

Tales from the Cotting House Player's Guide

Part One: Character

"Once Upon A Time, in the land of Farroway, 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 Farroway, 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 Note on Tales:

Tales begins 5 years after the events in the original *Cottington Woods* campaign. While the people, places, and events of that campaign provide a backdrop for *Tales*, you need not have been a player of the original campaign to enjoy *Tales*. *Tales* is a series of new stories, with new (and, yes, some returning) NPCs and all new Plotlines. It is its own series of tales. *Tales* is intended to allow us to explore and tell stories of the Written World we didn't get a chance to tell in the original campaign.

If the original Campaign was a "novel," think of *Tales* as an anthology of short stories centered around a common theme/underlying story. An overarching plotline *does* connect all the events, but each individual Event is designed to stand on its own, with plots beginning and ending within a single event. We are experimenting with some new formats, to ensure that players who miss an event do not feel as if they've missed out on the storyline or integral information. Thus if you only attend one event, you'll feel as if you're involved in everything. If you attend all of them, you'll be able to piece together the larger picture.

Tales is episodic in its nature, though the passage of time is linear from event to event. This also means we will allow PCs, who wish to, to play different characters each event. CP will be tied to the Player, not to the Character, so you do not need to feel as if you are losing Skill Progress (CP) by switching.

For those who like to piece together a larger picture over time, don't worry - you won't be disappointed, as there IS something that brings all the *Tales* together. But for those who want to be able to show up at an event, throw yourself into the plotlines, but not feel you "lost out" because you missed the prior event or will miss the next event, you will hopefully also be happy with how the events will be run.

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"Be Nice."

This is the heart of our intentions and policies at *Tales from the Cotting House*, 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. 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 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. LARPing can be an intense activity, and the staff wishes to provide a safe environment for the players, NPCs and staff alike, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, age, religion, or any other factor.

Harassment is generally any behavior that annoys, alarms, or threatens another person or group. 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, and unwelcome sexual attention. 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. 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 harrasment@cottingtonwoods.com to reach us directly and immediately with any issues.

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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 Faraway 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 Faraway 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: thus 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, it's 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 Tales 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

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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's 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. 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.)
- 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.
- One of our staff once described that they strive for a "Sixth Sense" style of plot: the information is out there so that you realize he was dead all along.

A Collection of Short Stories, Connected Together

- If you think of most LARP campaigns as a "novel," then Tales of the Cotting House is an "anthology of short stories." There is a central theme, and an underlying plotline, that connects each story, but each event is a short story unto itself, with plotlines that begin and end within a single event.
- This hopefully allows new players and players who miss events to not feel as if they are missing out on what already happened, while allowing players who attend all (even if they play more than one character over the arc of Tales) to piece together the larger picture.

This is your story, too

- 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.
- 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. We, as Staff, very much enjoy the internal stories of your characters as much as the external quests you may undertake.
- 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. 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 Tales 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.

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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.

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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?

- 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 Faraway 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 Faraway, 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 passages, or running through the woods.
- Who is your family? Your mentors? Your friends? Do you have rivals or enemies, and if so, who are there? Who are the people that had an impact on your life, and why?

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 crept 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 folk 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.

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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 tradesman traveling together to town.

How would you face the uncommon?

- Cottington strives to tell the tale of the common people faced with the uncommon. So consider: how would your character react to the uncommon? What would you do if 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 does your character secretly (or overtly) strive to be? What do they hide from the world, and what do you show? Do you like yourself?

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.
- 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!

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.

Important Note: While pretty fonts add tremendous character to histories and PELS, please save the fancy scripts to the in game letters or notes you may send. A plain, easy to read font is best.

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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 armor smith 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.

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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 are less 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.