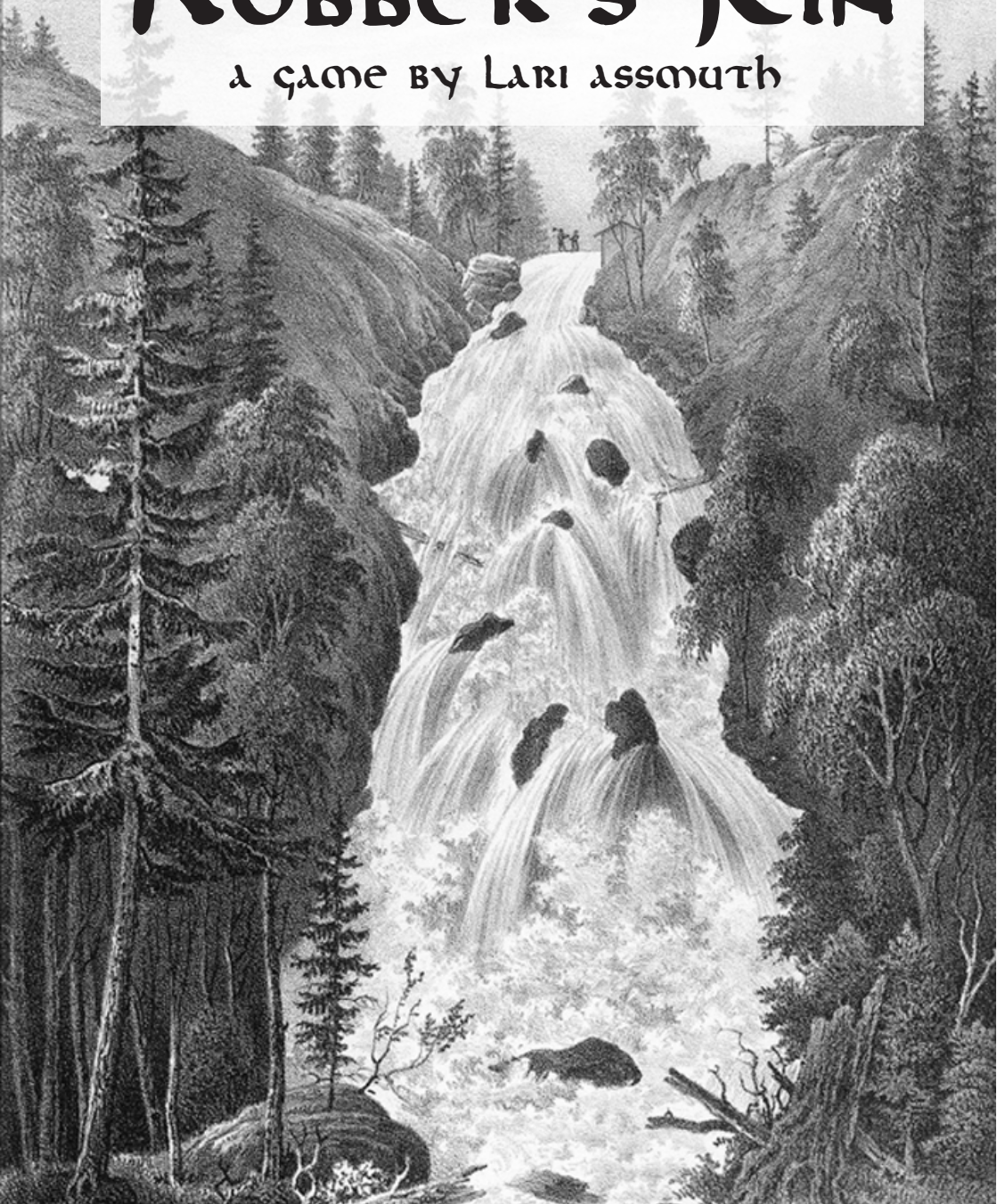


# ROBBER'S KIN

a game BY LARI ASSMUTH



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This game is Powered by the Apocalypse

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# ROBBER'S KIN

*The woods are full of wonder. They say there's a golden treasure in the middle of the swamp, if you can resist the song of the Unearthly ones.*

*The woods are full of dangers. If the Duke's footsoldiers or those dirty robbers from Jörnulf's Keep don't get you, there's a good chance the murktrolls or wild harpies will.*

*The woods are full of opportunity. When those fat merchants come on through on their way to the market, you know who'll be lying in wait for them.*

*The woods are full of hardship. When Winter comes, and the stores run out, how will you feed yourself and yours? Will you find it in your heart to be generous to strangers, or will your heart grow callous?*

*The woods are full of friendship. When the ice breaks and the rivers run free, who will you have standing by your side to greet the Spring?*

## WHAT IS ROBBER'S KIN?

This game is based on Astrid Lindgren's novel *Ronja Rövardotter* (*Ronia, the Robber's Daughter*). It's about a band of robbers living out in the woods in a fantastical medieval Scandinavia. Although it's not really about that. It's about family, and growing up, and learning the emotional skills that are needed to maintain meaningful relationships to people and nature. It's also about gender roles and transgressing boundaries.

