Cottington Woods 2 Player's Guide
Part One: Character

"Once Upon A Time, in the land of Farraway, there was Cottington Woods."
-unknown Patron

Cottington Woods is a fairy place.

That isn't the same as a fairy tale place, though it has its share of those. Fairies are terrifying creatures, and the woods reflect those ancient masters. Here you'll find the heroes of the tales, though not usually as you might expect. The Riding Hoods search for danger in the deep forest. The Jacks, nimble and quick in service to the King of Farraway, are constantly on the watch for plots within the Houselands. The cold-hearted elves from Greencloud are at war with the cunning goblins of UnderMarsh. Here things go bump in the night. It is the world of Mother Goose, but also of the Brothers Grimm, with Mary Shelley and a hint of Bram Stoker to keep you on your toes.

The Wood seems to exist smack in the middle of the entire world. Fairy mists reach out to all manner of places, distant and near, past and future. Mysterious goblin "door" magic makes it possible to go almost anywhere instantly. And there are the Ways, hidden folds on the map that can be sometimes found and traveled, if the traveler would risk them closing behind him. And at the center of the woods is Cottington, a tiny hub where the people of the woods gather for trade and news and sometimes hidden purposes.

Here, where the people gather at the Cotting House, are the stories waiting to be told. Warm fire and the boundaries of the Cotting House hearth keep away the dark - and, they say, the dangers deep in the less traveled corners of the Woods. Here is where your story will begin.

Out of Game Notes on Cottington Woods I: The Evil Fairy Queen:

Beginning in August of 2012 and ending June 19, 2016, the Evil Fairy Queen campaign told the story of the attempts made by Baeldannen, the Evil Fairy Queen, to take control of the lands of men. Baeldannen was ultimately thwarted and imprisoned in a genie bottle, then placed on ice in the enchanted glass coffin that the Cottings use to keep the food fresh in the Cotting House kitchen. In Tales, that bottle was stolen and thrown into a volcano in Fairy.

Out of Game Note on Tales from the Cotting House:

Tales from the Cotting House was set ten years after the events of the Evil Fairy Queen campaign. Tales was a collection of short stories tied loosely together by the tales of the various Cotting Ghosts, all of whom were trapped within the Cotting House by an ancient ritual that was, in the final Tales event, unmade. With a single exception, no plots from the original campaign carried over into Tales.

Out of Game Note on Cottington Woods II: The Final Tale:

The Final Tale immediately follows the events that occurred in the Tales, the only time passing being the time that passed in real ™ life. We've kept it simple - to determine the in-game date you need only add ten years to the out of game date. Thus, if game begins on August 28 of 2020, the in-game date is August 28, 2030.

If the Evil Fairy Queen campaign was a trilogy, and Tales from the Cotting House was a collection of short stories, The Final Tale will be our epic conclusion told over the course of three and a half years. The events of the past two games will provide a historical backdrop against which the new tale will begin, but with a few exceptions there will be no plots carried over from the past two games. Returning players and their characters will know about the world, but they will have no other advantage over new players or characters.

Plots in Tales were not meant to be any longer than a single event, but The Final Tale is a campaign. We will continue in our tradition of always having a title plot, or a plot that begins and ends during the same event so that you will always have a plotline that you can resolve within a weekend, allowing new players or players who miss events to not need prior knowledge and still accomplish something. But for the most part plots will be longer in duration, allowing players to really sink their teeth in.

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A Note on Our Plot/Story Style:

We really enjoy making deeply interconnected stories that also weave into player and NPC backstories. This helps with the "small town" feel of Cottington, but also deepens connections between players, NPCs, and the plotlines we – and you - create. Your character histories DO matter, as do the NPCs you write into them. We may not use everything you write, and we may take it in unexpected directions, but we WILL draw on your character history.

This is not to say that every plotline is connected to one another – they are not – but neither are plotlines "sandboxes" with no connection to one another. What it does mean is that you may find out clues and information about one plotline in a seemingly unrelated plotline, so it is important to talk to one another and share information. We like to encourage players and communities to come together and work together; while there may be times you should not reveal info to a particular NPC, we will rarely if ever have plotlines where we expect PCs to keep knowledge *from each other.* (In fact, Priests have skills *to encourage knowledge sharing*.)

This also means that **details matter**. We acknowledge that we aren't perfect and that we do make mistakes (and we will inform everyone if one was made), but we do everything we can to ensure that everything goes out is *relevant*, even if only minorly so. If you are wandering the woods and come across some "wandering pain" but are being attacked by something out of the ordinary, that is actually information about something going on. For example, in our original campaign, the PCs once were misled by a villainous NPC to attack a tower that they were told had been enchanted by the Evil Fairy Queen, but rather than fighting Redcaps, Mischievous Sprites, and other minions that would fight for the Evil Fairy Queen, they were instead attacked by Dryads, Treants, and Will-o-Wisps. This was an intentional clue that the Tower had been enchanted by the Guardian of the Woods, not by the Evil Fairy Queen.

We aim for a bit of the "Sixth Sense" feeling: enough information that you *can* figure things out but might not, hopefully giving you that "ah ha!" moment when it all comes together and you see that you *could have* solved it and had all the pieces to do so.

Content Disclosure

This is a game based on fairytales, folklore, urban legends, stories and more. While there will absolutely be moments and plotlines of silliness, frivolity, and light-heartedness, many fairytales are dark, and Cottington often looks to twist those dark tales in unexpected ways. Thus, some story matter may be disturbing and may contain elements of trauma, systemic and personal abuse, mental illness, self destruction, addiction, the horrors of war, and other difficult topics. We strive to keep our game "lighter" than many mature LARPs in the area, but we do expect to touch on some difficult subject matter from time to time. Wherever possible, we will warn you if a particular module or encounter will have difficult or potentially triggering content. We have also created an in-game skill to "Nope" out of any encounter with no in- or out- of game consequence.

Add to the Immersion; Don't Detract From It

Take the game world as seriously as it is presenting itself at the time. Do not take actions that take away from the gravitas of a situation, especially where it would negatively impact the enjoyment of other players or NPCs. There will be moments of absurdity in Cottington for certain, but there will also be moments where terrifying things occur. Staff will do what they can to make things as terrifying in-game as possible, and we ask that you immerse yourself in the experience and refrain from using infantilizing nicknames for scary things, refusing to be affected by what's going on (unphaseable characters unfortunately don't work well in LARPs), or otherwise detract from the scene.

Ask yourself: Is my roleplay increasing the fun of the people around me? Am I raising up the roleplay of others and contributing to the collective experience in a positive manner? Is my roleplay adding to the emotion of the scene or detracting from it? If we all strive to be immersive and to consider the fun of one another, player and npc alike, we will all walk away having an amazing experience.

Code of Conduct
"Be Nice."

This is the heart of our intentions and policies at Cottington Woods, and it is our expectation that every player, NPC, and Staff member embody this policy as well. We expect everyone to treat everyone with respect on an out of game level.

  For example, if someone disregards an attack, give them the benefit of the doubt before yelling at them in combat. If you feel it is egregious or they are cheating, step out of combat and find a Staff member.

  If you have a disagreement with another player, before you confront them, ask yourself if you would appreciate and/or be receptive if the same was given to you. If not, then moderate your approach to be respectful.

  If an insult your character would make would offend someone on an out-of-game level, consider a different insult that can be taken entirely in-game. We do not tolerate the use of slurs or language stigmatizing mental health, non-neurotypical, or disabilities. Per Core Accelerant rules: "*Abusive language or actions are not tolerated, whether they are in game or not. Language or actions that are derogatory or that are deemed to be harassment are not allowed. References to explicit sexual behavior or concepts, particularly violent ones, are not allowed. In game threats should be worded so they are clearly in game.*"

  When providing feedback in PELs, understand that there are real people who worked hard and slept little to try to bring you a bit of fun, and so coach feedback in a respectful manner.

In short, BE NICE.

Have Fun, Be A Good Sport.

We want everyone at Cottington to have fun. We realize that this is not always obtainable, but it is something we very much desire to have, players and NPC/Staff alike. We hope to tell an engaging and entertaining story, one where we expect the Players to have agency to influence the stories told and to create their own that take us by surprise.

  We therefore expect everyone to take on the responsibility of ensuring that not only they are having fun, but the players, NPCs, and Staff they are encountering are likewise. If you are NPCing/Staffing, remember that you are there to entertain the players. If you are playing, remember that the NPCs are volunteers giving of their time to entertain you, and show them courtesy for this. Players or NPCs who consistently push boundaries, cause problems, or deliberately impede other's enjoyment of the game may be asked to leave.

Harrasment Policy

All attendees are expected to treat others with respect. Physical and verbal harassment and sexual assault will not be tolerated, period. LARPing can be an intense activity, and the staff wishes to provide a safe environment for players, NPCs and staff alike, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sex, sexual orientation, disability, mental illness, neruo(a)typicality, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, nationality, or any other factor.

