

Tales from the Cotting House Player's Guide

Part Three: Adventuring

16.2 Once Upon a Time, A Brief History of the World

"If a thing is not written, it never happened."
-unknown Patron

Wolf

Before the Robber Barons and the rise of man, wolves roamed and ruled the wild places of Cottington Woods. The first word was written. The word was wolf, and it was carved into stone as a warning to travelers who walked within the woods. That stone sits in the center of Cottington Woods.

0: The Robber Barons

The first tales of men did not discuss towns or armies. Men did not dress in finery, and the words they used were simple words. They were set apart from the animals by their ability to read and write. They were smarter, and they learned that when they gathered in numbers they were stronger. The time of the Robber Barons began. Of course they were not all robbers, and the first among them were not called barons, but, perhaps learning from the wolves, the stronger did command the weaker and took what they needed to survive.

Over the fifteen hundred years of their rule in and around Cottington Woods the Robber Barons made and lost hundreds of tiny kingdoms, and created the foundation of what would later become the four Households.

Battling the Things that Go Bump in the Night

Men were afraid of the things in the dark. Often those things were other men, but just as often they were other things, terrible things like creatures of fairy or demons or the dead. To fight the darkness, men assembled a collection of rules, rituals and patterns that, when put together, caused effects to come to pass, every time, in the exact same way. The name they gave to these rules, rituals and patterns was the Laws of Science.

Lord Curren and the Love of Money

Lord Curren was the first known Robber Baron. A volatile man, he was also well known for the fairness with which he treated his men. Curren had five lieutenants, each as greedy as himself. It occurred that they acquired a small fortune in gold, and there came the question of how to split it equally among them. Lord Curren melted it down and fashioned it into a measurable form. The only mold he had on hand was one to fashion arrowheads, so what resulted was a pile of golden points. They had no markings on them, no crest or date. They were simple, but they were uniform, and that's what Curren needed. He divided them equally between the men, keeping the greater share for himself, and sent them on their way.

The lieutenants didn't make it to the forest's edge before four turned against one. They killed him and divided his share. They fought until one remained, and the last turned his greedy eyes toward the baron. Curren killed the man, and reclaimed all the points for himself.

Now, if Lord Curren were the sort of man to learn a lesson, the tale might have ended there. Instead, he hoarded the points and used them, in small allotments, to reward others. As he was the most powerful man of the time, points became the universal form of barter, and currency was introduced to the land.

A single triangular coin is called an arrowhead, or, more commonly, a point.

Frostwroth

The Frostwroth are an aggressive people, and frequently crossed the waters from the north to raid against the Robber Barons. They built the walled town of Collamoor to serve as a staging ground to press into the woods and beyond. For many generations they were an almost constant scourge. Eventually the Robber Barons were forced either to unite or to fall completely to the barbarians.

The Frostwroth typically raided during the early winter, after crops had been taken in and sheds were full. On this occasion when they struck the first settlement, the barbarians found it empty. The harvest had been brought in early, and neither the livestock nor the people were to be found. The barbarians raided farther afield to find the same, over and over, until finally they had to return to Collamoor. When they did return they discovered their own town turned against them.

Days before, the barons had taken everything and waited until the Frostwroth set off from Collamoor. They then entered the town and slaughtered the few defenders who had been left behind. They brought in all the harvest's bounty and every piece of livestock that would fit, and they prepared for a siege. But the Frostwroth were outside the walls with no food and few supplies. To no avail the barbarians threw themselves against their own walls.

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Ultimately, outmaneuvered, they were defeated. Some surrendered to the barons. Other fashioned boats from the wilderness to attempt a return home across the bay.

Collamoor remained in the hands of the barons. Eventually it became the seat of the House of Clubs and later the birthplace of the first High King of Faraway.

The Day of the Dead

Though there had always been tales of the restless dead, it was at one time the expected norm that a body would stay beneath the ground once it had died and was buried. Prior to this time, tales of ghosts were not uncommon, but it was never the case that the dead would arise with any control over their bodies. This changed at a time late in the history of the Robber Barons, when to the surprise of all, the dead rose with the motivation to consume the flesh of the living.

