# How to Play



Containing rules for using Playbooks and Scenario Packs for



# An adventurous pastime from Flatland Games



www.flatlandgames.com



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Our sincere thanks to all the people on dragonsfoot, rpg.net, and elsewhere for playtesting, feedback, and encouragement

meae uxori pulchrae quae mihi semper suffragatur

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FLATLAND GAMES,

# INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of *Beyond the Wall and Other Adventures* is to provide groups the tools they need to play a game - from character creation to either victory or defeat - in a single evening, with little to no prep work on anyone's part.

We love a good, long-running campaign as much as anybody, but we've often found, as we have gotten older, that it is hard to schedule a frequent and consistent meeting time, and a lot of people don't seem to have the free time to prepare between sessions. Moreover, we strongly believe that it is beneficial for there to be a way to pick up a fantasy roleplaying game for the first time and play it more or less right away, straight out of the box. New and old gamers should have available to them an option for playing a quick and fun game with little fuss.



This basic version of the game comes with six different Character Playbooks and a single Scenario Pack. New Character Playbooks and Scenario Packs can be found at www.flatlandgames.com. We also encourage you to make your own and share them with friends. If you come up with one you particularly like, let us know!

The 'Core Rules' booklet gives standard rules for creating simple characters, but we recommend using our Character Playbooks instead. With a set of these Playbooks, the players can, in an hour or less, create a group of interesting characters from the same village, with a shared background, who are ready for adventure.

It is important to remember that the characters you will make with these Character Playbooks will already come with all of their ability scores, skills, class special abilities, and everything else, including starting equipment and some extra coin to spend. If you use a Character Playbook, you should completely ignore the quick and easy rules for making characters found in the 'Core Rules' booklet.

Meanwhile, we also provide Scenario Packs for the gamemaster to use. These booklets give a GM everything necessary to provide a satisfying off-the-cuff adventure: monsters, motives, npcs, and even short dungeons. Such Scenario Packs differ from traditional adventure modules in that they provide a different play experience every time, and the events of the Scenario Pack are directly tied to the characters' shared backgrounds and their lives in the village which you will create together.

This booklet gives you all the information and advice you need to play using these Character Playbooks and Scenario Packs.

Because the first adventure is the best, and it begins at home.

# Getting Ready to Play

The first thing the group should do, after finding some comfortable seats and grabbing some dice and pencils, is design their characters together. Each player should choose a Character Playbook that looks interesting to him and let the other players know what he has.

The gamemaster, meanwhile, should be preparing to take notes in her Scenario Pack. She'll also have her hands full keeping up with the players' ideas and helping shape a background narrative for the group.

# WHAT DO THE PLAYERS DO?

#### CHILDHOOD

The first three tables in each playbook deal with a character's time as a small child. The characters should take turns rolling on the tables one at a time. Their characters were all friends, and this is their first chance to figure out how they might have known each other growing up. Don't worry if two or more characters get the same results on some of these tables; in fact, that's great. Do two characters have parents who were merchants? If so, does this mean that they are siblings? It's a great hook to have two characters with a tight bond. On the other hand, maybe their parents were rival merchants in town, but they became fast friends nonetheless. That makes for a good story too.

The important thing to remember is to slow down and elaborate on your results as you go. It's no fun just rolling dice, one after the other, and making notes, so talk and collaborate. The results on the tables only give you a bare bones description of background events, and it's up to the players to weave a story out of it all. You don't need anything too elaborate here (the best stories come up in play anyway), but you can certainly start learning a lot about your characters.

#### **CLASS TRAINING**

The next four tables in each playbook let you know how your character became a warrior, rogue, or mage. These tables are different for all the Character Playbooks, so you shouldn't have any repeat actions showing up here. Again, all the players should take turns making their rolls and let the other players know what happened to their characters growing up.

You can learn a lot about your village as you make these rolls. Did your character train with an old mercenary in town? Is that mercenary still around? Do the other characters spend time with him too? (Remember: if you live in a small village and there are two similar descriptions, they probably refer to the same person.)

The third table in this section is special, as it involves not just your own character, but also the character belonging to the player on your right. You'll learn about something that the two of you did together from this table, and the result will affect both of your characters. These things happening in your past should seem quite natural, as you are close friends in a small place, so you were bound to be together for some important events.

The last table is also a little different; it gives you a special item of some sort. That item might be some extra money, a minor magic item, an odd trinket, or even a house in the village. You might not even know the value of these items yet, but your GM is very clever, and she is already scheming.

