

THE WOODS

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**A COLLABORATIVE GAME ABOUT TWO TRAVELERS LOST IN THE WOODS AND
THE NATURE OF FAIRY TALES.**

General Information:

Players:

4 players and one GM

Time:

1.5 - 2 hours. 30min of rules and collaborative world building and 1-1.5hrs of play.

Structure:

The plot of this game is simple. Two travelers are stranded at night in forbidding woods and take shelter at some strangers' fire. The once conceit is that in whatever culture you are a part of, telling stories at night is a custom, and each character will take it in turn to tell a story throughout the game.

Rules:

There are no rules for resolving conflicts. Players are encouraged to agree upon an outcome that best moves the narrative forward for their characters. In the case of an impasse, the GM will settle disputes.

There are rules for telling stories.

- Each story should last no more than 5-10 minutes.
- Each character has a type of story they want to tell, and a way they prefer stories to work or end.
- Once or twice (depending on character) a player may, change a type of detail about the story in order to move it in their preferred direction. The tale teller must then integrate this into the story
 - Ex: "The evil stepmother forced Cinderella to work because she was jealous of her." "Wait! You're mistaken, Cinderella was lazy and spoiled, and the stepmother wanted to instill in her a work ethic." "Yes, I remember now. . ."
 - Ex: "The giant was about to eat Jack, but Jack had a plan." "Yes! I've heard this story, wasn't Jack a dead shot with a sling?" "That's correct!"

Be sure to leave enough space in between stories to interact and pursue goals in character.

Before you begin:

- Choose characters. Since they all have secrets, do not show your sheet to another player.
 - The Baker: A forthright and stalwart baker, off to seek their fortune.
 - The Runaway: The baker's companion, fleeing something.
 - The Stern Woodsman: One of the woodsmen, a serious individual.
 - The Jolly Woodsman: One of the woodsmen, a laughing jokester.
- Decide on a common genre. This will be helpful to keep a consistent feel when you collaborate. Think about things like mood, time period and culture, but don't get bogged down in specifics.
 - Ex: Modern American horror, Ye Olde European fantasy, Arabian Nights
 - Whatever you choose, everyone should feel comfortable at least attempting stories in that genre.
- Split off into two groups, the woodsmen and the travelers, to work on your collaborative questions. You should be unable to hear each other.

Beginning of Play:

- Each player should briefly describe their character's appearance.
- The GM may set a mood, describing the scenery.
- The travelers stumble into the firelight and the game is on.

End of Play:

- Play ends when either the travelers decide to resume their journey or everyone turns in for the night.
- The GM will then give a brief epilogue.

The GM:

Your job is divided up into pre, during, and post game.

Pre-Game:

Explain the story telling rules:

Each person will tell a 2-10min story, usually based on a fairy tale. They have a theme and also a note on what type of stories they like. Other characters, who like other types of stories can introduce confounding notes (type of note specified on character sheet) to try and change the story.

Assign characters, making sure people do not see other peoples' character sheets.

Chair the discussion to pick a consensus genre.

Place the travelers in one room or area and the woodsmen in another.

Help each group answer their pre-game questions if they need it. Make sure they tell you the answers, so you know what shape the overall plot has.

Make sure every player has at least a rough idea for their story or understands their theme.

During Game:

Establish opening setting elements.

Resolve disputes (unlikely to come up).

Feel free to add setting notes during play to help them mood, since you know everyone's shared backstory. This can be useful for establishing consensus reality or nudging the plot.

Post-Game:

Explain the setup to the Travelers/Mortals.

Ask the mythic creatures to describe how they changed, and what blessing or curse (if any) they bestow upon the Travelers/Mortals.

The Baker:

Story:

You left a quiet life in a small town to seek a fortune, bringing along your (friend/sibling/lover) The Runaway. You were certain that strength, common sense and virtue would see you safely through the Dark Woods, and started the venture cheerfully, with a spirit of adventure.

Things went sour when you and the Runaway had a fight, with things said that might not be able to be taken back. The next day a group of bandits attacked you, stealing your mule, cart and supplies; and leaving you stranded. You fought them off as best you could, but took a blow to the temple. Leaning upon your compatriot's arm you staggered along the track until a faint light beckoned through the trees.

Now you exhaustedly stumble into a small camp.

Questions to answer collaboratively with the Runaway:

- What is your name?
- What is your close relationship to your fellow traveler?
- What has soured in your relationship?

Questions to answer either with the Runaway or on your own:

- Why have you traveled into the dark woods? What great quest are you running toward?

Motivations:

- Repair your relationship with The Runaway.
- Get help escaping the woods to pursue your quest.

The story you know:

A bully is taken down a peg by a trickster figure.
(ex: Br'er rabbit, coyote)

Changes:

Twice during someone else's story you can choose to change the direction by introducing a plot complication which the teller must integrate:

Can change: motivations, small details.

What you want out of stories: virtue / moral lessons

The Runaway:

Story:

You lived a hard, miserable life in a small town. So when your (friend/sibling/lover) the Baker left to seek their fortune, you jumped at the chance to escape and start over. You were certain that after what you've experienced, you had nothing to fear in the Dark Woods. You started the venture determined, with a new sense of freedom.