The aim of this game is not to re-create the story of Ronja and Birk in Mattis' woods. That story has already been told. The aim of *Robber's Kin* is to enable you to play out stories that are about those same things, in your version of the Scandinavian fantasy world.

The game is based on Vincent and Meguey Baker's *Apocalypse World* and a bunch of other games that are Powered by the Apocalypse. *Monsterhearts* by Avery Alder, *Sagas of the Icelanders* by Gregor Vuga and *The Warren* by Marshall Miller have provided great inspiration, as have the games of John Harper, Andrew Gillis, Adam Koebel & Sage LaTorra.

# Why to play

We play to find out who our characters grow up to be. We play to find out what relationships will shape them and how. We play to find out what they learn about the world and their place in it.

# how to play

In *Robber's Kin*, every player except the game master (GM) begins play with two characters to play. They each start with a child character, as well as an adult robber who is the parent or other significant person of one of the other players' child characters. Not all characters need to belong to the same band of robbers, but they need to all live in the same woods and have some kind of relationship to each other, even if they are rivals.

Through play, these characters will age. Children will grow up and become adults, perhaps parents to a new generation. Adults will age and become wizened elders, and eventually die, for such is the way of things.

# flow of play

The game follows the seasons of a year. After you have gone through character creation together, by following the playbooks, decide as a group which season you want to begin in.

During each season, the GM and players together frame a number of scenes around key characters.

- 1) Who do you want to frame a scene around?
- 2) What do you reckon they will be attempting to do in the scene?
- 3) Are they alone or is somebody with them?

Even if many scenes may start out with just one player character in it, other characters will often enter scenes to help or

It's important that every player gets at least one scene that's centered on one of their characters per season. After every player has had one, the GM will ask if you all feel that you are ready to move on to the next season. If yes, great! You can start framing scenes in that season. Look to the seasons to figure out what kind of activities are common.

If any players think one of their characters still have unfinished business that would be left hanging if you move on, that's absolutely fine. Center that character and play out a scene with them as the key character.

When four seasons have passed, skip ahead in time and age all characters one category before starting a new year.

**You will need:** some friends (the game is best when played with three or more players, including the GM), a copy of this pamphlet, playbooks for each character and a Woods and Keep map sheet. Some six-sided dice, two at the least, and pencils.

# GAME CONCEPTS

These are the basic concepts and rules needed to play *Robber's Kin*. Some will be familiar to players familiar with *Apocalypse World*, others will be new or different.

## ROLLING DICE

The basic flow of the game is one of a conversation, where the GM usually will frame a scene, present a situation for the characters in it, and ask what the characters will do about it. The players will say what the characters do. Often, it will be clear how the characters' actions affect the narrative. The GM says what happens, responds with a GM move and play flows on. However, some actions trigger moves, and when they do, you follow the rules for that move.

Often, it will involve rolling two six-sided dice (2D6) and adding the relevant stat number to the result. A roll of 6 or less is a miss, and this means something bad may happen. Often your character will need help to get out of these situations. A roll of 7 or more is a hit, and you get what you want, essentially. In some cases, a roll of 7–9 is a limited hit or a success with a cost or complication. For some moves, a roll of 10+ means you have pushed too hard and your actions lead to unintended consequences because you took it too far.

## STATS

Characters in *Robber's Kin* are defined by three stats: Brave, Hard and Compassionate.

**Brave** characters can keep a cool head, even when they're scared stiff.

**Hard** characters are tough and strong, used to getting their way using shows of force.

**Compassionate** characters are good listeners, good at calming down people and taking control of situations. Being compassionate in no way implies you are a push-over.

## FORWARD

Sometimes, a move will specify that a character gets +1 or -1 forward. That means that they add or subtract that number from the next roll they make, or until a certain condition is met.

## HELP

Often, a failed roll will mean that character needs help to get out of the situation they are in. The player of the character that needs help can ask the player of another character if they will come to their aid. If they do, both characters mark +1 bond to the other character. If they don't, check if another character will come to their aid.

The aiding character will usually need to take some action to help. Sometimes, this may trigger a move, other times, it will not. Refer to the section **rolling dice**, above.

## relationships

Relationships are a key part of *Robber's Kin*. Whenever your character helps another, get help, or a move tells you, mark a box for your relationship with the relevant character. This means there's now a bond between you. When you have filled out three boxes, you are bonded for life.

You start out bonded for life with the members of your family, i.e. the adult or child that is your character's parent, child or other important relation.

When you make a move that relates to a character you have a bond with you take +1 forward to that roll.

