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INTRODUCTION

A GAME OF HORROR



WHAT IS THIS?

Bluebeard's Bride is a tabletop roleplaying game of supernatural horror set in a familiar fairy tale. The tale starts simply enough: one room in Bluebeard's house is forbidden to the Bride. She eventually falls prey to her curiosity and opens it, discovering gruesome evidence that reveals her husband to be a killer of women. The game you play with this book is different—you and your friends explore the rooms of Bluebeard's home as his Bride, creating your own beautifully tragic version of the dark fairy tale.

Each player takes on the role of an aspect of the Bride's psyche—a Sister—who guides the Bride through Bluebeard's house, armed with little more than a set of keys. Each of you takes turns speaking as these aspects of her psyche would speak, deciding what actions the Bride takes, pushing the Bride deeper into the mysteries of each room, and provoking new horrors along the way.

You and your Sisters may not always agree, mimicking the internal struggle we all sometimes feel when confronted with difficult choices.

One Sister may feel the need to rebel and push further in her investigation, while another Sister labors to regain control in the face of her fears. The Bride, and your experience in the game, is stronger for these types of conflicts and disagreements.

The rules of this game involve some negotiation and a bit of chance. Sometimes you wear Bluebeard's wedding ring and directly control the Bride's actions; other times you roll dice to determine what happens next. No single person directs this story, not even the Groundskeeper, who portrays the servants and horrors you meet along the way. The Bride's story is unpredictable and engaging, leading her down a dark path to an unknown future.

But the Bride's story is not random. Your experiences in Bluebeard's house are guided by the original fairy tale, a framework that ties your story to the many tellings of the Bluebeard story. You move from room to room, gathering tokens and encountering horrors, before eventually making your way to the final room—and sealing the Bride's fate forever. And along the way, questions will arise...

*What will you find in
your new husband's house?*

What horrors will haunt you?

*What darkness will you find
within yourself?*

But in the end, there is only one question that matters for a new Bride:

Will you open the final door?

WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

Before you play *Bluebeard's Bride*, you need to gather a few friends who want to explore the house with you for a couple of hours. The game is designed to be played in a single session, but it has replay value; if your friends are left begging for more, you can always set aside some time for another session. We included several Sisters (page 47) so players can choose a different one each time, as well as guidelines to help generate an endless array of rooms for the Bride to explore (page 76).

As you prepare to play, you may find yourself in need of the following:

- **A Dark Corner to Play In:**

Ambiance is everything when playing a horror game. Find a space that accommodates the kind of story you are trying to tell. Dim the lights and shut the door, so everyone can hear you whisper.

- **A Spooky Soundtrack:**

Creepy music and ambient noise can heighten players' involvement at the table as well as inform your play; music can build tension in a scene or accent suspenseful moments. Look to the mediography (page 110) for some of our recommendations.

To play the game, you absolutely need:

- **Players:** One person to facilitate the game as Groundskeeper and three to five others to play as the Bride (Sisters).
- **Playbooks:** Each Sister playbook is an archetype of the Bride's personality. Available online at magpiegames.com/bluebeard.
- **Ring:** A Sister who wears the ring has more narrative control over the actions of the Bride.
- **Dice:** You need one pair of six-sided dice (d6) for when things get rough.
- **Pencils and Paper:** Print the materials and grab some pencils before you sit down to play.
- **The X-Card:** This tool makes playing together fun and comfortable. Available at tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg. (See more on page 12).
- **Time:** *Bluebeard's Bride* works best when you take your time with the story. Try to set aside 3-4 hours to play the game.

WHY PLAY A HORROR GAME?

Why go to all the trouble of gathering friends when you can instead read a ghost story or rewatch your favorite horror film?

Tabletop roleplaying games allow you to explore horror directly, and to collaborate on a terrifying tale with your friends. Watching a movie allows you to passively engage with monstrosity—the storyline is fixed and unmoving, not tailored to you or your fears. Often, you can guess the tropes of a movie or a story and what the ending will be. *Bluebeard's Bride* has an ending that only you and your friends can discover through play.

Horror stories are things born of nightmares and old fears; their content is drawn from a dark place deep within our psyches. *Bluebeard's Bride* encourages, nurtures, and grows the grim and indecent part of your imagination that hardly gets exercised in the light of day.

You have permission to give voice to the darkness within, and you may be surprised at what you find there—as well as what your friends reveal. This feeling can be liberating as well as terrifying. And if you can scare yourself, you can scare everyone else at the table.

