

## Cottington Woods Player's Guide

### Part Three: Adventuring

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.

#### 1990: Mount OverMarsh Closes its Doors

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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.

#### **2012 to 2026: The Evil Fairy Queen**

*These events occurred during the Cottington Woods: The Evil Fairy Queen Campaign.*

#### **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. Gatherings commenced wherein the settlers around the woodland met at the Cotting House to conduct business.

The large number of new travelers in the woods awakened the Old Forest, and houses and people were swallowed by the Woods. After many trials, a bargain was struck with the Arafel, the Guardian of the Woods, who spoke on behalf of the Spirit of the Forest. Four anchors were placed within the Woods to extend the protection of the Woods to the settlement of Cottington.

**2013: The Burning of the Grim Abbey:** The Fairy Queen Baeldannen burned the Abbey of the Grim Brotherhood to the ground. The ruling abbot died in the fire. The Church remained without an Abbot for some time.

#### **The Burnt Tree**

An ancient Treant was awakened in the Woods and gathered an army of Treants that began to attack human settlements along the southern Clublands. The Burnt Tree was eventually put to rest.

#### **The High King's Wedding**

High King Aaron fell in love with the Lady Arislin, and planned a wedding at the Cotting House. The people of Cottington Woods learned that the Lady Arislin was in fact the Evil Fairy Queen Baeldannen in disguise, and that the High King was bewitched. They discovered that Aleena Crofter, High King Aaron True Love who was long believed to be dead, was still alive. They located her and brought her and the High King Together, undoing the spell on the High King and thwarting the wedding.

#### **2014: Nightmares Walk**

Nightmares walked in the Cottington Woods, consuming and harming many, and the Church of the Word sent a contingent of priests to bring an end to the threat. Woodlanders gathered to confront the Lady of Nightmares, who had taken possession of Ishariel, the head Sandman, and used her to invert the Waking and Nightmarish worlds. The Woodlanders defeated the Lady of Nightmares and restored the Woods. Ishariel fell into a deep coma.

#### **Ulkarion, the Demon Wolf**

Ulkarion Bearkiller, a local wolf king, united all the packs of the woodland and brought war to the people of Cottington Woods. It was later learned that Ulkarion had been possessed by a demon from Anathema. The Paladins of the Church of the Word, the Riding Hoods, the Clubland Army, and the Woodlanders fought the wolves and banished the possessor demon.

#### **The Telling**

The Telling was an event that occurred once every hundred years, and it allowed mortals to re-write any one tale. The Moon Children, those woodlanders with a tie to the fairy Moon, told the tale of awakening Ishariel, who recovered from her coma.

#### **The High War Begins**

The King of Collamoor married Lady Belladonna, who was in truth Baeldanne, who had again taken human form to try and wrest control of the human lands.

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High Queen Aleena fell victim to the Stepmother Curse, placed on her by the angered Fairy Queen, Baeldannen. She took control of the Houselands and accused the woodlanders of bewitching the High King. The Houselands were divided in civil war. The High King led a group of Woodlanders into the throne room in Faraway City using secret means and dethroned Aleena. Aleena escaped with the King of Collamoor.

Collamoor declared war against the other Houselands.

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

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 sided of the High King.

Lady Belladonna Collamor forged an alliance with Simrock, King of the Frostwroth, and gave the Frostwroth entry to the Houselands, where they begin to pillage. War came to Faraway City.

The people of the Cottington Woods again come to the rescue, revealing the curse upon the High Queen and that Belladonna was in truth the Evil Fairy Queen herself, who had ensorcelled King Roderick of the Clublands. Arafel, Guardian of the Woods, came to the aid of the Woodlanders to declare war against the Evil Fairy Queen, and in the end, the heroes of Cottington Woods defeated the Evil Fairy Queen and imprisoned her. King Roderick gave his life to save the High King and High Queen.

The notorious brigand, Robin, was exposed as the bastard son of King Roderick, and forced to take the throne of Collamoor upon his father's death. Princess Virtue Faraway and Prince Robin are betrothed.

#### **The Invasive**

While the war raged, a strange plant-like life form, *the Invasive*, began to appear throughout the woodland. It choked and consumed plants, destroying crops and causing starvation, and quickly began to consume and twist animals and people as well, turning them into creatures controlled by the hive-mind of the Invasive Queen. The Woodlanders eventually discovered that it originated in a distant corner of the Fiary Land, and had been introduced to the woods by Baeldannen. With great effort the woodlanders located the Lygodium, a species of moth that fed on the Invasive, and used it to consume and destroy the Invasive.