## relationships in crisis

At any point in play, any player can declare that the relationship between them and another character they have a bond with is in crisis. This often happens as the result of an action that one of the characters takes or some new information that comes to light about them.

When there's a crisis between you and a character you have a bond with but are not yet bonded for life with, you take -1 forward instead of +1 to any moves that relates to that character, except for **Insult** and **Lash out** which still get the +1. Any time you mark a new box for this relationship, you may choose to end the crisis.

If there's a crisis between you and a character you are bonded for life with, you both take the -1 forward for most moves, as above. Also, both characters must check a condition (see below). That condition can only be cleared by the other character in the relationship soothing you. If they succeed in doing it you can choose to end the crisis for both of you.

## Learning about the world

Many moves specify that you learn something new about the world. This means you, the player, get to say a truth about something in the world – a place, a type of creature, a group of people or a single person, for example. Try to make the thing you learned flow from the fiction, so that the thing you learned has to do with something you encountered during the scene.

When you have decided what the thing you learn is, write it down somewhere on the Woods and Keep map.

Any time anyone uses some established fact to their advantage, they take +1 forward to any rolls they make that relate to that.

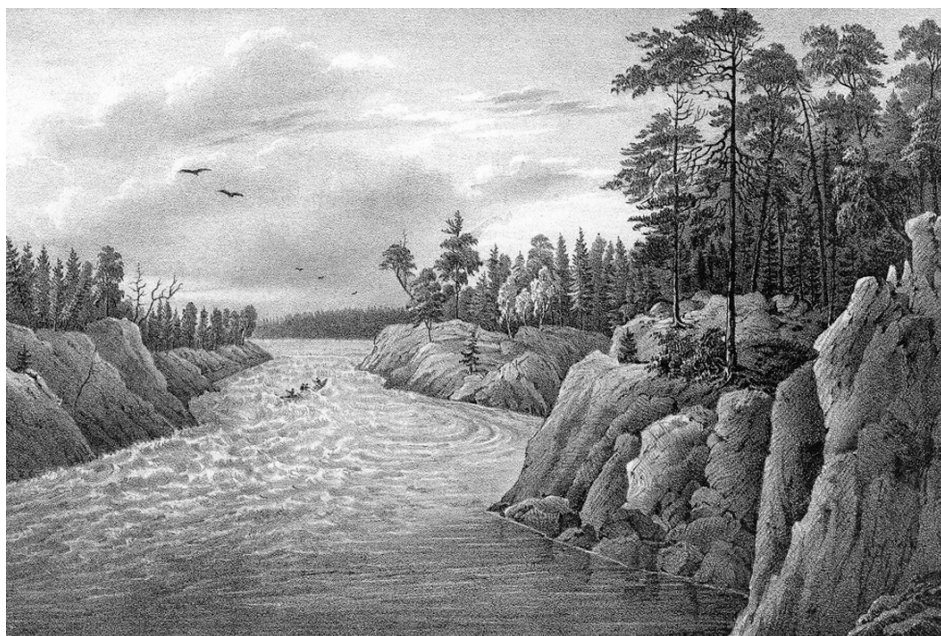


## CONDITIONS

Conditions are harmful, temporary conditions that characters may incur for example when they roll a miss on a move. The character who has the condition takes -1 forward to any rolls that are affected by the condition, and any character who can use the condition against the character takes +1 forward to their rolls against that character.

## WOUNDS

Wounds are much more serious than conditions. If you get a wound, you are badly hurt, and it will take special care to make you hale and sound. A wounded character is effectively out of the action until they can make the recovery move.



# CHARACTERS

## child

Children experience the world with an open mind, and every new experience is an opportunity for them to learn.

When children wander the woods, they are wont to encounter some of the fantastical denizens of the forest.

## adult

Adult characters in *Robber's Kin* are robbers all. Furthermore, they are the leader figures of their particular band, or hold some other key position in the keep. Whether that means they are the matriarchs or chieftains, the chief's husband or wife.

Adults have different roles in the keep: some go out in the woods to seek fortunes robbing the merchants travelling to or from town, while others command and manage the keep.

## elder

The elders are the wizened crones and old men who have survived the robber's life for long enough to be afforded a life of relative comfort and a place close to the hearth in the dining hall.

While the other robbers sometimes make fun of the elders of their band, all but the most foolish respect the knowledge of the surrounding world that the elders hold.

# THE BASIC MOVES

## Act of bravery

When you try to act despite being scared and in imminent danger, roll+Brave.

On a hit, you brave the danger and accomplish what you tried to do. In the process, you learn something new about the world. Write it down on the Woods and Keep map. On a 7–9, you have to push yourself to do it. The GM will give you a cost, a complication or ask you to mark a condition.

On a miss, you land in trouble and need help! The GM can make a move and unless you get help it's going to go badly for you.

