

ROOT

— The Roleplaying Game —

Core Book



A Game of Woodland Adventure



Core Book

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Introduction



Root: The Roleplaying Game is a pen-and-paper tabletop storytelling game. Alongside a few friends, you spin out the stories of roguish vagabonds as they journey throughout the Woodland, acting as something between knaves and heroes!

You meet up with your friends, whether it's around an actual table, in an online call, or whatever way fits your group. Most of you have your own character, an individual vagabond in your band, acting as anything between a rogue, a scamp, a survivor, and maybe a hero. One of you is the Gamemaster (GM) and describes the rest of the world and all the other characters in it. Every now and then, when you describe something chancy or complicated or tense, you roll some dice to find out what happens. Over a bunch of individual meetings—sessions—you and your friends play out a larger story of these miscreants and legends of the Woodland.

What Is Root?

ROOT: A GAME OF WOODLAND MIGHT AND RIGHT is a board game created and published by Leder Games, designed by Cole Wehrle and with art by Kyle Ferrin. The game was originally published in 2018 and, since then, has racked up a slew of awards, including four Golden Geek Awards and the Origin Award for Best Board Game in 2019.

The board game is an asymmetric wargame featuring wildly different factions of anthropomorphic animals vying for power. The Marquise de Cat and her minions try to build workshops and lumber mills to take control of the Woodland, while the Eyrie Dynasties manage a complicated bureaucratic “program” of orders, and the Woodland Alliance starts with no pieces on the board, only to spring forth with sudden force as a surging insurrection against the greater powers. The base game includes one faction—the Vagabond—who acts as a single, isolated, roguish figure, moving throughout the Woodland, switching allegiances between the other factions, and performing quests for the denizens of the Woodland.

At the time of writing, two additional expansions are available for the board game: one that adds the mercenary Riverfolk Company and the cryptic Lizard Cult; and another that adds the arrogant Great Underground Duchy and the anarchic Corvid Conspiracy. A third—The Marauder Expansion—will soon be available for fans as well!

Root: The Roleplaying Game is based on the same fictional world as **ROOT: A GAME OF WOODLAND MIGHT AND RIGHT**, playing with many of the same themes and ideas, but from a different perspective—that of a tabletop roleplaying game focused on the vagabonds themselves.

What Is a Tabletop Roleplaying Game?

A tabletop roleplaying game (often abbreviated to TTRPG or RPG) is a kind of storytelling game that you play at your table with pen, paper, and dice. It plays out as if you and your friends were cooperatively and conversationally telling a story together. Over a few hours—or many sessions—your collective story evolves and changes, going to new and unexpected places based on your characters' actions.

Most players each take on the role of a character in the setting of the game. You describe what that character looks like and what they do. You say what they say, either describing their words (“I say something apologetic!”) or speaking for them verbatim (“I say, ‘You’ll never catch me, Count Ragar!’”). You think about what they think and feel, and you guide all of their actions.

You do all of that alongside your friends playing their own characters. You work together in times of danger, and you argue with each other in times of drama. You flesh out friendships, rivalries, romances, and more, all from the perspectives of these fictional characters.

One of your friends plays a special role—the Gamemaster or GM. They portray the rest of the world, including all the other characters. They tell you what your character sees, hears, smells, and so on. They describe what the non-player characters—NPCs—do or say. They fill in any holes in the setting so that everyone at the table shares the same imaginary world in their heads.

Very importantly, the GM isn't at all playing *against* the other players. They're here to try to represent the world faithfully and interestingly—to say what happens and what exists in a way that makes the fictional world *make sense*. And they're here to keep things compelling, fun, and exciting—which includes honoring how awesome the other players' characters are!

What Makes Root: The Roleplaying Game Unique?

Root: The Roleplaying Game is a tabletop roleplaying game in which the characters you play are anthropomorphic animal vagabonds—miscreants, rogues, outcasts, and renegade heroes—adventuring across the Woodland. The vagabonds are highly skilled and capable, but they're not really at home anywhere in the myriad clearings of the Woodland. So they move around, traveling the paths and crossing the dangerous forests, taking jobs for pay and equipment.

Whether they mean to be or not, the vagabonds are often drawn into the overarching conflict between the powerful factions of the Woodland. As those factions wage war against each other, the vagabonds may prove the key to tipping the balance in favor of one faction or the other...or they may act as heroes, protecting the average Woodland denizens from a war that might consume them. Whatever they do and whomever they support is your choice as you play!

How Does Tabletop Roleplaying Work?

For the most part, a tabletop roleplaying game plays like a conversation—you take turns speaking, describing the action or sharing dialogue, reacting to each other, switching back and forth between in-character speech and out-of-character speech. But the conversation leads to places of uncertainty, times when no one is sure exactly what to say next, when no one knows what happens in the story. When one character tries to jump from a flaming tree to another, across a seven-foot gap, no one knows for sure what happens, whether they successfully reach the next tree or go plummeting to the ground!