Harassment is generally any behavior that annoys, alarms, or threatens another person or group, whether it occurs at in person or online. This includes (but is not limited to) unwanted or inappropriate physical contact, following someone around without their consent, threatening to physically attack someone, offensive verbal comments, display of explicit images, deliberate intimidation, unwelcome sexual attention, and online harassment or hate speech. If you approach someone and they tell you "no" or to leave them alone, you must do so immediately and have no further contact. If you fail to honor their response, they may have a legitimate complaint of harassment.

We do not tolerate harassment in any form. Period. Game participants violating these rules may be given formal warnings, expelled from an event without refund, or banned from the campaign entirely, at the discretion of staff.

If you experience harassment or if someone is making you uncomfortable, or you believe you have witnessed harassment against another, please inform John Mangio, Michelle Mangio, or Alysha Hosford, so we can handle the problem. You may send an email to harrassment@cottingtonwoods.com to reach us directly and immediately with any issues. **We care deeply about creating a welcoming and safe community.**

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Accessibility

LARPing by its nature is a physically demanding activity that also requires one to remember a lot of rules and information. We understand that this is not accommodating to a number of people, and strive to make our game more accessible and accommodating.

We have two standard classes that can allow those for whom physical accessibility is a concern, and whose skills are largely By My Voice or By My Gesture: **Bard** and **Architect** Path under Sandman. Both of these can play support or combat roles, or a combination of both. Additionally, the **Hearth Witch** role is centered around healing and support in central gathering places.

For those who do not wish to participate in combat, we have a section on Non-combatants and rules to support them.

We print copies of character sheets for players at the beginning of game so that you do not need to remember all of your skills, or have the means of making your own copies. We allow you to use a phone or tablet device to access information or skills during the game, but we do kindly request that you try to use a case or cover for modern devices to make them appear more in-game. If you do not have a case or cover, let us know, and we'd be happy to loan ones for the event.

We include two skills to help as needed: our "Nope" skills (Having the Miasma) and our "Bathroom" skill (Answering the Call of Nature). The first allows you to opt out of any encounter, for any reason, from not feeling well, to needing to practice self-care. You do not need to explain yourself; you may just leave and everyone in the game will respect and support your need to do so, no stigma attached. Bathroom skill allows you to travel by spirit to the bathroom, allowing you to leave any in-game situation or bypass any dangers. You may also use this to get needed medications, food, or water from your cabin.

We cannot always control the accessibility of our campsites, but we will work with you to make the facilities and the content of our game as accessible as possible. However, please keep in mind that this IS still a boffer combat LARP and physical challenges will be a normal part of the gameplay.

If you have need of accommodation tbeyond that which our current rules and policies provide, please reach out to us at staff@cottingtonwoods.com. We respect and protect the privacy of our players, and will not share any medical or other information provided to us except in the extreme situation where your life may be on the line (for example, you inform us that you have a peanut allergy, someone accidentally gives you something with peanuts in it, and we need to call 911 to save your life).

We also welcome feedback and suggestion on how to make our game more accessible.

Pronouns

We kindly ask that you do not make assumptions about the pronouns of a player or of a character/NPC, unless you know with certainty or have been told their choice of pronouns. If you do not know the preferred pronouns of an individual, please use they/them.

Physical Contact

Cottington Woods is a no physical contact game. This is core tenant of the Accelerant Rules Systems, but it is worth repeating. You may not touch another player unless they have explicitly given you permission to do so. Undesired physical contact is against both the rules and the policies of the game.

Representation and Appropriation

Cottington Woods embraces diversity and inclusiveness, and our stories draw their inspirations from the folk and fairy tales from around the world. While the Houselands is largely Euro-centric, we seek to incorporate the beauty of legends from other cultural backgrounds. Some members of our staff are BIPOC, including white-passing

Indigenous, and seek to connect to their diverse heritages through the incorporation of NPC characters and storylines from those heritages. Further, we seek to bring the diversity of non-European stories into our game as best we can in a careful, considered, and respectful manner.

For players and NPCs who likewise seek to celebrate their heritage, we encourage you to work with staff to do so, and we encourage you to explore your heritage and the stories that belong to them. That being said, we respectfull ask that if you are not BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Color) that you do not seek to play a BIPOC character. We will not question you if you decide to do so – that is not our job, nor do we want to make assumptions about your racial, cultural, and/or ethnic background. This is not a perfect solution, but we ask you respect the BIPOC members of the Cottington Community by adhering to this request.

However, we do not stand for appropriation in any manner. We recognize that this is a complicated and nuanced topic in fantasy games. While you make take inspirations for costuming from other cultures, we ask that you do so in a respectful, non-appropriative manner, and that you do not use sacred, religious, or culturally important costumes or artificats as props. We do not allow black-face, brown-face, or yellow-face. We consider engaging in racial stereotyping behaviors as harassment and do not tolerate it.

If you think something you might be doing is offensive, error on the side of "it might be" and not do it. If you have any questions or concerns, you may always reach out to staff.

Sobriety and Campsite Rules

Cottington Woods is an alcohol, tobacco, and recreational drug-free game. Usage of alcohol, tobacco, or recreational drugs on site, or playing while impaired or under the influence of such substances, is grounds for an immediate and permanent ban.

You are expected to follow Campsite or other Event Space rules and insurance requirements and local laws with regards to alcohol, tobacco, and fire, as well as all other concerns communicated by Staff during Pre-Game Briefing.

Community Values

Our community – Staff, NPCs, and PCs – has members who have chronic, invisible illnesses, have chronic, visible illnesses, are neuro-atypical, are LGTBQ+, are POC. We represent a diversity of thought and being, and where an individual may not be one of those things, they are expected to support and respect those who are. We are imperfect, but we strive to be and do good, and we collectively care deeply about the community we have here.

The Golden Rule may be a fairytale, but it is one we uphold: Do unto each other as you would have done unto you. Be nice. Be respectful. Love one another. Be the good you want to see in the world.

If you join Cottington Woods, know that are joining a community who all strive to be and do good while having fun together, and that we expect the same from you in return.

We do not tolerate hatred or harassment of any kind, full stop.

We reserve the right, without notice, to remove players violating our values from our community. Our priority is to maintain a safe and inclusive community, and we hold ourselves equally accountable to being the change we wish to see in the world, requiring constant vigilance, work, learning, and action.

2   Table of Contents

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1   Introduction

> *"Into the Woods without delay, but be careful not to lose the way.*
> *Into the Woods, who knows what may be lurking on the journey?"*
> *-Stephen Sondheim, "Into the Woods"*

The Cotting House sits in the middle of enchanted Cottington Woods, where it serves as a meeting place and the center of commerce for landholdings and craftsmen throughout the community. The House rests south of Collamoor and Asylum, north of Farraway and Halfway, east of Greencloud and west of UnderMarsh. Travelers from and to any of those places pass by the house each day. So far neither the High King in Farraway nor his reluctant vassal, the King of Clubs have laid claim to the tiny town, but it's young yet, and hasn't attracted much attention.

The surrounding woods are home not only to humans, and more distantly to goblins and to elves, but to the Fair Folk as well. And while it's wise to avoid fairies, or at least step carefully around them, in Cottington Woods it's just not possible. Some Fairy are friendly, but some are Monstrous, and there are whispers of the dangers in the dark regions of the Woods where few dare to go.

The characters of Cottington Woods are those settlers whose will it is to make the tiny town thrive, and to do so they will have to overcome many obstacles, not the least of which is the Spirit of the Woods itself. Our players will explore fairy tales and fables in their darkest form. Wait, fairy tales? Don't for a second think that Cottington Woods is a game for children. The earliest stories were written as warnings of things to avoid.

Herein, there be dragons!

Back to the basics.
- Player characters are mostly human. While Brer (animals), Golems, Elves, and Goblins will be allowed, the number of characters of those types will be limited and require Plot Approval to play.
- Classic character types. We have fighters, rogues, magicians, priests. We also have witches, sandmen and Men of Science.
- Damage is low. Health is also low! This extends not only to the player characters, but to the adversaries they will fight.
- Skills are reusable frequently, but the number of actions in an encounter is low. The focus is on managing your skill use in a single battle, not over an entire weekend.

That small town feel.
- The townsfolk are encouraged to seek solutions to their own problems, since asking for aid will often come with a price.
- The characters will fill the major roles about town. Cottington is theirs, and they can develop it in the way they choose. They should be mindful of the King's Law, of course.
- Each character is required to declare an occupation. Is he a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker? Cottington is a small town, and cannot afford to support those who do not help to support it.

Games within Games
- The Merchant Board -- Occupations equal influence, and influence allows a character to vote on the direction the town will grow.
- Not every challenge will be won by spell or by sword. Things here like to play, and they make up the rules. Expect to swing or throw, but expect as well to miss a turn, or play a card, or move a piece across a board.

Fairy tale influence
- Because Cottington Woods takes its inspiration from Fairy Tales, its morality is more polar than you would find in the real world. Good and evil deeds alike have profound impact, and the wicked will find that their dark deeds will have a true toll on their soul. Remember, in fairy tales, the hero often loses when they do an evil deed or succumb to temptation, but is rewarded in the end when they do the right thing.
- Characters in Cottington Woods may be the common people dealing with uncommon circumstances, but they are still encouraged to ultimately be Heroic. This is a fairy tale, after all. Being good does not mean you have to be pure - the best tales are ones with struggles, internal as well as external, and a bit of internal strife and actual flaws makes things interesting. We will not, however, reward evil behavior, and characters that

fall or become "wicked" should not expect to be able to continue playing their character. Staff will not mitigate the consequences of being villainous.