Things went sour when you and The Baker had a fight, with things said that might not be able to be taken back. The next day a group of bandits attacked you, stealing your mule, cart and supplies; and leaving you stranded. You fought them viciously, but were overpowered and The Baker took a blow to the temple. Supporting your compatriot's weight you staggered along the track until a faint light beckoned through the trees.

Now you exhaustedly stumble into a small camp.

Questions to answer with the Baker:

- What is your name?
- What is your close relationship to the Baker?
- What has soured in your relationship?

Questions to answer either with the Baker or on your own:

- Why have you traveled into the dark woods? What are you running away from?

Motivations:

- Resolve your relationship with The Baker
- Find a new, better life.

The story you know:

Three siblings try and get something from a witch. She punishes two and rewards one.
(ex: three princes off to seek their fortune, two rude sisters and one kind one)

Changes:

Twice during someone else's story you can choose to change the direction by introducing a plot complication which the teller must integrate:

Can change: Punishments and Rewards / Locations.

What you want out of stories: The character you identify with to be powerful.

The Jolly Woodsman (The Trickster):

Story:

For centuries you have haunted the Dark Woods. Your nature changes as stories about you come and go, but always takes the form of a trickster, one who uses cleverness and humor to win. You share your home with many other such creatures, including a wicked old witch, with whom you have a complicated relationship. Your feud is older than most mortal's lives, but has aged like brandy into a type of companionable sniping friendship.

Life for you is joyful, getting in and out of scrapes or playing practical jokes; but mortals don't come through the Dark Woods much anymore, and you get bored. So when you saw two mortals traveling in their sad donkey cart along the path, you and the witch decided to entertain yourselves. You placed a bet about what each of you could get them to do. Then, disguised with illusion as brigands, you attacked and stranded them in the forest.

Changing form to a pair of woodcutters, you set your warm fire's glow like a lure, to tempt them in for an evening of entertainment. However, when The Runaway staggered into the clearing, bearing their companions weight upon their shoulder, you were struck at once by love at first sight.

Questions to answer with The Witch / Stern Woodsman:

- What is your name?
- What is your bet with The Witch?
- Why do you feud with The Witch?

Questions to answer privately:

- What attracted you to The Runaway? (you can decide in game)

Motivations:

- Keep your disguise
- Win your bet with The Witch
- Make people look foolish
- Seduce The Runaway

Special Story Rules:

In any tale told by you or the mortals, what happens to representations of your archetype changes your history and personality. This is especially true of any details added by the mortals.

In the Baker's story, the underdog is a trickster figure.

However, you also get to make stories real, and at the end of the night can bring a supernatural power to bear upon the Mortals for good or ill.

The story you know:

A clever trickster torments and confuses person(s) to the amusement of all--or at least you.

(Ex: *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *will o'wisp*s)

Changes:

Once during someone else's story you can choose to change the direction by introducing a plot complication which the teller must integrate:

Can change: Add unexpected plot twists

What you want out of stories: You start wanting trickery and cleverness, this will change if your personality changes to whatever best embodies your spirit.

The Stern Woodsman / The Witch:

Story:

Centuries ago you left behind mortal life to become the witch of the Dark Woods. Your nature changes as you drift into myth, but always takes the form of a ruthlessness and powerful old witch. You share your home with many mythic creatures, including a too clever trickster, with whom you have a complicated relationship. Your feud is older than most mortal's lives, but has aged like brandy into a type of companionable sniping friendship.

Life for you is solitary, living alone in your cottage. Mortals don't come through the Dark Woods much anymore, and you get bored. So when you saw two mortals traveling in their sad donkey cart along the path, you and the trickster decided to entertain yourselves. You placed a bet about what each of you could get them to do. Then, disguised as brigands you attacked and stranded them in the forest.

Changing into a pair of woodcutters, you set your warm fire's glow like a lure, to tempt them in for an evening of "entertainment." Unbeknownst to the Trickster, you have an ulterior motive, one of these mortals (or both) is important to you.

Questions to answer with the Trickster / Jolly Woodsman:

- What is your name?
- What is your bet with the trickster?
- What is your feud with the trickster?

Questions to answer privately:

- What do you need from the Mortals?

Motivations:

- Keep your disguise
- Win your bet with The Trickster
- Get what you need
- Be mysterious and powerful

Special Story Rules:

In any tale told by you or the mortals, what happens to representations of your archetype changes your history and personality. This is especially true of any details added by the Mortals.

In the Runaway's story, a witch features prominently.

However, you also get to make stories real, and at the end of the night can bring a supernatural power to bear upon the Mortals for good or ill.

The story you know: A strong beautiful witch torments a useless prince/princess.
(ex: Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, etc. but with a new perspective.)

Changes:

Once during someone else's story you can choose to change the direction by introducing a plot complication which the teller must integrate:

Can change: Character's powers and abilities

What you want out of stories: You start wanting tales of vengeance, this will change if your personality changes to whatever best embodies your spirit.