In those moments, you turn to the game's rules. The rules of *Root: The RPG* help you to figure out what happens in moments of tense uncertainty, guiding the conversation forward into new, interesting, and surprising outcomes. The rules themselves will provide plenty of guidance on exactly when they come into play, what to do to resolve a situation, and what the outcomes are. But much of the time, the GM will have to provide some additional interpretation to help the mechanics fit the very specific situation in your game.

What's more, the GM also acts as a kind of impartial judge, helping the table determine when the rules actually come into play. If there's ever doubt about whether or not the rules apply, the GM acts as the final arbiter and decision maker.

For example, in the aforementioned case, when a character is jumping from a flaming tree to another tree about seven feet away, the GM might look at the rules and the situations in which they're supposed to come into play, and then decide that, yes, there *absolutely is uncertainty here*. Time to go to the rules!

If, on the other hand, a character is jumping from one tree to another when there's no fire and the two trees are touching, the GM might look at the rules, look at the situations in which they're supposed to come into play, and decide that *there's no real uncertainty here*. There's no tension. The character just does it.

Think of it like this:

- ♦ Each player is in control of their own character in this fictional, imaginary world.
- ♦ The GM describes the rest of the world, including other characters in it.
- ♦ When no one knows what happens next, the rules come in to provide interesting results. The GM helps to interpret the rules, calling out when they come into play and which rules are relevant.
- ♦ The GM acts as a kind of interpreter, making the rules and outcomes fit the specifics of your fictional world at that particular moment.

Trials & Adventure

As you progress further through this game and this book, keep a few important ideas in mind—core precepts of **Root: The Roleplaying Game**, its setting, its tone, and its themes. Specifically, **Root: The RPG** tells stories of adventure and action amid greater drama and political conflict. The Woodland, the overall setting of **Root: The RPG**, is a place where a vagabond can cut a rope and fly up as a chandelier falls...and it is a place embroiled in war, where deposing the local sheriff can have real, dangerous consequences.

Just to be clear up front—the Woodland is populated by anthropomorphic animals. There are no humans at all in the Woodland. In general, the anthropomorphic animals—the denizens—are around the same size, and they all have the same general capabilities as a human. For more on how **Root: The RPG** handles the anthropomorphic animals, see page 43.

The vagabonds are always capable characters with the skills necessary to undertake difficult, dangerous tasks and come through more or less unscathed. They're social outcasts at the start of play, separated from the backing or support that might allow them to focus on larger issues. So they take on the distasteful or complicated tasks that others throughout the Woodland pay them for, anything from getting rid of a dangerous bear, to exploring newly uncovered caverns, to stealing important military documents from a foe. All of these jobs become their own fun adventures, as things inevitably become more complicated than the vagabonds originally anticipate. They run into guards while carrying contraband—will they fight or talk their way out of trouble? They wind up accidentally knocking over a lantern in the middle of a scroll repository—will they try to put out the flames or just bolt?

But their actions inevitably have an effect on the Woodland at a higher scale. When they deliver those stolen military documents to their employer, they have just given one faction a significant advantage over another—and the Woodland changes to reflect that. When they set that fire in the scroll repository, the treaty protecting that clearing from invasion goes up in smoke—and another faction invades.

Even though, at any given moment, the story you're telling will likely be about one particular caper, one specific adventure or situation, the actions that your vagabonds undertake can have consequences that ripple across the Woodland. And when you play a full campaign, you'll not only encounter the immediate effects of your own actions, but you'll also revisit the places you changed and see exactly what happened, for example, weeks after you accidentally set that fire.

This combination produces stories with immediate, in-the-moment excitement and action, accompanied by long term storylines and meaning.



The Woodland

For ages, different factions have fought for control of the Woodland's denizens and its resources, all amid conditions that amplify the threat of any battle. The place has always been dangerous, the thick woods concealing a multitude of threats from bears to bandits. It has resources to support life, but only after a great effort has been poured into creating a safe place. The clearings carved out of the forest are the best examples of this safety, little pockets where the greatest dangers have been pushed back—and a whole new set of dangers have taken their place.

The denizens of the Woodland have seen war fairly recently. The Grand Civil War between the Eyrie Dynasties rocked the Woodland a few decades ago, tearing down whatever remained of the Eyrie's established order. Some clearings were left to govern themselves after the conflict. Others found themselves endangered without the aid of Eyrie soldiers to guard the clearing or nearby paths. While different clearings were affected in different ways to different extents, no place was left untouched, no life unchanged.

In the absence of another great power controlling the Woodland, the Marquise de Cat, a powerful and dangerous noble of a far-off empire, swept in to seize the opportunity. She led her forces to invade the Woodland, bringing it under her control in the Marquisate. The Marquisate might have total control if the Eyrie Dynasties hadn't recovered enough to try to retake the Woodland...and if the Woodland itself didn't threaten rebellion with the newfound Woodland Alliance.

Now, more upheaval seems imminent. The Marquisate looks upon the Woodland with hungry eyes, eager to squeeze resources out of it; the Eyrie's claws stretch out to reclaim their lost territory; the Woodland Alliance arises to push back all other powers; and more factions gaze upon the Woodland from within and without, a gleam in their eyes.

War returns to the Woodland, and the vagabonds will be drawn in.