#### **The Deadwood (aka the Deathwood)**

In 2015, a grove of the Cotting Woods suddenly and mysteriously died, and any living creature that came within it would sicken and die as well. Stories claimed that the Daughter of Death, Morrigan, had made this grove her home while she sought her living love, and her presence caused all around her to die. In 2016, stories further told tales of how the woodland heroes, having united Morrigan with her true love, beseeched Death on his Daughter's behalf, and that Morrigan was made living so that she might be with her true love for whatever remained of their life, though Death did not promise that life would be kind to them.

#### **The Shadows of Mount Overmarsh**

The Goblin Trickster, Rimple, with the adventurers of the Woods, had opened a Door to Mount Overmarsh, only to discover the mountain home of the Goblins was overrun by dark Shadows from a Door opened to the Deep Dark. With great difficulty, they closed the Deep Dark Door and then resealed the Door to Mount Overmarsh, trapping the remaining Shadows within.

#### **The new Patron, Alice**

Alice, Princess of the Heartlands and inmate of Asylum, ascended to become the Patron of Madness. She introduced Paradox to the Written World.

#### **The new Brother Abbot of the Grim Abbey**

The Abbey Grimm was rebuilt in Redbridge. Father Nolan became the new abbot.

#### **2016: The Wedding and Rebuilding**

Princess Virtue and Prince Robin married. Both the Clublands and faraway rebuilt after the short but brutal war against the Evil Fairy Queen. Animosity between the Clublands and the other houselands remained, but there was an overall time of peace.

#### **2021: The Naming Day of Prince Roderick**

Princess Virtue and Prince Robin bore a son. In a small ceremony at the Cotting House they named the boy Roderick, after the late King of Clubs.

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#### **2026 to 2029: Cottington Woods**

*These events occurred during the Cottington Woods: Tales of the Cotting House Game.*

#### **2027: (The Start of the Tales): The Library of the Cotting House**

Abbot Nolan blessed the Cotting House library, recognizing on behalf of the Abbey and the Church that this was one of the locations where the new Patron, Alice, had often told her Tales.

#### **2026: The Long Youth of Prince Roderick**

In Midsummer of 2026, Prince Roderick of the Clublands was kidnapped from the castle in Collamoor, though some claimed he had wandered into the Fairy Mists and was lost. Some stories claim he was taken by the Fairy, Arafel, to whom it is whispered the now-deceased King Roderick had made a bargain. Queen Virtue, with the Prince's Protector, Cyril of the Silver Hounds, and various Heroes of the Woodlands, ventured into the Fairy Mists to rescue him and while they were successful, freeing the prince in the course of just a couple of days, 15 years had passed for the Prince while within the Fairy Realms, learning to be a hero himself in service to the Guardian of the Woods. If the stories are to be believed, he hunted down the thieves who had stolen lamp prison of the Evil Fairy Queen, recovering the bottle and tossing it into the volcano, Scheherazade's Crown (called Demon's Doom or Demon's Eye in old, old stories, but named later after the Grimm Abbott, Scheherazade, who herself had hailed from the Dustlands before rising to Grimm Abbott, known for the Thousand and One Tales she wrote of that far away place), though some stories claimed this happened in Fairy, not in the Written World. The heroes, summoned to him by the Horn of Heroes, aided the Prince in his quest and then returned him home, now a young man.

#### **2026: The Defeat of the Harrowed Nightmare**

With the aid of the Heroes of the Woods, the Sandman – led by Ishariel (beloved leader of the Sandmen and Caretaker of the Asylum) and Doctor Johan Burgess – were able at last to free the Woods from the Nightmare of the Harrow, but Ishariel herself was slain in the attempt. Rumors claim, however, that her ghost still remains, haunting the Asylum.

#### **2027 to 2029: The War with the Wolves**

The white wolf, Ovinhur, raised in the ways of war by the Frostwroth and responsible for wiping out the Clubland village of Hapmoor, took control of the wolf packs of Cottington Woods and waged a war to kill all humans. While the Riding Hoods lost many in the battles that followed, the woodland heroes rose up to at last defeat the wolf and return peace to the Woods.

#### **2029: The First Letter of the First Patron's Name (and the Ghosts of the Cotting House)**

Rumors had always persisted that the Cotting House was rife with ghosts. Sometime in the early history of the house a ritual had been performed, and a side effect of this ritual created a sort of trap that collected those who died while bearing the Cotting name. Late in 2029 the woodland heroes entered these spectral hearthscapes and learned the reason for this ritual. An ancient artifact of extreme if unknown importance was hidden in the house, a letter of the First Patron's name. Demonic agents had been hunting this artifact, and the heroes defended it from one such agent, a demon called the Relentless. They thwarted the demon and banished it to Anathema, met the ghost of Callahan Cotting, who had first cast the ritual and had since become a new patron while he was secluded in the Cotting House, and returned to the living world with the Letter in their possession.