Many thought it was the end of the world, and it might have been except for the presence of the Priests of the Word. Though less organized than the church of today, the priests were still the only organization that spanned the entire known world and acted with a single set of motivations. These new undead, these walking bodies, they were new to the world and were an abomination, much like the demons of Anathema. The priests employed the very same tools of their faith against the undead that they used against the demons, and those tools worked just as well. Battles raged all across the land, and what took what seemed a single night to begin took almost a year to resolve, but the Robber Barons were able to control the restless dead and put them down.

Not all dead now rise. Some do. Graveyards typically are surrounded by sturdy walls, not to keep folks out, but to keep them in. There are several rituals now to keep the dead from rising, and every priest of the Word is trained to know them. Every year the Day of the Dead is observed to remind the people of the world of how it almost all came to an end. Now, so many years later, the day has more the feel of a celebration. To the priests of the Word it is always a serious affair, but they have a hard time helping other remember that.

The Rules of Science and Magic

As time passed and the hold of men on the Written World grew stronger, they learned to trust in themselves. The need for the Laws of Science became less. Study of the Word had revealed spaces between the lines, loopholes in the way of things that could be manipulated. Men discovered magic. While the Laws of Science still exist and are studied around the world, magic is the science of the day. Once it was understood, magic was just easier than any scientific method.

1500: The Four Houses and the House of Cards

Around five hundred years ago the Robber Barons ruled the four nations of Collamoor, Rollinghill, Westall and the Heartlands. They took the titles of kings and queens. As was customary by that time, each house had an associated symbol. Collamoor was the House of Clubs, Westall was the House of Diamonds, Rollinghill was the House of Spades, and the Heartlands was the House of Hearts. The tales then did mention towns, and even cities. There were armies. Men dressed in finery and their words were far less simple. Though less so than in the time of the wolf, it was still a violent time. Borders changed frequently and armed conflict was not uncommon. But there remained the House of Clubs in Collamoor, the House of Diamonds in Westall, the House of Spades in Rollinghill, and the House of Hearts in the Heartlands.

Prompted by the House of Diamonds, the four nations formed a body known as the House of Cards, a council where the four houses could discuss and resolve difficulties without resorting to warfare. And for nearly two hundred years, the House of Cards and the four nations stood.

1700: The Mind Illuminated, The Fall of the House of Cards

For almost two hundred years, the House of Cards kept peace by giving the four Houselands a forum to discuss conflict rationally and without bloodshed. More recently, and with alarming frequency, conflicts were exploding into open hostility. In particular, Spades and the Heartlands were in a constant struggle, and the Midland River was unsafe for fear of abuse from one side or the other. The House of Cards shook. The epicenter of this conflict was Faraway, wherein the House of Cards met, and where each House had a small force of men. Clubs had the strongest presence, and was closely allied with Diamonds at the time. Together they traced every event to a single organization and uncovered the plot behind the conflict.

There existed a group of like minded men and women who believed in the importance of the Laws of Science. They called themselves the Mind Illuminated. Their ranks were filled with higher ranking members of society, many only a few short steps away from the thrones of each of the four Houselands. On the surface, the Mind

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Illuminated seemed to be a school of enlightened thought, but for two decades they had been maneuvering behind the scenes to steal control of the Households for themselves.

The Mind Illuminated succeeded in toppling the House of Cards. Before they could assume control, however, the houses of Clubs and Diamonds exposed them and brought their plans to an end.

High King Faraway

The same king of Clubs and queen of Diamonds who foiled the plot of the Mind Illuminated took control of the ruined House of Cards and united the four Households under the throne of a High King. They relinquished control of their individual houses to their successors and settled in the city of Faraway. Each of the four Households swore fealty to the new High King, and such is the way it has remained for the last three hundred years.

Cottington Woods

Stretching north over the Border Hills to just south of Collamoor is the enchanted Cottington Woods. During the early years of the Robber Barons the forest covered much of what is now the four Households. Over time the forest has seen over three quarters of its acreage removed. The forest seems to have a mind of its own, and it now resists the passage of men.