#### **IMPORTANT RULE FOR PLAYERS!**

While you are rolling on the various tables for your character, you may get a particular result that you absolutely hate, or you may just see a result that you missed that you really love. Once during character creation, you may ignore the result of a roll and pick anything you like from that particular table. No fair going back and doing this later! Just do it when it feels like you need to so that you can make your character conform to your vision.

#### **UNUSUAL ABILITY SCORES**

Very rarely, a player may defy the odds and end up with an ability score of 20 or even higher while making a character with a Playbook. The highest that any ability score can start at is 19, and any points over that limit are simply wasted. Don't feel cheated! The benefits of having such a marvelous score will probably outweigh any points which you might lose by going over.

#### THE OTHER BITS

You're almost done with your character now. Total up your Ability Scores and jot them down on your character sheet, as well as any other information you need from your playbook, like your saving throws. You should also pick an Alignment now. You can check the rulebook for more on the three Alignments, but if you are really unsure, just pick Neutral. You also probably have some money to spend, so you can pick a couple items that you really want and give your gamemaster some time to plan things.

You also will need to record your class abilities. Most of these will have been taken care of when you were rolling on the charts in your Playbook. For instance, rogues will have already generated their extra skills, mages their various spells, and warriors their weapon specialization. However, a rogue's special 'Fortune's Favor' ability, and a mage's 'Sense Magic' ability should be recorded now.

Also, if the group thinks it is important, you can pick the languages that your character knows. Everyone speaks a common language which they share, but characters with high Intelligence scores can know more.

### WHAT DOES THE GM DO?

#### MAKE NOTES

The things your players are rolling on their playbooks' charts and their embellishments as they chat around the table are gold for you. Your GM Scenario Pack has lots of places for you to write down important people, places, and things that come up during this part of character creation.

In particular, most of the Scenario Packs have a table or two with blank spots for things that come up while the players are making their characters. You will need to fill those in now, as the players are chatting and rolling, so that you can figure out the results of that table when the time comes. Any time something from their tables or their own brainstorming grabs your interest, make a note of it in your Scenario Pack on these tables.

#### **GUIDE THE PLAYERS**

It's important to look at how much time you have to play and guide the players through the character creation process so that they will still have time to get into the adventure on the same night. The dungeon is waiting, and they don't want to miss it. We find that if you have about four hours to play, you should spend around an hour on all the pregame stuff and then two to three on the adventure itself.

Alternatively, perhaps your players are being tightlipped or having trouble coming up with ideas to embellish their characters. That's a great chance for you to step in and prompt them with leading questions like, "John, I notice your dad was a smith, and that Jill trained with the smith. I take it that's the same guy? Did you help at the forge too, or were you too busy learning from the witch?"

#### **ROLL ON YOUR TABLES**

You've got tables in your Scenario Pack too, and they will help you come up with the background for tonight's adventure. While the players are making their rolls, you should make yours too. Don't miss out on any juicy bits from their discussion though, as you can always take a minute to make your rolls while they are filling in their sheets or picking equipment.

As you fill in information in your Scenario Pack and see the results of your table, you should begin to get a vague idea of what's going on. Just like with the players, you'll only have basic descriptions of things in your Scenario Pack. It's up to you to weave it all together.

Many of the Scenario Packs provide short "dungeons" for the climax of the adventure. If so, go ahead and roll on these tables as well so that you aren't stumped when you get there.

# WHAT DO WE ALL DO?

#### **RECENT EVENTS**

By now, the players should all have characters with a history together and the gamemaster should have an idea from her Scenario Pack of what's been going on recently near the village. All we need now is an impetus for those characters to get out the door and on their adventure.

Each Scenario Pack has a table called 'Recent Events.' Each player, in turn, should roll a die and see what happened to his character some time within the last couple of weeks or so. The character belonging to the player on his left was there with him for his recent event, and has a chance to help him out. This means that every character will have been involved in two events, and they should be weird and intriguing enough to get the players ready to get into the action right away once play starts.

Each result on the Recent Events tables gives the player an option of acting on the event and, thereby, making a roll. This is a good chance for the players to test out the rules and learn how to make tests. Don't forget, the player to the left was there with him for the event, so he can help out if he has a relevant skill or a Fortune Point. Be careful though, as any Fortune Points spent during this part of the process will be unavailable to the character when play begins.

The GM should do her best to make the results of these rolls meaningful. If the characters succeed on an interesting check during their recent event, let them start



right off with a clue as to what's going on or information about whom they need to watch. Don't give everything away, but it's okay to let them know some things now; it only makes it easier for them to start the game right away.

A given Recent Event can only happen once. This means that if a player rolls the same event as one that has already happened, he will need to go to the end of the table and find the special events. The first unused special event happens instead of what he originally rolled.