#### **2029: The Change Winds of the Fairy Mists**

The Change Winds of the Fairy Mists swept over Cottington Woods, stealing away many of the woodland heroes and leaving only questions in its wake: what caused it to sweep out of the Ealdwood? What happened to the woodland heroes?

#### **2029: The Winter That Wasn't**

For a reason that isn't entirely clear, winter never came to the Houselands in 2029-2030. The frozen north remained frozen; it is not as if unusual summer came. But rather, the frosts never came in the fall, and while temperatures cooled with the turning of the seasons, winter itself never made its way south. Some claim that the Fairy, Jack Frost, had gone missing, and while known as a Jack among the Fairies, he was also the harbinger of

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winter's coming. Others claimed that this was because of the Fairy Mists rolling out of the Ealdwood, home to the endless Summer of Fairy it is said.

#### **2029-2031: After the Change Winds**

In the two years since the Change Winds swept through the Cottington Woods, much has changed even as much has remained the same: The Cotting House continues to be a waystation for those traveling through the Woods and a central gathering place in the small but growing community in the Woods. But the Change Winds shook things up; moving a river here, a house there, making the distance between one point shorter and another longer. And the Mists lingered, spreading out from the Ealdwood, sometimes pooling and appearing in the Woods without warning; some who wander into them never return, some pass harmlessly through them. The Woods have grown darker and more dangerous, with many fairy beasts once confined long within Fairy now roaming at night or in dark stretches, preying on the unwary. Some of have been haunted by Nightmares, speaking of a Hollowed Lady. The Riding Hoods have been hard-pressed to keep the Woodlanders safe and provide protection for merchants, traders, and travelers. It is whispered that the Guardian of the Woods, the fairy Arafel, is less patient with the mortals trespassing in places outside the established paths of the Woods. Certainly the Woods itself is less tolerant of large caravans crossing the Woods, and as such – and the need for protection from dangers in the Woods – trade has slowed between the Clublands and the southern Houses, and from Taiden Sheh to the Houselands, as a result. Prince Roderick of the Clublands has remained serving with the Riding Hoods during this time.

The Deadwood (also called the Deathwood) had receded somewhat in the first five or so years after it came to be, but the heart of its grove has not healed in all this time, despite efforts from the Grandmother of the Woods and her Apprentice, though a single lily has grown in the heart of the Wood. And it is said that in some parts of the Wood, a strange blight has affected some of the trees.

In the Houselands, the affects of the Change Winds were felt, though less so. Life continued much as it always hard, though the hit to trade caused hard times in some areas, and reports of rising undead, or bands of trolls, fearsome werewolves, or hungry dragonlings maudering in the countryside, became more common than they had before.

The High King Aaron and High Queen Aleena continue to rule, and are generally much loved by the people and their reign is good, but of course politics among nobles remain as they ever are, with each Houseland seeking power and favor, not to mention the internal politics of each Houseland.

The finding of the First Patron's First Letter has invigorated excitement among the Church and would-be adventurers that the remaining letters might be found, and a number of expeditons have set off in the hopes of finding them; for example, The Society for Extraordinary Adventurers it is said has undertaken an expedition to the Dustlands, at the behest and funding of the Church. Other adventurers set out across the Houselands and even de

#### **2031: The Long Winter of 2031**

The winter of 2030-2031 was a harsh one, with winds carrying snowflakes swarms from the north before any sign of frost after the Harvest. It caught the Woods unaware, and before all harvests were brought in, leading to a hard winter in the Clublands and Woodlands. But when the spring came, the winter storms remained. Spring planting was delayed in the north, and while the South faired better, the spring was colder than it had been in recent memory. As cold spring turned to cold summer, it seemed almost as if the Woods fought back, fairy mists rolling out among the trees in the dawn of day carrying with it the warmth of summer winds, only for snowflakes to often return in the dark of night like a swarm of bees rattling among the treetops. And though they melted in the dawn's warmth, the summer was cold and the plantings in the north faired poorly. Worry set in at what little harvest there might be. It is whispered in rumors that the High King and Queen even journeyed to the Woods, to meet with their old friend Vigo Cotting and the others who remained of the Company of the Heart, perhaps seeking an answer.

And if the long cold of the year wasn't enough, in early Fall, the Change Winds of the Fairy Mists returned...