- That said, the oldest fairy tales are dark. They deal with morality and difficult choices and sometimes with the fact that doing the right thing sometimes means some bad things have to happen. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. Sometimes you will lose, but when you win, it is because you earned the victory.
- We hope to challenge you, terrify you, bring you to tears, and make you shout with joy.

Interwoven Stories

- In an effort to keep that "small town, small world" feeling, we do try hard to interweave character backstories into the fabric of the world and make them central to our plotlines. We can't promise we'll always succeed in doing this as well as we want, but it is our goal.
- We do not play a "sandbox" style game: this means that plots can be interwoven and often are (though it does not mean all plots are connected). You may find that the Magician taking you to learn about ritual magic is the person unknowingly being hunted by a villain in an entirely different plotline. Or the letters you find hidden in one module hold the key to figuring out where a PC's father is being held prisoner. We thus strongly encourage players to talk to one another and share information. (We will do our best to put information out in multiple ways, however, to ensure information is learned.)
- This also means that everything in our game has a purpose. While we may put NPCs into a mod to provide some challenge or a fight, the TYPE of creatures you find and why they are there are always relevant. If you learn that a villain always has redcaps protecting them, and you go to what you think is the villain's tower to find the Treants and Dryads associated with a friendly PC, this is a clue about what is really going on.
- We strive for a "Sixth Sense" style of plot: the information is out there so that you can piece together he was dead all along, such that if you were to watch it again, you would wonder how you didn't figure it out the first time.

This is your story, too – Live it Up (Be Immersive)!

- Remember you are surrounded by many other stories, and many other characters. Take the time to learn their stories and be a part of it. This includes NPCs: they each have their own backstories and their own motivations, and we encourage you to engage with them as you would PCs.
- We encourage you to ask yourself: Is my roleplay increasing the fun of people around me? Do what you can to add to the immersive experience of everyone at the game.
- Create a story for your character, and don't forget their struggles and goals and flaws. We encourage people to take on flaws that create interesting stories. Some of the most profound PC stories in Cottington Woods centered around characters learning to overcome their fears, or who fled from something that terrified them and how they handled the consequences, or who struggled to find themselves worthy of being loved. Allowo your characters to have emotional growth. We, as Staff, very much enjoy the internal stories of your characters as much as the external quests you may undertake.
- Roleplay, roleplay, roleplay! Let your charact feel fear and be willing to run away, if the situation warrants it.
- Do not create a character who is "impervious" or has "seen and done it all" and thus would not be emotionally affected by what happens to them. Unphaseable characters detract from everyone's enjoyment, as LARPing very much is a forum to immerse and experience the stories around you. We want you to experience the emotional growth of your character in the course of play.
- Please do not do something because you believe "plot wants you to." This is your story, and we want you to make the choices you believe your character would make.
- We encourage you to be proactive. Please let us know of the things you want to do, so that we can support them in the course of the game! If you want to have a party, or start an in-game contest, please do!
- Our goal in Cottington Woods is to tell a story where you, the player, have much agency and influence in the direction we will go. As returning players from Cottington Woods can attest, we often do not write the ending to plotlines, or write multiple endings and still toss them out when players do something unexpected. While we do have stories we want to tell, we especially want to be able to tell YOUR tale. We believe strongly in collaborative storytelling.

3   Character Creation Overview

"Every man's life is a fairy tale written by God's fingers"
~Hans Christian Andersen

Step One: Concept

We are pretty open about what we will let you play, but we insist that every character has a plot approved character history. To help with the flavor of the game, we suggest strongly that you decide on a concept before considering skills. "I am a sword and board fighter" is far less interesting than "I know the beast that killed my little sister is still out there somewhere, and I *will* be ready!" Remember that this is a game influenced by fairy tales. Your concept should be influenced by them as well.

Step Two: Occupation

What does your character do to support himself? Characters in the Cottington Woods game are not required to pay a maintenance fee. However, each character must declare what he does to support himself.

Your first occupation is free. Each level after the first must be purchased using character points, but offers the character additional in game funds at the start of each weekend event.

Step Three: Race

You are human.

Some few of you may be brer and golems, which are both considered human, but are different, and generally considered less than men.   Even fewer may be elves or goblins, creatures once of fairy. Because we are going for a specific, human-centric feel for Cottington Woods, we are limiting the number of brer, and severely limiting the number of golems, elves, and goblins. All require plot approval to play, and we will only accept a brer, golem, elf or goblin character concept from a player if a fully human concept has been submitted as well. Please, don't be discouraged if your sub-human character concept is not approved.

Step Four: Culture

Without exception, all characters are from the Houselands (which includes Woodlanders and Wanderkin). Several cultures are available that may influence your appearance and the way your character acts. Don't search for a culture on the world to fit your needs. If you don't immediately see one, just ask. If it isn't on the map, we can probably add it. The Written World is vast.

Step Four: Headers

 Choose your header or headers. Consider the skills and flavor you want for your character. Be mindful that while taking multiple headers opens up more skills, it reduces the amount you can do with each header.

Step Five: Purchase Skills

Choose skills for your character.

4   Character Concept (Character History)

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it.
Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."
--Howard Thurman

You are a character out of legend. While not Snow White or Peter Pan, your story may be similar. Instead of Cinderella you may be more like one of the stepsisters, or even one of those enchanted mice. Design your character with as rich a background as you wish, and we'll be flexible with what we will allow. This is a game about stories, and you should feel free, within the limits of the game world, to write your own.

Character concepts may be submitted in any format (bullet-points, outline, story format, journal, essay, etc.). Character concepts may be of any length, but should answer a few basic questions:

Who are you?
- Names are important, as are professions and skills. But you are more than a name. Who are you really?
- Don't name your character Jack or Jackie. The Jacks are an organization in the Houselands, and that would just be confusing.
- Don't make your character a Prince or Princess. Also, you are not the heir to the throne of Farraway or the Prince of the House of Diamonds. Cottington is a story about common men and women dealing with the uncommon.
- Children form the foundation of many fairy tales and fables, but we ask that you play a character that is at least believably close to you in age. After all, you see what you see.

Where are you from?
- Without exception, all characters are from the Houselands (including the four Houselands, the city of Farraway, Cottington Woods, and the Wanderkin).
- Though you must be from a Houseland, several cultures are available that may influence your appearance and the way your character acts. Don't search for a culture on the world to fit your needs. If you don't immediately see one, just ask. If it isn't on the map, we can probably add it. The Written World is vast.
- Cultural clothing from distant places is allowed. With roads and water routes, the Ways, the Mists and even goblin Door Magic, traders have covered the lands. Consider, however, that Cottington is a working community. It's very possible you will find yourself crawling through passagesor running through the woods.

Who are the people and what are the moments that had an impact on your life?
- Who is your family? Your mentors? Your friends? Do you have rivals or enemies, and if so, who are they? Are they alive or dead? If alive, where are they now (do you know)? Who are the people that had an impact on your life, and why?
- What are the events, and who are the people, that changed or influenced the trajectory of your life? It could be as simple as a kind (or harsh) word that led you down a different path, or it can be as life-altering as the death of a loved one, a failure, or a personal quest.
- You don't need to write a long history, but think of the people and the moments that led your character to be who they are, feel the way they do, have the loves, desires, fears, and ambitions that they have. Now tell us about them!

What motivates you or drives you? What goals do you have?
- Your story should be incomplete. If your own personal tale is done when the game begins, you won't have room to grow.
- Don't forget your struggles and desires and flaws. We encourage people to take on aspects that create interesting stories and allow for characters to react emotionally and grow in the course of play. For example, If your character is struggling with their fears, be willing to run away or huddle in a corner in terror from the Monster that has creeped into the room.
- We have an occupation system in place, which acts as a money skill and replaces any need for a maintenance fee. Generally speaking, however, the folks who live in Cottington Woods are not rich.

- Do not create your own religion, civilization or culture.
- Our apologies, but player characters cannot be Jacks, Riding Hoods, Grimm Brothers or monks. That will probably change through gameplay.
- You may have been a soldier or a mercenary, but you are not one now. Cottington is not currently at war, and not many characters therein can afford the services of a mercenary. When threatened, the people in Cottington Woods generally pick up their torches and pitchforks and face the threat themselves.
- **Please read the Introduction and Chapter 16, which addresses Ethical Concerns!** Characters in Cottington Woods are encouraged to be "good" and ultimately to be "heroic". They do not have to be "pure", and a bit of darkness can always make things interesting. But we will not reward evil behavior. Don't play evil.

Why are you coming to Cottington (and why would you stay?)
- You have come to Cottington for a reason. The default reason we provide is to schedule your business with the other members of the Cottington Woods community, but you are welcome to come up with your own.
- Come to each event with a goal or goals that you can accomplish on your own. Don't be disappointed if those goals are not met, since every other character will have goals of their own, and they may be counter to yours. It's a good idea to give your character a reason to interact with other characters, as well as be interested in many things.
- We'll have encounters for you to join or things to overcome, and we'll attempt to spread those encounters around, but having your own agenda will make sure you always have something to do. This is a game about stories, and you should feel free, within the limits of the game world, to write your own.
- If you consider being part of a group or team, you could be part of a single homestead, or it could be a collection of tradesmen traveling together to town.