Remember, you and your friends determine the fate of the Bride—a young woman who arrives at her new home—rather than simply reading about how her story ends. As you make decisions for her, you occupy the role of both the audience and author of the story, watching and reacting as the horror unfolds around you.

Playing *Bluebeard's Bride* is a memorable experience; no movie or ghost story can match the kind of experience you and your friends can create collaboratively, whispering to each other in the dark and rolling dice at moments of horrific uncertainty.

EXPLORING

YOUR

FEARS

PLAYING SAFELY

Before you take a deep breath and step off the path into the delightful darkness in which *Bluebeard's Bride* is played, there are a few things you need to know:

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Before you begin, you and your group should discuss what kind of game *Bluebeard's Bride* is and decide whether or not it is a good fit for the group that night. In this game, the goal is not just to scare or creep out the characters you play, but to frighten you *as players*.

This kind of experience requires at least a minimal amount of buy in. You would not show up to a funeral wearing a clown suit, and you should not play a horror game when you would rather play a game about superheroes.

Bluebeard's Bride is designed to push the limits of your intellectual dark side and exercise everyone's twisted imaginations, but that means there is the possibility for some people to get emotionally overwhelmed or upset by that content. Violence against women and a lack of agency are examples of two recurring themes that your group may or may not be in the mood to explore.

We include some tools to help your group overcome truly upsetting content that may arise without spoiling anything about the game (such as the X-Card). This may not be a suitable game for your group at this time, and that is fine. This game was not designed to please everyone, and player preferences matter a lot to a game's success.

This is not to say that playing *Bluebeard's Bride* is not fun. Quite the contrary! Exploring your fears and the fears of the people around you from the comfort of your own home and in the company of people you care about can be an enlightening and rewarding experience!

THE X-CARD

The issues that *Bluebeard's Bride* raises are often disturbing and uncomfortable, so we encourage you to play with an X-Card at your table.

The X-Card, designed by John Stavropolous, is a tool that helps groups manage difficult content without setting artificial boundaries or flagging content in advance. To quote John:

The X-Card is an optional tool that allows anyone in your game (including you) to edit out any content anyone is uncomfortable with as you play. Since most RPGs are improvisational and we will not know what will happen till it happens, it is possible the game will go in a direction people do not want. An X-Card is a simple tool used to highlight and resolve problems as they arise.

To use, at the start of your game, simply say:

I'd like your help to make this game fun for everyone. If anything makes you uncomfortable—

[draw X on an index card]

—just lift this card up, or simply tap it.

[place card at the center of the table]

You don't have to explain why, it doesn't matter why, we simply edit out anything X-Carded. If there is ever an issue, anyone can call for a break so we can talk privately. I know it sounds funny but it will help us play amazing games together and usually I'm the one who uses the X-Card to protect myself from all of you! Thank you!

We have found that anything that gets X-Carded during play can be replaced by something equally horrific, twisted, and troubling that does not push our group to bad places.

We trust your collective imagination to do the same! You will always think of some other terrible thing the butcher was going to do or some other disturbing performance of self-mutilation the horror needs to perform. Do not let yourself be bound by something so mundane as the first thing you thought of in a scene.

More on the X-Card can be found at tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg.

MORE
MORE

MORE

MORE





A STRANGE BEGINNING
CHAPTER ONE

THE TALE ITSELF

The fairy tale of Bluebeard is one of the oldest—and bleakest—to persist and was a well-known story by the time it was written down. For centuries, analogues like “Fitcher’s Bird” have taken root all around the world and you should not, dear girl, assume a *correct* or *definitive* version exists. Fairy tales persist in a state of multiplicity with new life and meaning breathed into each telling.

The many versions of this lurid tale are a testament to the gripping quality of what is at its core. Violence. Sexuality. Death. We know that these subjects are titillating, but like any good story there are lessons to be learned. The thread running through all these tellings paints a picture of a trap that is sprung when a wife’s curiosity drives her to disobey her husband.

Some interpretations say it is a tale meant as admonishment to women for their capricious nature. Others say it is a tale from women, for women, meant as a warning about men and their power. The following version of the tale, which we are about to share with you, is one of the many you may share at the table.

As you read and play out your own telling of this haunting story, allow yourself to connect to this feminine horror. It belongs to *you*, dear child. Your burden and your thrilling dare. There is no flinching away from it. The horror you unlock will be what it will be, and you must find your own meaning in respect to your own life. And ask yourself how that tale reconciles with your hopes, your dreams, and your darkest fears.

Remember though, it’s just a fairy tale.

VIOLENCE
SEXUALITY
DEATH