Legend tells of a force of three hundred Frostwroth that travelled south along the coast to invade Collamoor. Normally this would not be a treacherous journey, except the path brought the men through Cottington Woods. The force was never heard from, and the Frostwroth have never again attempted to send men to raid the coast except by sea.

The Riding Hoods were assembled by one of the later kings of Faraway. Woodsmen all, it was their job to patrol the forest and to protect the Households. They were very proud and highly dedicated men and women.

1800: Anathema and the Invasion of Dreams

Demons from Anathema crossed to the Written World through the dreams of the inmates of Asylum. The countryside of Westall saw violence on a scale like nothing this side of total war as invaders attacked without warning and retreated, using patients as living gateways to and from the Slumberland. There was little anyone could do to defend themselves. Even the Priests of the Word could not act fast enough to fend the creatures off. It was the inmates of the Asylum themselves who managed to face the demons, sealing the gates that were created. Asylum was moved from Westall to its current home on the side of the Black Mountains, where it remains as the training ground and headquarters of the Sandmen.

The Red-Castle Railway

The Red-Castle Railway was a joint venture by the Diamond and Spadelands to build a lightning powered railway to connect the lands. Tracks were laid between Redbridge and Midcastle, with stops in central Faraway, the Faraway Warehouse district, and the Heartland city of Briardown. The loud screeching cry and the earth shaking vibrations it created as it went by, combined with most people's lack of trust for anything built using the Laws of Science, saw the railway in constant disfavor.

Still, the building of the way continued, and plans were even made to run a track through Cottington Woods from Faraway all the way to Collamoor. The Halfway station was built on the north side of the Border Hills and construction on the tracks began. With the tracks laid down only a few miles into the woods, construction stopped, and the project was shelved indefinitely. The way stations were decommissioned, and in most cases the bodies of the lightning powered cars were left where they were.

1850: Colonizing Lakupaparoo

A fleet of settlers from Faraway traveled west to colonize Lakupaparoo. Originally made up of members from the various Households, the settlers eventually established the House Down Under.

1950: Queen Equiline Faraway and her Very Bad Bargain

The mother of the father of the current King Aaron Faraway was Queen Equiline Faraway. Her love of horses was well known, but her reign as High Queen would forever be remembered because of her Very Bad Bargain.

Equiline took the throne when she was very young, the Queen before her falling to an illness the Priests of the Word could not cure. While out riding one day the young queen encountered an old woman on the road. Being short of sight, the woman did not move out of the way. The queen insisted, and when she did the woman asked, "Who are you, young thing, to tell me to get off the road?"

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Equiline told her, "I am Equiline Farraway, and I am the Queen. Because I am queen, all these roads belong to me, and I can do what I want."

The old woman regarded her. She said nothing more, and she moved herself laboriously out of the queen's way.

Many years later the queen was married and she bore in turn four children, all sons. When the boys were older, it came to pass that the oldest son, the heir to the throne of Farraway became ill, and it was realized that he was ill with the same sickness that took the queen's mother. The Priests of the Word still knew of no cure to save him.

The queen called before her the three younger sons. In turn she told them, "Your brother is ill, and there is no known cure for his illness. Yet you are princes of the land, and as such you can do what no other can. I want you to travel the land and find for your brother a cure." The boys set out in different directions. Many months passed and the oldest brother grew worse.

When the youngest brother returned he found his mother. "I have failed to find for my brother a cure." Queen Equiline was disappointed.

When the second youngest brother returned, he also found his mother. "I have failed to find for my brother a cure." Queen Equiline was disappointed and distraught, for there was only one brother left.

But when the final brother returned, he was not alone. With him was a woman, a witch from the woods. "It is as you asked, mother," the son told the queen. "I have found for my brother a cure."

The witch told the queen, "I can cure your boy, and I will do so, but only for a price."

Equiline said, "Do you know who I am? I am Equiline Farraway, and I am the Queen."

The witch said, "Be that as it may."

Equiline grew stern, but the witch would not change her mind. Finally, because her son's life was at stake, she said, "Very well, what is the price?"

The witch said, "Your horse."

