you, the Director!

Prospero's Island



Prospero's Island



Variants on a Theme

What we have described briefly here, is certainly not the only direction the plot could take. It could be as complex or simple as you make it. Here's some other directions the story could go:

Scenario 1

Caliban is mentally just a child, and was well and truly mistreated by Prospero. He never did attempt to rape Miranda- Prospero just used that as an excuse to keep the 'misfit' away from his daughter. Finding his mother's tools gives him unexpected, new-found powers, and he lashes out. The out of control magic wounds Prospero and Miranda, who he has frantically carried back to his cave to try and heal. He is desperately hiding from the wrath he expects to come from Prospero.

Scenario 2

Caliban is not the inhuman monster Prospero has always made him out to be. Miranda was attempting to befriend him, despite her father's contempt; Prospero attacked Caliban, but pulled the spell when Miranda moved to protect him. Caliban was wounded and Miranda is in the cave nursing him back to health- the traps protecting the cave are her doing.

Scenario 3

Ariel is behind it all, and has maneuvered it to place the blame on Caliban, whom he has trapped in the cave with Miranda. Now that he has his freedom, he's not taking any chances.

Scenario 4 (For the really out-there and complicated!)

The entire thing is a plot by Shakespeare's contemporary and rival Christopher Marlowe. Before his death, he gained the help of the magician Jon Dee and cast a spell that would ruin all of Shakespeare's works- for some reason the spell hasn't activated until now.

These are just a few of the possible iterations of the plot- the core idea is that characters from other Shakespearean works are now in the world of the Tempest, and need to find out what has happened to Caliban & Miranda. From this, you could build your own unique back story.

Beyond the Island: The Primero System For Other Games

Primero was an Elizabethan-era card game that bore many similarities to modern poker, or other games that use a system of bidding on who has the best hand. For the purposes of Caliban's Revenge, only the modified deck, the scoring system and the hand size of 4 cards was used. The addition of the player statistics- Brawn, Wit and Bardic (ie, Physical, Mental, Verbal skills) determined how many cards the player could have to build their 4-card hand with. The more cards, the better chance of building a high-scoring hand.

To use the Primero System in your own game, *(which you are free to do, a dash of credit would be appreciated)*, you only need the deck, the Encounter system, and the basic statistics.

Statistics & Character Creation:

The core information for a character is the statistics- everything else is gravy, and can be as detailed or simple as you like; but you will need to know your character's PHYSICAL skill, MENTAL skill and VERBAL skill. Each of these will have up to 3 Base Points. For example, a very brawny but shy fighter character might have a Base PHYSICAL of 3 and a VERBAL of 0.

Once you know your character's Base points, you then have 6 Flex points you can use to pad out those scores, up to a maximum of 6 total points in each skill. So our quiet, burly fighter might now have a Physical of 6 and a Verbal of 2. These points will be used to determine how many cards you will have to draw on to build your 4 card Primero hand during an encounter.

The Physical, Mental and Verbal stats are only the bare-bones of possible statistics. You could easily add a Magic, Dexterity or Stealth stat. Each stat you add will have up to 3 Base Points, and three more slots for Flex points. For each new stat, add 2 points to the player's Flex point pool- If you add Magic and Dexterity to the core 3, players will have a pool of 10 Flex points to spend.

Encounters:

You will need a standard deck of cards, with the Jokers, 8s 9s and 10s removed. This is your Primero deck. As explained in the main text, Encounters are resolved by pitting the player's Primero hand against the GM's.

For the Player:

Decide which skill (Physical, Mental, Verbal) you are drawing on for the Encounter. The GM then deals the you 2 cards for each Base Point in that stat. Without looking at those cards, you can then decide to spend Flex points to get more cards. You must first spend the points in the same skill that you are using Base points from, then you may draw on other skills. For every 2 Flex Points you spend, you are dealt 1 card, to a maximum of 10 cards. You then use those cards to build the highest scoring 4-card Primero hand possible.

For the GM:

If it is a Simple Encounter: ie any generic monster, minion or situation, deal yourself the same number of cards as the Player has, and build a 4-card Primero hand.

If it is a major monster, NPC, or critical situation you will need to assign the NPC Base points, just like a regular PC. However, because NPCs do not have Flex points, their Base points can be a maximum of 5, rather than 3. So an NPC with a Physical of 5, would have 10 cards to work with.

BUT, there is a drawback- if your NPC is going up against multiple characters, each player is treated as a single Encounter- the deck is shuffled and new cards dealt. For each loss your NPC has, you lose one card in your pool. So when that monster with the 5 physical gets beaten by the first player, you only have 9 cards to work with next time.

Major NPC points refill after every battle (with multi-player Encounters as above counting as 1 battle). Unless there is a compelling role-play reason not to. If the PCs cut off your NPC's arm, he's not going to have a Physical of 5 anymore, will he?

Once the player and the GM have their hands built, place them face down, and reveal them at the same time. The highest scoring hand wins the Encounter; the scoring rules are in the main body of this game.



THE TEMPEST.

References, Resources & Credits

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Ariel- An Illustrated Shakspeare Birthday Book, 1883



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