How would you face the uncommon?
- Cottington strives to tell the tale of the common people faced with the uncommon. Consider: how would your character react to the uncommon? What would you do if you heard a cry for help in the dark woods?
- What do you fear? Loathe? Love? What are you curious about?
- What do you think of fairies, and what would you do if faced with one?
- What of monsters that once only existed in tales your parents told you as children?
- What are the lines you would never cross? What are the ones you would, and for what reason?
- What does your character secretly (or overtly) strive to be? What do they hide from the world, and what do they show? Do you like yourself? Why or why not?

Consider the following:
- Demons are anathema to the Word. Anyone who sees them will desire to destroy them or flee in terror. You don't bargain with them or summon them to gain power. They are an evil, destructive force.
- Fairies are rarely "nice" just to be "nice." Even the "kindest" of fairies will generally expect something in return.
- Don't worry if we ask you to change something. **This just means we care and want to incorporate your history into the world and our plots**. I promise you, we likely loved what you wrote, but want to weave it more deeply into our stories.
- We are happy to answer questions, provide insight, and give advice on concepts, game world, history, culture and more. We very much wish to work with each player to create a character you will enjoy that will fit in with and also influence our game world and stories. Reach out to us!

Please inform us:
- If there are things you've put in your history that you do not want Staff to do something with. (For example, your father died in your backstory, a pivotal moment that shaped your character's life, but you do not want Plot to write a plotline where your father comes back from the dead. Please tell us this!)
- If there are things in your history that your character doesn't know, but that you as a player want Staff to know. (For example, you as the character only know that your fiancé was murdered and don't know by

whom, but you as the player inform staff in your history that he was actually murdered by your brother because you want that to be a tension point later on if and when it is revealed).

Returning Characters (from CW1 or Tales)
- If you played in Tales, your character was caught up in the Change Winds of the Fairy Mists. This can serve as a reason why your character's skills and abilities will change coming into the campaign.
- If you played in the original Campaign but not in Tales, you can be caught in the Change Winds if you wish, but the passage of 15 years – and whatever adventures or not that occurred in the interim – can easily explain why your skills have changed. Think of something you learned 15 years ago but have not used in all that time; knowledge and skills do fade over time without active use. Please consider writing a character history "addendum" for this campaign that spans those intervening 15 years. Make new adventures

New Players/Characters
- The events of the past two games will provide a historical backdrop against which the new tale will begin, but with a few exceptions there will be no plots carried over from the past two games. We will do our best to not give Returning Characters an advantage over New Characters or New Players.
- Plot Staff is available to answer your questions and help you create a character history that is interwoven into the world and stories. Please reach out to us at character@cottingtonwoods.com with any questions.

The Change Winds
- At the end of the Tales campaign, the Change Winds of the Fairy Mists swept through Cottington Woods. Players – whether returning or new – can choose to be swept up the Fairy Mists and/or affected by the Change Winds. The Change Winds are "an often invisible force or phenomena thought to be fairy in nature that causes "odd things" to occur." If you want to make changes to your character (class, profession, etc) or want an explanation as to why you are "less powerful" or "forgot skills," the Fairy Mists/Change Winds and/or the passage of time are a good reason!
- Returning Tales characters do not need to be stuck in the Fairy Mists for the ~2 years between the end of Tales and the start of Cottington Woods 2. You could, for example, have any of these things happen:
  - You find yourself swept up, but when the winds die down are back at the Cotting House, with only a few minutes passing. You can then write up what you've done over the next ~2 years.
  - You find yourself back at the Cotting House thinking only a few minutes have passed, but it's REALLY BEEN ALMOST TWO YEARS. (i.e, you're going to start the first event of the campaign as if the last event of Tales had just happened. This is a great option if you don't want to write more history between games, or want to explore what's happened while you were away).
  - You find yourself stuck in the Fairy Mists for ~2 years, and you write up some adventure(s) that occur in that time. Or maybe you don't remember!
  - You step out a few minutes/hours/days/months later, but you instead find yourself in <PLACE>, where that place could be anywhere in the Written World. You then have an adventure(s) finding your way home again.
  - Whatever other possibility you come up with that you want to submit as your history going into Cottington Woods 2
- For new characters, you could also choose to have your character swept into, or step into, the Fairy Mists (you could think they are normal mists and not realize what you've stepped into) if you wish. You'll emerge from them at the start of the game.
  - This can be a good option if you cannot think of a reason why you are coming to Cottington Woods, but you should consider why your character might *stay* once they are there.
- We are more than happy to have conversations to help flesh out what has happened in the intervening years (or, for new characters, flesh out full histories and connections) and answer questions you might have: drop us a line at character@cottingtonwoods.com.

Have fun with it. We're pretty open about what we will let you play, but we do insist that every character has a plot approved character history before we'll allow you to play.

5   Occupations

"It's what I do, darlin'"
--Capt. Malcolm Reynolds

Every character must declare an occupation, which determines what the character does to maintain his style of living. The occupation takes the place of a maintenance fee. It is free – the player does not have to purchase it with character points.

You should choose an occupation that makes sense for your character. For instance, don't choose Magician as an occupation if you have no magician skills. On the other hand, having a skill does not require that you choose an occupation that uses it. For instance, you could pick the armorsmith skill and not choose armor smith as an occupation.

Generally speaking, an occupation is a role-playing tool meant to add flavor to your character. Use it to support the small town feel we are striving for in the Cottington Woods game. The Brave Little Tailor, the Butcher, the Baker or the Candlestick Maker, the Shoemaker, these are all examples of occupations that appear prominently in fairy tales.

The first occupation does not grant the character any skills or money in game.

Occupation Levels

The first level of occupation is free, but it offers nothing in the way of benefit beyond the role-playing option. A player can purchase additional levels, which grant extra coin or equivalent at each full weekend game event as well as an influence marker for use on the Influence Board when it appears. This is our money skill.

- Additional levels can be in the same occupation as the first. This could represent a degree of success which allows the character to make more money, or an expanding client base.
- Additional levels can be in a different occupations. The character could for instance, be a rancher who gains a second plot of land and plants crops on it. He could be a tailor who decides to start making armor.

In any case, the effect is the same. The character benefits from the added coin at each event. If we present plot that targets a specific occupation (it could happen) then a person could benefit from any occupation he has purchased.

Selling Back Occupations

You may decide that you wish to "sell back" levels of an occupation, in effect forgetting that level and getting back the character points you spent in it. We will allow this to some extent. You cannot sell back the first level of an occupation, since that level represents the knowledge you have learned in order to perform that job. You can sell back any additional levels of an occupation, however. Thus, a person with three levels of farmer could sell back two levels, but not the last level. Barring unusual circumstances, he's stuck with it.

A person who knows two different occupations may sell back any additional levels, but cannot sell back the first level of either.

List of Occupations

Header Occupations

Some headers make appropriate occupations. Being a Priest of the Word is pretty much a way of life. A wood witch could create and sell potions, while a hearth witch is sought for her healing. Magicians cast spells that have all sorts of effects.

Examples: Magician, Priest of the Word, Witch, Man of Science.

Craftsman Occupation

A person who builds or repairs things is a craftsman. Tales are full of craftsmen, a well-known example being the short but sweet tale of seagoing adventure featuring the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker.

Examples: Smith, Leatherworker, Herbalist, Carpenter, Baker, Wine maker, Shoemaker.

Service Occupation

Servicemen perform tasks to make a living. A bartender serves drinks, a courier runs messages, and a Town Crier delivers news.

Example: Bartender, Courier, Fortune Teller, Chef, Healer.

Landowner Occupation

Landowners tend to land all around the woods. Each level of the landowner occupation represents a different unit of land. Landowners might also take the role of team leaders, with the other team members working for him.

Example: Farmer, Rancher, Miner

Entertainer Occupation

We encourage folks to entertain. The Cotting House will always be open and there will be time set aside for folks to sing or tell stories or dance. The master of the Cotting House will always pay for folks to entertain.

Playing an entertainer should be a role-playing choice. Unlike other occupations, however, it might be best to play an entertainer only if you decide you want to entertain.

Example: Singer, Storyteller, Dancer

Restricted Occupations

Some occupations are more appropriate as part of a character's history rather than as a current occupation.

The soldier is a good example. While there will be plenty to fight in Cottington Woods, the game is not about professional men at arms, and at least in the beginning Cottington cannot support them.

Mercenaries areless appropriate. It is less likely that person in peril would be seeking to hire help than it is that he would simply be seeking it, and very few people in the woods could afford to pay the price for a person to put his life on the line. Don't pick an occupation that will force you to avoid plot. If adventure comes looking, it will always seek the lowest bidder. If your character requires money to be part of the Cottington community, you'll eventually have to look elsewhere for work.

