SYCORAX WANING: An Introduction
By Russell Norris 2011

What’s the High Concept?
Sycorax Waning is an imagined prequel to William Shakespeare’s The Tempest. It borrows
key characters from the play and introduces several new ones of its own. Written in modern
English, this graphic novel works as a standalone tale without prior knowledge of The
Tempest. Readers who go on to enjoy The Tempest, however, will be able to revisit Sycorax
Waning and see it in a whole new light.

Why a prequel?
Sycorax the witch is a fascinating character (see the Character Profiles). She never actually
appears in The Tempest and is dead long before the play begins, but her “presence” is keenly
felt throughout it. Shakespeare leaves Sycorax’s background tantalisingly vague, neatly
summing her up in 30 lines or so. But it’s this brief backstory – and the repercussions of
Sycorax’s past actions – that go on to define the central dramas of The Tempest.
When I first read Shakespeare’s short and ominous description of Sycorax, I saw the bare
bones for a powerful story already mapped out i.e. what really happened on an enchanted
island before the characters of The Tempest were washed ashore on it? The basic structure of
this prequel has, in a sense, already been set up: Sycorax Waning is my attempt at fleshing it
out and bringing it to life as a graphic novel.

What’s the story “really” about?
Please see the Plot Outline for a detailed breakdown of the storyline. What’s “really” going
on in Sycorax Waning, though, is a mixture of the following:

- An examination of motherhood and the “nature vs. nurture” argument.
- A reworking of the infamous character Medea from ancient Greek myth.
- Reflections on immortality, punishment and the thin line between good and evil.
- Pagan worship and the enduring legacy of the Greek and Roman gods.
- My own answers to some of the enigmatic questions raised by The Tempest.
- The literary tradition of “parallel fiction” i.e. a new story told within the framework
  of a classic piece of literature. Examples of this genre include Rosencrantz and
  Guildenstern are Dead (a modern play that parallels Hamlet) and Wide Sargasso Sea
  (a modern novel that parallels Jane Eyre.)

What’s the structure?
Sycorax Waning is divided into nine segments (eight chapters and an epilogue). Each chapter
begins with a quote from The Tempest, covers a year of time and mirrors one of the eight
lunar phases of the moon: New Moon, Waxing Crescent, First Quarter, Waxing Gibbous, Full
Moon, Waning Gibbous, Last Quarter, Waning Crescent. The idea is that we are witnessing
the final rise and fall of Sycorax: in the latter half of the book, she is metaphorically “waning”
like the moon when it recedes from view… and by the time the epilogue arrives, she is dead.

When Sycorax Waning ends, the storyline of The Tempest is poised to begin. I’m hoping
that readers will then be encouraged to read the play, as much of it will “echo” with the
prequel they’ve just finished.