The queen's love for her horse was well known. She thought to refuse, but she saw the witch would not be moved. Besides, she planned to back out of the bargain as soon as her son was cured. She was the queen, and could do what she wanted. She told the woman, "Fine. One horse, a dozen horses, it doesn't matter to me. Just cure my son."

The witch did, and when she did she said to the queen. "I have upheld my part of the bargain, Queen Farraway. Now it is time for you to uphold yours. I would have the horse."

The queen told the witch, "You will leave with nothing."

"Are you sure?" the witch asked. The queen did not respond, so the witch said, "That is twice you have shown me rudeness, Queen Equiline Farraway. Do you remember?" The witch revealed herself to be the same old woman that the queen encountered years before on the road.

The queen remembered. She grew angry. "Get out," she told the witch.

The witch said, "I shall take the horse."

The queen called her guards.

The witch told her, "That is thrice, and that is unforgivable." She did not grow, but her presence suddenly filled the room.

The queen grew very afraid. "You are no witch. You are a fairy."

The witch said, "I would have taken your horse and left with it, and the scales would be balanced. But you were rude, and now I shall take them all."

The queen was rash, but she was wise enough not to argue. "Yes, of course. I'll show you to the stables myself."

The witch told her, "You don't understand. You are Equiline Farraway, and you are the Queen. Because you are the queen, all the horses belong to you. I will take them all."

Equiline blanched. "You cannot."

The witch smiled cruelly. "I am fairy. I can do what I want."

That is why there are no horses to be found in the Households.

For Want of a Horse

The loss of every horse in the Households was felt across the land.

The Riding Hoods were without steeds to ride. The queen, feeling the riders were now ineffective, disbanded them. But the Riding Hoods were loyal to their cause. Most were very proud and many, after all, had no place else to go. They regrouped and reformed under their own banner, private patrollers and protectors of the woodland and

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of the people who live there. They still wear the riding hoods of their former office, and still attempt to carry out their duties on foot. The leader of each band of Riding Hoods wears a red hood as a badge of office.

There was renewed interest in the Red-Castle Railway. Many of the way stations were reopened, and one train was refurbished and readied for active service. However, damage to the tracks that crossed the land was extensive, and, while interest was renewed, there were not enough funds raised to breathe life into the project again.

The Halfway Station was among those that were reopened. Without a functioning railway, however, it served no purpose. It was sold to a private owner and refitted to serve as an Inn for travelers about to set off into Cottington Woods.

1980: The Beanstalk and the Jacks

There was a boy in the land of Diamonds who traded a cow for a handful of magic beans. Needless to say, the boy was punished severely when he returned home to his mother, who in turn took the seeds and threw them out the window. In the morning, both mother and boy were found crushed to death with a beanstalk reaching into the sky where their house had been, and bits of cottage scattered all over the Diamondlands.

The King of Diamonds regarded the beanstalk, saw that it reached into the sky and out of sight, had no idea what to do about it, and so left it well enough alone. The next day his guards were found flat beneath footprints that led off into Cottington Woods. The tracks disappeared in the UnderMarsh, but it was clear as day where they had come from.

It was also clear that exploring a sky-high beanstalk was not a job for normal soldiers, so the King of Diamonds asked for aid from the High King of Faraway, and the High King sent the jacks. Three jacks spent hours climbing the stalk, resting often on leaves as wide as houses. Though the day was clear, after nearly half a day the Jacks began to climb through clouds, and when they finally emerged it was to a mist enshrouded landscape of floating mountains.

The jacks saw the enormous beings that inhabited this land above the clouds. Exploring, they came to a modest home, equal in proportion to the giant men, and they entered it. They split up, for there were many rooms.

The first jack came to a room filled with bags of coins. Each golden point was as large as a warrior's shield, and hefting one was about all he could manage. The second found a kitchen and a counter, and a nest on which sat a goose that laid eggs of gold. The third found a magical harp with the face of a maiden that begged him to secure its freedom. The three jacks met back at the cottage door. The harp warned them that the giant master of the house would be back soon, and they must hurry and be away. Sensing the wisdom in her words, the jacks hastened toward the stalk and their way home.