No player can be an Innkeeper. The only inn in town is the Cotting House, and that inn is owned by Vigo Cotting. He does, however, employ a large staff, and PCs are very welcome, encouraged even, to join that. If that is your goal, please speak to us to work it out.

Lastly, our economy is world driven and not solely affected by the actions of the player characters. While PCs can buy and sell things on the small scale, they are not general merchants. They could claim butcher, cobbler, or bee farmer, and sell meat or shoes or beeswax, but a character cannot have a far-reaching merchant business. We do encourage players who wish to do so to be small merchant characters - in the original Cottington Woods campaign, we had characters who were Bakers and sold baked goods; sold Honey; sold Fortunes; sold trinkets; etc. If you sell In-Game items, we will make every effort as Staff to support it with some NPC attention as we are able.

Example: Soldier, Mercenary, Innkeeper, Merchant

A note: The Cotting House is the gathering place of the Campaign. It is run by the Cottings, who are NPC characters. However, if you wish as a Player to help run the Tavern (and thus have your occupation be Bartender, Cook, Tavern Help, etc) please contact us about doing so.

6   Player Character Races

Human

"The human race is governed by its imagination."
--Napoleon

Humans are the most common of the races on the Written World, and are the race against which others are measured. They require no racial makeup, no special costuming and no role-playing guidelines.

Humans in Cottington Woods can come from one of the four Houselands, from the city of Farraway, or from Cottington Woods itself. Be sure to read the cultures section to determine which of these locations best suits your concept, though keep in mind that the culture section is a guideline only.

Humans in Cottington see themselves as one race, and while there is a beautiful diversity of physical and non-physical differences among Humans, they do not see this as a point of division but rather embrace it as part of the wonder of the story written by the First Patron. (*OOG Note:* Human racial divisions and bigotry as they exist in our real world do not exist in the world of Cottington, and any human displaying such racism would rightly be seen as wrong and villainous in the context of Cottington Woods).

It is Humans who truly embody the power of the Written Word, and it is said that it is their story that the First Patron set out to write. As they are grounded in the Word, they are more easily able to resist the madness of the Anathema.

Out of Game Stuff:
    Racial Make-Up Requirements: None
    Racial Abilities: Resist Madness, once per event (free); ability to purchase Culture skills
    Racial Disadvantages: None
    Roleplaying Requirements: None
    Other Notes: All non-brer and non-golem human characters have the Human, Living, and Mortal Traits.

Important Note on Sub-Human Character Concepts
    We have a very specific vision for the Written World, and part of that vision is that the world is very "human-cetric". No sub-human concept will be considered for any player unless that player also submits a normal human character concept.   As a guideline, consider that of every ten player characters, seven will be human, two will be brer, and maybe one will be a golem. We are very willing to work with folks to make their characters as interesting as possible, but on this point we must be strict.

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Human, Golem

"I want to be a real boy!"
--Pinocchio

Parents sometimes go through extraordinary means to bring children into the world. Consider the case of Pinocchio, Tom Thumb, the Scarecrow, or the fact that we know what happens when you combine frogs and snails with puppy dog tails. The result is a golem -- a created man. Each golem must have a unique creation story. Don't stick with the tales you know, since somewhere in the world, those tales have been taken.

Golems are not gargoyles or robots. As such, they are no less vulnerable than any other human character. The exception is the toughness of their skin. Golems can purchase Golem Armor. Though they are never entirely made from stone or metal, they could be made of wood or earth. If it is appropriate for the golem to be armored, and if a character purchases Golem Armor, he must wear make-up or costuming that makes the armor obvious. In any case, a golem character must always look fabricated. His skin could be painted like bark, or pale like snow, or ruddy and rough as if he was made from clay. The exception is green. A golem cannot be green, since he might then be mistaken for a goblin.

Not always, but often, golems contend with a desire to be more. They are almost human, but really they are not. Their strange look and sometimes strange, not-quite-human behavior sets them apart. They are acutely aware of this.

Golems do not start with the skill to read or write, but they can purchase it with character points.

Golems are extremely rare, and as such we will severely limit the number of golem characters allowed into the game. All golem characters require plot approval.

Out of Game Stuff:

Racial Make-Up Requirements: Makeup/masks and/or costuming that makes the character look fabricated. Cannot be green (as would confuse with Goblins) or animal-like (as would confuse with Brer).

Racial Abilities: can purchase Golem Armor

Racial Disadvantages: Must purchase Read/Write skill to be able to read and write.

Roleplaying Requirements: They are not quite human and should act accordingly.

Other Notes: All golem characters have the Golem, Living and Mortal Trait.

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Human, Brer

> *"All animals are created equal but some are more equal than others."*
> *--Animal Farm*
> *"I could not help myself. It is my nature."*
> *--the scorpion*

Long ago, animals changed skin freely. This practice became less common over time, but the evidence remains. Brer are animals. They walk and sometimes talk like men, and they dress in men's clothing, but they are still animals. It is easy to pick out a brer from any crowd, as every brer has some physical feature or features distinctive of their animal type. They may have a black wolf's snout and ears, a fox's bushy tail or a head of feathers in place of hair.

Most any type of normal animal can include brer, but most common to Cottington Woods are bears, boars, dogs, foxes, geese, crows and wolves. Brer players are required to roleplay as the animal they are. Please don't play a brer goose if you do not want to act like a goose, or if you are not prepared to be treated like one. Forget what animals usually are likeand play up the stereotypes. A pig is usually unkempt. Geese are silly. Dogs are loyal. Oh, and watch out for camels. They spit. Crows and ravens are thieves, and worse, they like dead things. It's also fair to remember that, in tales, wolves are portrayed as the bad guys more often than not, and so they will be viewed, at the very least, with suspicion. If you consider playing a brer, it is best to ask plot if the animal you wish to play is acceptable.

No brer can claim natural armor or any other type of protection derived from his animal type, but some brer can use the natural claws they were born with. When a player decides to play a brer, it should be obvious if his animal type would have claws. If so, that character would have access to the Skills: Short Claw, Two Claws and Clawed Reach. All brer have access to the Skill: Speak with a Specific Animal Type, which allows him to speak without limitation to any animal of his type. Brer are NEVER literate. Again, to be absolutely clear, BRER CANNOT EVER LEARN HOW TO READ OR WRITE.

Though not as rare as golems, brer are far less common then pure humans. We will limit the number of brer allowed into the game. All brer characters require plot approval.

Out of Game Stuff:

Racial Make-Up Requirements: Mask and/or makeup and/or costuming to appear as an animal

Racial Abilities: Speak to Animal Type (free), can purchase Claws, Two Claws, and Clawed: Reach skills. May gain access to other skills for their animal type.

Racial Disadvantages: Cannot Read or Write, and therefore cannot play Priests, Magicians, or learn Man of Science Schematics

Roleplaying Requirements: Role play as the animal they are, and play up the stereotypes as portrayed in Folklore, Fairytales, and Nursery Rhymes.

Other Notes: All brer animals have the Animal, Living, and Mortal Trait.

> **A note on wild brer:** While all brer are animals, some are more like animals than others. PC brer are always of the sort that walk like men, and of course they always dress like men. Talking like men is optional. The vast majority of brer do not talk like men and are as wild as the woods they live in. If an animal is met in the wild, even if it walks upright, it is best to treat it with caution. Consider the scorpion.

> **A note on playing wolves:** We all love wolves, but wolves in fairytales are often villainous. We allowed PCs to play Wolves in our first campaign, but this caused a lot of strife between some of the players and challenges for the PC playing a wolf given that people (rightfully so) mistrusted wolves. As such, and because our goal is to have a community working together as a band of heroes, we have decided not to allow wolves as a PC race in Cottington Woods 2.

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Marsh Goblins

"We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."
- Walt Disney

Goblins are green-skinned, amphibious humanoids. They are sometimes twisted or hunched, and are considered unattractive by non-goblins. Goblins are regarded as mischief makers, in fact goblin magicians are called tricksters, and goblins rarely find welcome into any non-goblin settlement. Goblin magic is known to bend space, allowing goblins to pass quickly from place to place, and this service is sold, usually at a price, to non-goblins.

They inhabit swamps and fresh water coast lines in every corner of the Written World. Bracken is the nearest goblin settlement to Cottington, and is about a day's walk away, on the border of a widespread bog called UnderMarsh. As caravan's pass through and do business with Bracken quite regularly, most people from outside have no need to visit the place. Humans are welcome there, but they find it less than hospitable, as only about half of the town is accessible above the cold swamp water.

Goblins are very curious, often to a fault, and thus sometimes have little aversion to risk. They have a poor sense of boundaries by Human standards and occasionally take things that belong to other people if they have need of it. Because they have this reputation of stealing, they are often viewed with distrust and few people will let a goblin into their home.

All UnderMarsh goblins share a deep racial hatred of elves, and there are no exceptions to this rule. The two races are antagonistic towards each other, and meetings between them often come to blows.

At the north edge of the forest stands Mount OverMarsh. Once the capitol of UnderMarsh, contact with the mountain was interrupted about thirty years ago. As goblins are not long lived - the oldest being about thirty to thirty-five years - there are none who recall with clarity a time when Mount OverMarsh was open and free. Further south is the Gobaleen Mountains, and the Goblins there still have some violence with people along the borders of the Diamondlands.