## Insult

When you use your words to harm someone, roll+Hard.

On a 7–9, they can choose to bear it and mark a condition, to challenge you or to walk away. On a 10+, your words cut them to the bone. The player of that character says what it is you say about them that is true though they wish it wasn't. Write that truth down on the map as a truth.

On a miss, you are hoisted by your own petard! The GM decides whether you gain a condition or whether you must reveal an unwelcome truth about your character and write it down on the map.



### **Soothe**

When you use words, song or touch to soothe or comfort someone, roll+Compassionate.

On a hit, you can remove a condition from the character you are soothing and check a bond. On a 10+ that character's player will also reveal something true about their character. Write it down on the map. If you wish to reciprocate, you may offer up a truth about your character as well.

On a miss, your words ring hollow and you gain a condition.

### **Lash out**

When you strike someone to cause them harm, roll+Hard.

On a 7–9, you hurt them. Place that condition on them. On a 10+, you lose control. They choose:

- You are both hurt.
- They are wounded and you must write down that your character is cruel or violent as a truth on the map.

On a miss, somebody's going to get hurt. The GM chooses who is wounded in the fracas.

### **Go out in the woods**

When you venture out in the woods, the GM will tell you what your character encounters there.

If you are a child:

- You meet a creature of the woods
- You encounter a wild animal
- Something from the adults' list

If you are an adult or elder:

- You meet a merchant
- You meet a robber from a rival band
- You meet the Duke's soldiers
- Something from the childrens' list

### **Recovery**

When you must recover from a grievous wound, ask the GM what you'll need to become hale and sound. They'll tell you.

- You need to be cared for by someone. Who will do it?
- Your wound requires a special herb to be bound. Where in the woods can it be found?
- You require healing by other than mundane ways. What kind of magic will it take, and who has this power?

When you are healed, tell the other players what scar or mark you bear to remind you of the wound.

# The GM's rules

## Agenda

- Make the woods and the robbers' keep magical and real.
- Make the characters' lives full of wonder, danger and possibilities for adventure.
- Play to find out what happens.

## Principles

- Fill the world with fantastical creatures and mundane people with motivations of their own.
- Be a fan of the characters.
- Ask questions and build on the answers.
- When a truth is revealed, write it on the map and incorporate it in the fiction.
- Address the characters, not the players.
- Make a move that follows, but never speak its name.
- Name everyone. Make them human.

## Moves

- Place a condition on them
- Put someone in a spot
- Announce an off-screen threat
- Announce an approaching threat
- Reveal an unwelcome truth
- Tell them potential consequences & ask
- Offer an opportunity with or without cost
- Turn their move back on them
- After every move: What do you do?

# The keep and the woods

## In the autumn

The robbers will be preparing for winter, trying to grab enough booty to make it through the cold and dark winter months. The children will be exploring the woods, most likely.

## In the winter

The robbers may be holed up in the keep. If the keep wants for something, it will surely be felt in the long winter.

## In the spring

The spring is greeted, the robbers can get back to their work, and the children can again run free in the woods.

## In the summer

It is a time of plenty. There are fat merchants' wagons and wild horses coursing through the woods.

## CREATURES OF THE WOODS

These creatures are from Ronja and some from Scandinavian folklore. They get some descriptions here, but ideally you'll flesh them out with truths that the players mark on the map through play. Feel free to create your own creatures as well!

**Gray dwarves:** they are small and vicious, and drawn to fear but scare easily and are only a threat in groups.

**Unearthly ones:** live underground and mostly come out in the mist. Their song can charm and tempt.

**Rumphobs:** these creatures are neither malevolent or benevolent. They live in holes in the ground and mostly wish to be left alone. Talking any reason with them is an exercise in futility.

**Murktrolls:** Elusive beings that only come out at dark to sing and dance.

**Wild harpies:** the cruelest creatures in the woods, these flying beasts possess a terrifying beauty as well as sharp beaks and claws.

**Skogsrå:** a skogsrå is like a dryad, a keeper of the woods. Usually feminine, they sometimes grant good fortune to their favorites.

**Näcken:** a male water spirit who plays wonderous music and lures mortals into the deep ponds and brooks.

# MUNDANE CREATURES OF THE WOODS

**The Duke's soldiers:** tasked to protect the town and the merchants. They usually keep away from the deep woods, but every now and then they try to make their presence felt.

**Robbers and bandits:** the characters' bands are not necessarily the only robbers living in the woods.

**Merchants:** on their way to the market in town with goods, or from market with pouches of gold and silver, merchants try to hurry through the woods or trust their escorts to protect them on their way.

**Wild horses:** horses run through the woods, and those with enough patience and compassion might be able to tame a mare or stallion.

**Bears:** the bears of the forest usually leave people be, but if you should come between a mother and her cubs, be prepared for the worst.