The third jack carried the harp upon his back, and so the thing could see the cottage as they left it. It saw the giant return even when the giant did not see the jacks. The harp let out a shriek of terror and cried out for the jacks to run. The giant heard the cry, and gave chase.

The three jacks ran faster, but they were no match for the long legs of the giant, and he was almost on them when they reached the top of the long climb to the ground. The first jack was burdened with the heavy gold point and was last in line, and the giant picked him up and hurled him out into the sky, where he fell past the stalk and tumbled a very long way to the ground far below. The second jack was soon overtaken, and hid himself in the vines of the stalk where the giant was hard pressed to reach him. The third jack continued with great haste down the stalk. The harp continued to cry out, and he was tempted to toss it if it did not shut up, but he did not. When the second jack sailed by him and the stalk began to shake, he looked up to see the giant on its way down.

By then the king's men below saw the giant. The golden coin had long since fallen to the ground and had narrowly missed striking the Diamondland king. The jack who carried it, however, landed atop the monarch and crushed him dead. Now the king's men watched in horror as the second jack struck the earth. Not seeing the third jack and fearing he had met his fate high above, they set upon the stalk with swords and axes. As the giant grew closer they forwent the sharp instruments, and set the stalk ablaze. They fled, and it was then that the third jack and the harp reached the safety of the ground. They also fled while the stalk shook and wavered and the giant came down after them. The monster reached the ground and gave chase, and at that moment the stalk, weakened by the damage at its base, by the fire and by the weight of the giant, broke. It fell upon the giant, the jack, the harp and the fleeing king's men, crushing them and killing them all.

To this day the remains of that great stalk still lay along the northeast border of the Diamondlands, attracting herbalists and wood witches who seek its various strange growths.

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1990: Mount Overmarsh Closes its Doors

At the best of times, goblins do not make good neighbors. They frequently get into things and take things that don't belong to them. Typically, upstanding people do not seek them out. But goblins are great burrowers, and from their warrens they pull the greatest supplies of precious metals in the world. So despite their role as society's estranged, it was very clear when, about twenty years ago, they faced a crisis. Mount OverMarsh, considered the capitol of things goblin, sealed its doors, cutting off the goblins outside from those within.

For a society whose magicians specialize in making doors to almost instantly transport themselves from one place to another, the event was also very curious. The goblins have no answers.

Recent Events, 2012 to 2026

2012: The Cotting House and the Woods Awakens

Vigo Cotting announced the opening of the Cotting House, an Inn near the center of Cottington Woods, just about halfway between the cities of Faraway and Collamoor. Gathers commenced wherein the settlers around the woodland agreed to meet at the Cotting House at regular intervals to conduct business.

The large number of travelers awakens the Old Forest, and houses and people are swallowed by the Woods and disappear. A call goes out to Adventurers to help, and after much trial, a bargain is struck with the Guardian of the Woods, the high fairy Arafel, speaking on behalf of the Spirit of the Forest. The Adventurers plant four anchors within the Woods that extends the protection of the Woods to the Cotting House settlement.

2013: The Burning of the Grim Abbey: The Abbey of the Grim Brotherhood is burnt to the ground, and the Abbot dies in the fire. Many books are lost. The Church remains without an Abbot for some time.

The Burnt Tree

An ancient Treant is awakened in the Woods and gathers an army of Treants that begins to lay waste to the southern Clublands. The adventures of Cottington Woods come together to put the Burnt Tree back to peaceful slumber.

The High King's Wedding

High King Aaron falls in love with the Lady Arislin, and plans a wedding at the Cotting House. The people of Cottington Woods uncover that the Lady Arislin is in fact the Evil Fairy Queen Baeldannen in disguise, who has bewitched the High King. They also discover that Aleena Crofter, the True Love of High King Aaron long believed to be dead, is still alive, and bringing her together, undo the spell on the King and thwart the wedding, instead uniting the High King and his Love.