While goblins as a race have no exceptional talent at blacksmithing, the metals and jewels they mine from deep beneath the earth is usually of high quality. It is said that Mount Overmarsh was a marvel to behold.

Out of Game Stuff

Racial Make-Up Requirements: Green skin and, sometimes, gills. Costume requirements - Goblins do not care at all about the quality of their clothing, given that most fabrics cannot handle well the continued soaking that an amphibious life entails. Most goblin clothing it tattered or worn.

Racial Abilities: Can purchase Amphibious (Goblins can breathe as easily under water as above), Standing Out, Stepping Out, and Goblin Magicians (Tricksters) gain access to Goblin Door Magic

Racial Disadvantages: Vulnerable to Aging

Role Playing Restrictions: Goblins hate bright sunlight, as it dries their skin and makes them cranky. This is a role-playing restriction, and does not confer any penalties.

Goblins are curious and have a poor sense of boundaries. Since they occasionally take things that belong to other people, they are viewed with distrust, and very few people will let a goblin into their home.

Racial Hatred: Goblins hate elves. There is NO exception to this rule.

Other Notes: All Marsh Goblins have the Goblin, Living, and Mortal Trait.

> If you are considering playing a Marsh Goblin, please contact us before putting effort into your character backstory so that we can work with you on the concept. There is information about Marsh Goblins and their culture that will not be shared unless you are playing one.

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Wood Elves are not allowed as a PC race, but are included here for completion:

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Wood Elves

> *"The Elven people believe that preservation of the land and all that lives and grows upon it, plant and animal alike, is a moral responsibility... every Elf is expected to devote a part of his life to working with the land... where(ever) the need to do so is found."*
> — Terry Brooks, The Elfstones of Shannara

> *"Mythology was littered with people who meddled in the affairs of elves & fairies and were never again heard from"*
> — Thomm Quackenbush, Artificial Gods

Elves are the ageless inhabitants of the far corners of the Wood. They are considered to be proud and aloof, often snobbish. They tend to avoid contact with humans and other short-lived races. Elves have a very strong tie to nature and can often speak with animals. They favor the use of craft over faith or magic, though they are not restricted from being magicians or priests, and believe they have a duty to the Woods in which they live.

The nearest elven settlement is Thornwall, nestled in a protected valley to the east of Cottington. Beyond Thornwall is Greencloud, the secret homeland of the elves. Thornwall is as deep into elven lands as a non-elf has ever gone, and all elves will protect access to this place. Even in Thornwall the elves insist that non-elves stay as far away as possible and leave as quickly as possible. No non-elf has ever set eyes on the lands beyond Thornwall, and all non-elves are unwelcome there. Attempts to gain access to Greencloud are met with denial and then violence. The elves do not fool around with this.

Elves typically do not approach human settlements, and on the rare occasions that they do, they never stay for long. They view non-elves with poorly concealed disgust, and it is well known that the touch of a non-elf is disgusting to an elf. This constant distance is also evident in how elves fight – they choose to wield bows and to kill from a distance.

Without exception, to the very last elf, they absolutely hate goblins. The two races are antagonistic towards each other, and meetings between them often come to blows.

Out of Game Stuff

Racial Make-Up Requirements: Pointed ear prosthetics. Costume requirements - All elven PCs are required to have leaves or a leaf pattern worked into their costuming.

Racial Abilities: Can purchase Speak with Animals, Speak with Plants, Speak with Minerals, Bow Affinity, and Seeing through the Glamour.

Racial Disadvantage: Vulnerable to Aging

Role Playing Requirements: Elves are obviously uncomfortable in the presence of non-animal things that age, as if they are disgusted by being near them. Some elves believe that aging is a disease that is very contagious and that has no cure. They will almost never touch something that ages, with the exception of the trees that age as slowly as they do and the creatures and plants residing with Greencloud and the Old Wood, which are touched by the Fairy Mists.

Elves tend to be proud (believing themselves to be superior to mortal races and favored by the Spirit of the Forest) and have a strong sense of honor. They have strong ties to nature and believe it is a moral imperative to care for the Forest.

Elves who have left Greencloud and would be among the people of Cottington have done so for a reason that is beyond mere curiosity or exploration. Please discuss further with Plot.

Racial Hatred: Elves hate goblins. There is NO exception to this rule.

Other Notes: All Elves have the Elf, Living, and Mortal Trait.

> **We have decided not to allow Elf Players as part of Cottington Woods 2,** and there is no exception to this rule, so please do not contact us asking to be the one exception. We decided that as a player race, they would likely detract from player fun (theirs and others) and that we did not want to require players to roleplay deep-seated hatreds amongst themselves. Roleplaying it as a PC to a when-they-show-up NPC is another matter. As we already have PC Goblins returning from Tales, the decision was made to continue to allow Goblins, but not Elves.

7 Cultures Around the Written World

"Back where I come from there are men who do nothing all day but good deeds.
They are called phila... er, phila... er, yes, er, Good Deed Doers."
--the Wizard of Oz

There are four local human lands, and two local non-human lands. Human, brer, and golem player characters may come from any of the four Houselands, from the city of Farraway, or from Cottington Woods itself. Goblin players are always from UnderMarsh, and elf players are always from Greencloud.

In addition to the four Houselands, UnderMarsh and Greencloud there are several cultures from around the world. Cottington Woods exists in a special place, and there are lots of comings and goings. Traders travel all over the Written World and discover all sorts of exotic things, and somehow these things often find their way to Cottington. Characters cannot originate from any of these distant lands, but they could be inspired by the cultures found there. That said, we'd like to maintain a small town atmosphere.

Below is a very general overview of the lands.

The House Lands

The four House Lands border Cottington Woods to the north and south, with the Clubs to the north, and Diamonds, Hearts and Spades to the south. These three southern lands surround the city of Farraway. Each house land is ruled by a king or queen, who in turn, at least in theory, is subject to the rule of the High King in Farraway.

Collamoor, the House of Clubs

North beyond Cottington Woods, the House of Clubs is removed from the other House Lands. Clublanders place great emphasis on strength of arms and on physical prowess. More so, they value one's ability to be productive. Farmers are no less valuable than the militia. Clublanders are the most down to earth and practical of the Houselanders, disdaining the Hearts as full of fluff, the Diamonds as twofaced and shallow, and Spades as arrogant busybodies. They are often sought as bodyguards and protectors. The Clublanders sponsor the annual Games, and their fighting school is considered the best in all the lands, such that other houses often send their own to study there.

If there is a reason that the Clublanders fight so well, it is because they fight often. They are under constant threat from the Frostwroth barbarians to their north, and it is a rare winter when those barbarians - or the Frozen Dead of the north - do not attack somewhere along the Clublander coast. Collamoor boasts a large number of standing troops, but even so they cannot be everywhere, and those who live farther away must be ready to defend themselves when the barbarians attack. Clublanders take pride in knowing they defend the rest of the Houselands from the Frostwroth, but feel some resentment that they get little support from the other houses.

There is some small resentment against the Clublanders as a result of their involvement in the war against Baeldannen, the evil fairy queen, when King Roderick Collamoor was ensorcelled by Baeldannen and sent his army to take Farraway City, Asylum, and northern Woods. That war was short and it was, after all, many years ago, and King Robin Collamoor and Queen (and High Princess) Virtue Farraway have done a great deal to make amends.

The Collamoor colors are green and black, often with a black club on a green field, though sometimes the colors are reversed.

(*Collamoor takes inspiration from Scottish, Germanic, Scandinavian and Russian/Slavic fairytales and folklores*).

The House of Diamonds, Westall

Diamondlanders are shrewd businessmen who place great emphasis on material wealth. They are very much about appearance and position, and often display both in complicated games of intrigue. No one throws a party like a Diamond. While Diamonds often appear on the surface as benevolent, beneath the surface is often found a heart as cold and unforgiving as their namesake. Diamonds love to make deals, though be careful what deals you make, because a Diamond will hold you to your end. Diamondlanders tend to look down their noses at the other Houses. They are well aware that they are the wealthiest, and flaunt that wealth. Many great Men of Science workshops and guilds are found within the Diamondlands, as well as some universities.

They see Clublanders as "brutish and boorish;" flashy dueling is more the Diamondlander style. While many Diamondlanders sponsor the artisans within the Heartlands, having great appreciation for their work, Diamondlanders see Heartlanders as easily manipulated and foolish for putting more value on love and friendship than on wealth, power, and position - emotions are ephemeral things with no lasting power. Diamondlanders see Spadeslanders as the only House that could possibly compete with them, though they often see Spadeslanders as nosy and prying, without a proper sense of social etiquette and proper respect for one's social position.

Westall, the Diamondlands, is the northernmost of the southern Houselands. The Gobaleen Mountains form the Diamondlander's northern border, and those same mountains are honeycombed with the mines of both men and goblins. It is not unusual for the Diamondlanders and the goblins to engage in conflict, armed or otherwise, over ownership of the valuable ore found there.

The Diamond Colors are blue and white, and the symbol is typically a blue diamond on a white field. Sometimes the colors are reversed.