Some Scenario Packs have different types of Recent Events, such as a single group event that all of the characters take part in and which immediately jump starts the adventure.

#### TAKE A BREATHER

You're ready to start the game now, so take a couple minutes to grab a drink and let the GM finish making notes. You should have plenty of time left for the adventure ahead of you.

#### The Gamemaster's Most Important Job

The gamemaster is going into this with a fair amoung of information overload - a lot of things coming from a lot of directions. Cool. You've got a lot to play with that way. Your job is to figure out how to relate the best bits of the player characters' backgrounds that they are getting from their Playbooks with what you're getting from your Scenario Pack. This requires finesse and creativity, but we find that most people get the hang of it.

Remember, these Gamemaster Scenario Packs are not traditional adventure modules: they don't give you a pre-made game session, ready to go. The whole point is for you to make up your own adventure scenario and play it in a single evening, so have fun and roll with the punches. If you need a minute to figure out how two or three things go together, just tell the players that you need to think, come up with something that seems fun, and go with it.

# Building the Village

As an optional way to add some depth to the game and make things easier on the gamemaster, you can use the Character Playbooks to build a map of the village while the players are making their characters. Use the worksheet provided at the back of this booklet and available for download at www.flatlandgames.com to draw your village map.

You'll notice that the map already has a place for the inn, located at the center of town. In fantasy literature, the local inn or tavern is frequently a site of adventure and fellowship, and serves as a central location for life in the village, so we consider it a given that this location is important to the game. It also gives a nice visual in the center of the map.

Likewise, you'll also notice that there is a box to one side with spaces for important people in the village. Feel free to go ahead and list the inkeep if you think he will be important.



The players and gamemaster will now take turns adding locations and important NPCs to the map. Any time players see the symbol to the left beside one

of the tables in their Character Playbooks or Scenario Pack, they may then add a location of interest to the map. This location may or may not be directly related to the result that they just rolled on the table itself. The player should feel free to use the result as inspiration or just to make up something that interests him.

Example: Jillian just rolled a result telling her that her new Village Hero character excelled at various games while she was growing up. Jillian may decide to add a practice field for the levy on the outskirts of the village where her character frequently won sporting events, which would certainly fit with his roll. However, she could just as well decide instead to add Grandfather Oak, an ancient and rune-carved tree under which her character often sits by herself or gathers with her friends to tell stories.



Players and the gamemaster also get to invent other characters in the village. When players see the symbol to the left beside one of the tables in their

Character Playbooks or Scenario Pack, they instead add an important NPC to the list on the side of the village map. As with the map locations, this NPC may or may not have anything to do with the results of their most recent roll.

By the end of character creation, you should have a rough map of the village with some interesting locations and people to use during the game. These people and places are good candidates for placement on the tables in the gamemaster's Scenario Pack, too. The map that you end up with will not, of course, describe every NPC in the village, or have every building or location, but that's okay. The players can point to it during play and get a rough idea of where they are at any given time, and the gamemaster and players can add to it as the game goes on if they find themselves returning to a spot which isn't drawn there yet.



# Running the Game

Now it is time to get to the adventure itself. The gamemaster should have everything necessary to get the players hooked and interested. The Recent Events tables in the Scenario Pack probably already have the characters ready to save their friends and their home. Here are some tips to help you while running the session.

### **KEEP THINGS MOVING**

When things start getting slow, ramp up the drama. Ideally, your players will be driving the story forward from the beginning of play; after all, they've had a lot of odd recent events, and this is their own home that is in danger. However, sometimes things drag, or the characters find themselves lost without a clue as to what to do.

When this happens, throw something new at the players. The cliche example is a sudden attack. That certainly works, but so might a stranger with a special, unforeseen clue, or a musty tome found in the ancient temple at the edge of town.

The secret here is this: most players want to roll dice, and they want their rolls to matter. You achieve this by picking interesting obstacles and clues that play to the stuff on the character sheets: ability scores, skills, family, and personal history.

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

The Character Playbooks and the GM Scenario Pack already help you tie the events of the adventure directly to the characters' lives, friends, and families. If you feel that they need another hook, keep it up!

The villages and other settings portrayed in *Beyond the Wall* are generally rather small places, and everyone knows everyone else. If you need someone to be revealed as a masquerading faerie, look first to the characters' friends from their playbooks. If someone from town needs to stumble upon the dragon's cave, have it be one of the characters' fishing buddies. Take advantage of the lists of names in the Scenario Pack to make every NPC unique and a little more of a person to your players.