2014: Nightmares Walk

For a time, Nightmares walk in the Cottington Woods, consuming and harming many, and the Church of the Word sends a contingent to bring an end to the threat. The adventurers of the Cottington Woods gather to confront the Lady of Nightmares, who had taken possession of the Head Sandman, Ishariel, and used her to Invert the Waking and Nightmarish worlds. They defeat the Nightmare Lady and restore the Woods, though Ishariel falls into a deep coma.

Ulkarion, the Demon Wolf

Among the Wolves, they proclaim a King, Ulkarion, who unites the Wolves of the Woods and begins a war against the Woods, the Riding Hoods, and the Clublands -- something that is against the nature of Wolves. It is discovered that Ulkarion is possessed by a Demon, and the adventurers of Cottington Woods come together to help the Paladins, the Riding Hoods, and the southern Army of the Clublands defeat the Wolves and banish the Demon.

The Telling

Once every hundred years, the Telling occurs, where those so blessed by the Moon bear the Mantle of the First Patron and tell a story that is true. The Moon children tell a tale of the Awakening of Ishariel, who then recovers from her coma.

The High War Begins

The High Queen takes control of the Houselands when it is believed that the High King was bewitched by the people of Cottington Woods. The kingdom becomes divided when the High King, accompanied by a small force of the Cottington Woods, sneaks into the Castle and attacks the High Queen, who flees to the safety of the Clublands. King Roderick, himself recently married to a mysterious lady, Belladonna, takes the side of the High Queen and declares war against High King Roderick.

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2014-2016: The High War (or the War of the Curse)

The Kingdom is torn by the War between the High King and High Queen. At first the Heartlands and the Diamondlands come to the aid of the High King, with the Clublands on the side of the High Queen. The Spadelands initially refused to take sides, but eventually joined on the side of the High King.

The Lady Belladonna Collamor forges an alliance with Simrock, King of the Frostwroth, and gives them entry to the Houselands, where they begin to lay waste. The city of Faraway City is set afire by the invading army.

The people of the Cottington Woods again come to the rescue, revealing that the High Queen was cursed by the Evil Fairy Queen and that Belladonna is none other than the Evil Fairy Queen Baeldannen herself, who ensorcelled King Roderick of the Clublands. Arafel, Guardian of the Woods, comes to the aid of the Woods to declare war against the Evil Fairy Queen, and in the end, the adventurers of Cottington Woods defeat and entrap the Evil Fairy Queen. King Roderick gives his life in the process to save the High King and High Queen.

It is revealed that the notorious brigand, Robin of the Hood, is the bastard son of King Roderick, and he takes the throne upon his father's death. Princess Virtue Faraway and Prince Robin are betrothed.

The Invasive

While the war began to rage, a strange plant began to overtake the Woods, called *the Invasive*. At first it choked out and consumed plants, destroying crops and causing starvation, but it soon began to consume and twist animals and people, turning them into creatures controlled by the hive-mind of the Invasive Queen. The Woodlanders eventually discovered it was a plant from Fairy, put there by the Fairy Queen, and with great effort they managed to find the Moths of Fairy that could consume and destroy the Invasive, returning the Woods.

The new Patron, Alice

During this time, a new Patron arises: Alice, whom many call the Patron of Madness due both to her paradoxical tales and because she was a long-time patient of the Asylum.

The new Brother Abbot of the Grim Abbey

The rebuilding of the Grim Abbey continues, but the Written Word reveals a new Grim Abbot: Father Nolan, formerly of the Cyprian Abbey of the Cottington Woods.

2016: The Wedding and Rebuilding

Princess Virtue and Prince Robin are wed, and begin the process of rebuilding the Clublands while the High King and Queen begin rebuilding Faraway. A period of peace in the Houselands begins, though animosity between the other Houselands towards the Clublands remains.

2021: The Naming Day of Prince Roderick

Princess Virtue and Prince Robin have a son whom they name Roderick, and bless him in a small Naming Day ceremony at the Cotting House deep within the Woods.

(Additional details on current events may eventually be added).

2026: (The Start of the Tales): The Library of the Cotting House

Abbot Nolan declares that a Library will be blessed and established in the Cotting House, recognizing that this was one of the locations where the new Patron, Alice, had often told her Tales.