(*Westall takes inspiration from Victorian England fairytales and folklores, as well as the pomp and decadence of Renaissance Italy and pre-Revolution France*).

The House of Hearts, the Heartlands

As the name implies, Heartlanders are ruled by the heart. They place great value in love and friendship, and courtly love traditions reign. Art and music are considered the greatest pursuits, and even those in other professions typically practice some form of artistic hobby. Many Priests of the Word are Heartlanders. The Bardic College in Briardown is the greatest in the land, and nowhere else in the Houselands are bards so well-respected.

Heartlanders see Clublanders as reliable, dependable and fearsomely brave, but feel sorrowful that they forget that strength of the heart is needed as much as strength of arms. Heartlanders and Diamondlanders rarely, it seems, see eye to eye, yet many Heartlanders have Diamondlander sponsors. Certainly the Diamondlanders have an appreciation for the Arts that the Heartlands produce, but often usually as a status symbol and a thing of beauty to be flaunted, not something to be appreciated for what it truly is. They often find Diamondlanders cold and, well, heartless, and their game of intrigues rarely take into account the feelings of those involved. There is something about Spadelanders that Heartlanders tend to find both intriguing and also at times a bit disconcerting. They share an intense curiosity, but the Spadeslanders have a lack of respect of privacy. Their sense of justice is often removed from their sense of heart, and they sometimes see things too black and white, too life and death.

The Heartlands are the most expansive of the Houselands. They sit between Diamonds and Spades with their northeast corner just touching the city of Farraway.

The Heartland colors are red and white. Their symbol is the red heart on a field of white. This is never reversed.

(*For inspiration, read "*A Song for Arbonne*" by Guy Gavriel Kay and Arthurian Legends, as well as courtly love traditions and fairytales, some celtic folklore, french folklore, etc*., *especially those that involve stories of love and the arts.*)

The House of Spades, Rollinghill

Fortune favors the Spades. Their lands are smaller than the Heartlands, but have great abundance, and certainly no other house can claim as many marriages into the royal line of Farraway. They have extensive trading routes and engage in many business ventures with the Diamonds. Spadelanders place a great deal of value on knowledge and discovery. This does not mean they are all scholars or priests (though a great number of Scholar-Priests are Spadelanders), but that they share a great curiosity. For this reason, some of the greatest explorers and rogues hail from this house. They place a strong emphasis on justice, and are often called upon to settle disputes, investigate matters, or enforce the King's law. The first Jacks were Spadelanders. It is said, however, that their pursuit of knowledge and truth sometimes goes too far, and many of the other Houses accuse them of prying into matters not of their concern.

Spadeslanders appreciate the prowess of the Clublanders - but also see them as somewhat straight and narrow. Somtimes even simple, due to their disdain of playing the Game of Cards. But they can be relied upon, and no one makes a better bodyguard that doesn't ask questions. Spadeslanders see the Diamondlanders as so caught in their games and one-ups-manship that they miss the larger picture, and don't appreciate that knowledge for knowledge's sake is often its own reward and by far the greater game. Their emphasis on status and material goods is sometimes seen as gauche. Spadeslanders find the Heartlanders refreshing and delightful. Their patronage of the arts means they often have some of the best libraries and collection of knowledge, and Spadeslanders do love collecting knowledge. They also have an adventurous spirit the Spadelanders appreciate, and perhaps only the Spadelanders truly realize what strength the Heartlanders truly have.

Rollinghill is the southernmost of the four Houselands. To the southeast is the Canyonlands, and the Spadelanders have a strained history with the people there.

The Spade color is black, and the symbol often shows a black spade or spades on a red or white field.

(*The Spadelands takes its inspiration from a variety of sources, from Sherlock Holmes to Indian Jones to the Cadfael Chronicles, to stories of knowledge and discovery; from tales of the justice aspect of Arthurian legends to stories of spies such as James Bond or Brent Weeks's Night Angel Trilogy to the legends of monks like St. Patrick, St. Benedict and St. Augustine.*)

Farraway City

The city of Farraway is the seat of the High King of the four Houselands. The citizens of Farraway typically adhere to the characteristics of the various lands, with the added rush and hustle of city life. It is largely considered unnecessary to travel to the various Houselands in order to taste the flavor of them. In most cases, it is enough to visit Farraway, where each house is well represented. Here, the citizens believe, everything of important can be found, and it is not just the center of the law but also the center of culture for all the Houselands.

Much of the city was burned during the War against Baeldannen, the Evil Fairy Queen, but over the past many years, much has been rebuilt - grander, some claim, than it was before, but the few areas that still remain ruined and the memorial to the war stand as a start reminder of the dangers of meddling in the affairs of fairies and in the dangers the Woods to the north can sometimes represent... even if there is also a sense that the people owe the Woods some thanks for thwarting the evil fairy queen's plans.

The city stands at the northern border between the Heart and the Spadelands. It is south of the Border Hills, north of which is Cottington Woods.

(*Farraway City is a hodgepodge of all the Houses, and so takes inspiration from all. We envision Farraway as a mix ranging from Victorian London to the Discworld's Ankh-Morpork to Ba Sing Se from Avatar: The Last Airbender.*)

Lake Tower, the center of learning for Magicians across the Houselands is located in the lake across from Farraway City. Not all Magicians are trained here, but certainly those who do are considered to be among the best of all magical practicioners. Those who are serious about Ritual Magic eventually go there to study.

(Lake Tower *is a mix of the Wizard's Tower in Fantasia to legends of Merlin, a mix of the frivolity of Terry Pratchett's Unseen University from the Discoworld novels and the gravitas of the Wizard Towers in the movie, The Flight of Dragons*)

Cottington Woods

Most folks in Cottingting Woods grew up on the borders, and tend to take after whichever House was closest to them, but some grew up deeper in the woods, and claim no ties to the Houselands. Those rare individuals are often considered odd, perhaps a little fairy touched, or just plain crazy. At best they are considered backwards or out of touch by mainstream Houselanders. The goings on outside of the woods have a hard time reaching into the woods, and they often don't seem to matter so much. Woodlanders tend to be more focused on the simple yet frequent day to day challenges that the wood presents.

Locals to Cottington Woods, although not belonging to a specific house, called Woodlanders, are still considered Houselanders. Prior to the start of game, there is no community within the woods, per se. There is no governing body or place where the woodlanders gather to discuss such issues. There is the Cotting House, but that is in many ways only the social center of the Woods, where people gather to trade and tell stories, to drink and to eat in the company of those who understand the strange things that happen in the Woods and for rumors of those things that happen outside it. To the Woodlanders, the world outside the Woods is as strange as the Houselanders see the Woods.

(*Cottington Woods itself is heavily influenced by Celtic Myths & Fairytales, the Brothers Grimm, Into the Woods musical, The Last Unicorn by Peter S. Beagle, many of the fantasy/fairytale writings of CJ Cherryh, and numerous other fairytales and folklore.*)

The Houseless, Wanderkin

Most Wanderkin clans migrate in and out of the Houselands, and player characters cannot come from these clans. However one clan/family, or collection of clans/families, spends most of its time wandering the four Houselands and Cottington Woods and players may come from this clan.

See Wanderkin below for more.

Non-Human Lands
There are two known, non-human lands that are close to Cottington.

Greencloud
Home to the local wood elven population, Greencloud is a place that no non-elf has ever seen. It rests in the forest to the east of Cottingon. The town of Thornwall guards the only known approach to Greencloud and is guarded vigilantly by aggressive elves perched on high natural walls.

Elves appear as humans, though they have pointed ears. Their clothing always incorporates leaf shapes into the pattern. They are proud and honorable, and often come across as snobbish when they aren't seen as frightening. Woodlanders give them respect much like they would the Fair Folk and avoid them as much as possible. Some few Woodlanders trade with the elves in Thornwall, and elven-made bows and herbal potions are highly valued.

Elves are a presence in the woods and cannot be ignored. They typically do not approach human settlements, and on the rare occasions that they do, they never stay for long. They view non-elves with poorly concealed disgust, and it is well known that the touch of a non-elf is disgusting to an elf. This constant distance is also evident in how elves fight – they choose to wield bows and to kill from a distance.

While elves seem to dislike humans, they absolutely abhor goblins, and will often threaten goblins on sight or even come to blows. That Cottingon sits between Greencloud and UnderMarsh is unfortunate, since elven and goblin hostilities will occasionally occur nearby, drawing the men of town into the conflict.

UnderMarsh
UnderMarsh is a very boggy swampland west of Cottington, and is home to marsh goblins. Beyond UnderMarsh are the Gobaleen Mountains and south are the Diamondlands. Much of UnderMarsh is under water, which is fine for the amphibious goblins, but makes travel difficult for non-goblins.

Goblins have green skin, though otherwise they appear human. Because the constant in and out of water is hard on fabric, goblins care little about the quality of their clothing, and they typically dress in rags or tattered clothing.

Goblins perhaps even more than the elves, they are a presence that cannot be ignored. Goblins are very curious, and have, to the Houselanders, a poor sense of boundaries, as they don't have the same understanding of possession of items. Since they occasionally take things that belong to other people, they are viewed with distrust, and very few people will let a goblin into their home.