It's worth watching that you don't only have terrible things happen to a character's personal acquaintances. When things get slow for the young village hero, it's fine to have her father kidnapped by wicked goblins from the silver mine, but if this happens with every one of her relations, she might start wishing she didn't have any at all. A character's family and friends can also be great sources of hints and information, and they can help the characters when they need it most.

#### SPECIAL ITEMS

Many of the Character Playbooks give some truly odd items to a starting character: a branch from the Dark Heart of the Wood, an engraved ring, etc. These trinkets may be useful or not, but they are a great source of hooks for the gamemaster.

Often, in the source fiction from which Beyond the Wall draws inspiration, heroes find that they have held something special all along which is useful to them. You might find it useful to have one or more of these trinkets be minor magical items which are important in their adventure.

For instance, perhaps the branch which the woodsman pulled from a twisting hawthorn in the forest is actually a charm against the fae, and will hold them at bay for several rounds in a dangerous combat. Or maybe the nobleman's daughter has been holding on to an ancient standard which has the power to rally the men of the village to her side in the most dire moment of an attack from the north.

This works best if you plan it at the start of the game and give the players hints, but don't be afraid to pull it out at the end if the players get in a serious bind and it's needed.

# Avoid Illusionism

Illusionism is a term used to describe a particular problem with seat-of-the-pants GMing in roleplaying games. Illusionism happens when a gamemaster makes sure that every choice the characters make is the right choice (or vice versa). For instance, the characters enter a small cave and come to a junction. One way leads to the end of their quest, the other to something else. The GM waits for the characters to say which way they are going, and then immediately places the end of the quest in that direction.

This is certainly not necessarily the worst thing in the world, but it can make some players feel that their choices do not matter at all, and they would be right. If the evil wizard will be down the right hand path if I choose it, but down the left if I choose that way instead, then why did I choose at all? Why didn't the gamemaster just make a single hallway taking me straight to the destination he had in mind?

You can avoid Illusionism fairly easily, even while running things on the fly. If there are two ways to go, simply decide which way leads to the evil wizard, even if you only make that decision five minutes -- or five seconds -- beforehand.

Let the players fail, because those failures will make their successes all the sweeter. It's okay if they stumble off the track, or reach a wrong conclusion. And if they succeed a little too quickly and easily, let them! Sometimes they deserve it.

### TONE

At its heart, *Beyond the Wall* is a game about young heroes who find themselves in over their heads and have to grow as a result of their experiences. Their world is often gritty and dark, but it is never grim. The characters have a chance to save their homes, their friends, and their families, but their success is not guaranteed.

Remember that those homes, friends, and families must be worth saving for the story to have meaning. If every NPC in the village is a duplicitous scoundrel who lies and cheats the characters, then they won't have much reason to want to stay there and protect everyone. That's not to say that there aren't any such scoundrels in the village; there almost certainly are. But it's okay to have one character's father live through his troubles and another's boyfriend be genuine and helpful. Make home seem dangerous during the session, but make it seem like it could be the safe haven the characters want it to be.

Compared to some games, our characters start out relatively competent, but certainly not immune to danger. A 1st level warrior with a couple of high ability scores can hew down goblins rather easily, but a well placed sword blow or two will still bring him to his knees. The players and the GM should remember this and not take undue risks. It is probably worth facing the axes of the invading northmen if it involves protecting the endangered father or the genuine boyfriend, but characters would do well not to go looking for trouble when it doesn't serve their ends.

Magic is mysterious and dangerous. Unless you want them, there are no 'mage's guilds' or 'magic shops.' A mage PC is likely to be the only wielder of magic in the village beyond the witch, whose powers are often subtle and earthy. If a character openly casts a flashy spell, such as Burning Hands or Conjure Darkness, it will likely be a thing told about in stories for a long time in the village.

There is an unseen world which lurks just beneath the mundane. Spirits and demons of Chaos abound, and there are creatures in the woods that mothers describe to their children in tall tales. For the most part our characters are just encountering the supernatural as the game begins. Their Character Playbooks have probably provided them with hints of this world, for the PCs are unusual people who might have already had a brush with the supernatural.

The lands outside the village are dangerous, but they are also also beautiful and enchanting. The faeries in the woods can kill a man, or take him captive for an age, but they also give the greatest of gifts, sing the sweetest of songs, and have a beauty unknown to mortals. After saving their own village from the dangers of the gamemaster's Scenario Pack, the characters should have a sense of this beauty and danger, and they should have a reason to continue their stories, go beyond the wall, and seek a world of adventure. Beyond the Wall and Other Adventures uses several terms and names that are Copyright 2000-2003 Wizards of the Coast, Inc. These terms are used under the terms of the Open Game License v1.0a, and are designated as Open Content by that license.

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Name: Player: Class:

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