Because the Diamondlanders and the goblins of UnderMarsh have such a history of violence, goblins tend to regard all humans warily, though they do have dealings and humans don't typically fear for their lives when traveling goblin lands. Goblins have the same hatred of elves that elves have for them.

Other Lands
While Houselanders will have the most exposure to other Houselanders, there are other cultures out there that may interact with them. Most frequently they would encounter Canyonlanders or Frostwroth, and occasionally they might meet travelers or traders from Taiden Sheh, the Dust Lands or the Barumbi Basin. Lakupaparoo or the Wikapapuji Islands are so far away that only extreme measures would ever serve to create an interaction. But of course, you never know.

The Barumbi Basin
The Barumbi Basin is a tropical rainforest that stretches over a large portion of the Written World, south over the sea from the Houselands. The deep canopy formed overhead by the massive trees of the basin make the place seem even deeper and larger than it is, and it is easy to get lost. Of all the lands on the Written World, none is filled with such an air of natural mystery.

The Houselands have a presence in the Basin in the small city of White House.

While the Robber Barons reigned and fell in the Houselands, other kingdoms did the same in the Barumbi Basin, and ruins of those great kingdoms persist, buried and hidden beneath vines and under roots. Though there is civilization in the Basin, there is more wilderness, and deeper into the jungle civilization as the Houselanders view it is harder to find. The peoples and cultures that remain in the Barumbi basin keep much to themselves.

(*Characters can draw their ideas from the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs or H. Rider Haggard, as well as mythologies and folklore of South America and Africa.*)

The Canyon Lands

To the south and east of the Spadelands are the Canyon Lands, an enormous stretch of land that is cut and cut again by maze-like ridges and valleys. The proud Canyonlander people are considered "simple" and "primitive" by Houselander standards, as the People here favor Witchcraft over Science and embrace an Oratory Tradition focused on Stories and Tales rather than the Written Word; the First Patron to them is a story *teller* not a story *writer*. The Laws of Science were learned and forgotten in the Houselands before the Houselanders ever reached the canyons, and even Ritualized magic is not as well known; what magic they practice is unlike any in the Houselands. But the truth is that their culture is rich and varied, with a different way of life than the Houselands, living in a manner closer to the land and to the fairies, elementals, and spirits that inhabit it.

The greatest of the canyons is RedFeather Canyon, and built into the wall of this canyon is the RedCliff Dwelling Place, the center of Canyonlander culture. While the people of the canyons are divided into many nations with many dispositions, once each year they gather at the RedCliff Dwelling Place to trade and speak of matters of import.

Over the last few generations the Church of the Word has sent many missions into the Canyon Lands to try and bring the Written Word to the people there, but also to bear Witness to ther culture, traditions and stories so that they might be Recorded in the Written Word. There has been some success, especially in the borderlands, but it has also led to some unfortunate conflicts.

(*The Canyon Lands should draw ideas from the varied native cultures and tales of North America.*)

The Dust Land, the Kingdom of Gold

East and above the Barambi Basin, separated from it by an enormous rock escarpment thousands of miles long are the Dust Lands. Over a thousand years ago the Dust Land was home to the Kingdom of Gold, a kingdom (so the stories say) that reigned since the beginning of time. While it seems that nothing could possibly grow in such a dry place, the Kingdom of Gold is one of the Written World's oldest cultures, raising pyramids up from the sands to reach for the sky. Eventually the Kingdom of Gold fell, and today the land is divided into dozens of tiny states.

(*Based very loosely on ancient Egyptian mythology, the people of the Dust Land envision their patrons as having the heads of animals. The Dust Land also takes inspiration from 1001 Arabian Nights and other folktales of the Sahara Desert and other Desert-dwelling people.*)

Frostwroth

Frostwroth sits across a great bay from Collamoor, north of Cottington Woods. Frostwroth is a bitterly cold region during the long winter, and a stunningly beautiful one during its very short summer. Carved out of the surrounding highlands by glaciers at some point during the world's shrouded prehistory, the land is rugged and filled with dramatic valleys, ancient evergreen forests, and cragged rocky spires that are never without a cap of snow.

The people of Frostwroth are as rugged and violent as the land they claim to have tamed. They regard battle as honorable, and to die in any way but on the sword of an enemy is considered a shame.

The Frostwroth constantly test their mettle not just against themselves but against the Clublands, north of Cottington Woods. In the far too recent past the many clans of Frostwroth unified and brought the full force of their people to bear. Ultimately they were broken and scattered. Now, the various clans battle for dominance over one another, and those farthest south or east also invade the Clublands. Rumors persist that there is a King again among them, seeking both to unify his people in peace with the Clublands and to bring the Frostwroth people to new lands out of the frozen north, but many dismiss these as Bard's tales: why would the warrior winter people abandon their home and their way of life?

It is also rumored that the dead of the Frostwroth cannot bear to die outside their homeland, and return home, one way or another. There are many stories of those who ventured too far north encountering the Frozen Dead. In the years since the Great War, the number of restless dead – believed to be those who died far from home in that War – roaming the Clublands has grown.

(*Frostwroth is inspired by classic Viking and Scandanavian tales and some stories of the Scottish highlands.*)

Lakupaparoo

Several generations ago, a colony of settlers traveled from the Houselands to settle the far distant land of Lakupaparoo. Lakupaparoo is one of the few places in the Written World that exists just over the horizon. On the otherwise flat Written World, this gives rise to the saying that Lakupaparoo is down under the rest of the world, and the colonists there have even assumed the name of the "House Down Under". Travelers from the land down under tell of coastal jungles and of an inland made of burning sand.

Aside from the expanding colony of former Houselanders, Lakupaparoo is home to a secretive native culture called the Mungo that even the settlers know very little about.

In recent years there has rumor of unrest between the House Down Under and Farraway, and some talk that the remote people are unhappy with their place among the other houses.

(*Lakupaparoo is influenced by tales from Australia and the dreamtime folklore of the Aborigini people*.)

The Petal Kingdom

TaidenSheh, the Petal Kingdom rests beyond Greencloud and beyond the Canyonlands on the far eastern shore of the continent. Travel to and from there is difficult, as the traveler must pass through the winding ways of the Canyonlands or through the Fairy Mists of the Old Woods of Cottington Woods.

The Petal Kingdom is ruled by the Emperor ("King of the Petal Lands), who has a guiding council of 3 advisors representing the 6 ministries of the civil government. Unlike the Houselands, where hereditary nobility rules most of the lands, the Petal Kingdom has a hereditary monarchy, but the government positions are Civil Servants who pass a Civil Examination to obtain their posts. Many of these officials are Scholars of the Word following the teachings of the First Patron, though Bards and Magicians are also represented who have undergone the proper schooling and examinations. That does not mean there might not be some corruption here or there in government appointments, but the premise is that positions are earned by merit and aptitude rather than chance of birth.

The different "lands" with the Petal Kingdom are ruled by appointed nobility; legends say that they are all descendants of the first Emperor's (other) children (not his firstborn, who of course continued the line of Emperor). There are also military leaders, and a mix of permanent military and rotating militia; in the Petal (Land) of The Chrysanthemum, their nobility are all military leaders and they call their king Shogun.

The Petal Kingdom fashion influences can be seen in the Houselands, although it may be considered a bit overdressed in rural Cottington Woods.

(*The Petal Kingdom is loosely based on the Asian cultures and folklore of ancient and feudal China, with the Petal of the Chrysanthemum based on ancient & feudal Japan.*)

Wikapapuji Islands

The Wikapapuji Islands rest about halfway between Lakupaparoo and the Houselands, resting in the ocean about a month's travel from either location. They stretch from the north edge of the world to the south, although they are so far spread out that travelers could miss them completely without the use of a map. Those who live on the more extreme northern and southern islands are not even aware of the others. Near the center of the north/south line is the Wikapapuji Archipelago. Some of the Wikipapuji are still largely seafaring people, and their stories often tell of the migrations and adventures on land and on sea. Hearthstones have particular significance for them, as they carry their hearthstones with them when they settle a new island, and it is said that these seafaring people can always find their way home because they can sense where their hearthstones are.

(*The Wikapapuji are inspired by tales of the islands of Polynesia, including Tahiti, Hawaii, and the Maori of New Zealand*.)

The Wander Kin, Wanderkin

These wandering clans migrate all over the Written World. Some suspect that the Wanderkin families did something in the past that lost them their home, though if that is the case, none can recall what that thing was. A mysterious and spiritual people, the Wanderkin all have a deep sense of personal freedom and a rigid sense of cultural honor. There are many different clans/families of Wanderkin, and while they may once have shared a common heritage, each Clan has its own traditions and dress. It is said that their Fortune Tellers can truly see into the fate of others, and fireside stories whisper of the terrible Curses those of the Old Blood can wreak on those who thwart them. Their habit of never staying in one place for long has resulted in a deep mistrust of them by many people of other cultures, and they are sometimes scapegoats blamed for lost children or missing items as much as the fairies are.

(*The Wanderkin are loosely based on nomadic peoples of varied folklore traditions, such as the Romani and Irish Travellers*.)