


# BLUE ROSE



THE *AGE* ROLEPLAYING GAME OF ROMANTIC FANTASY





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## THE AGE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF ROMANTIC FANTASY

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the world of *Blue Rose*, a fantastic realm where brave heroes, gifted with arcane powers, live and work side-by-side with intelligent animal companions. The heroes of the peaceful Kingdom of Aldis strive to uphold the ideals of fairness, justice, and equality, while protecting their homeland against its aggressive neighbors, including the fundamentalist Theocracy of Jarzon and the dark land of Kern with its monstrous rulers.

*Blue Rose* is a roleplaying game of romantic fantasy, where you and your friends take on the roles of the main characters in this fantastic world, creating your own stories about the heroes of Aldis, their triumphs and their tragedies—like writing your own fantasy novel but where *you* play the heroes! You may have played other roleplaying games, or this may be your introduction to new worlds of adventure. Either way—welcome, friends, to the world of *Blue Rose*.

*For Aldis, and the Queen!*

## WHAT IS ROLEPLAYING?

If *Blue Rose* is your introduction to the world of fantasy roleplaying games (RPGs for short), then you might be wondering, “What is all this roleplaying stuff about?”

Essentially, in a roleplaying game, you and a group of friends (the players) take on the roles of fictional characters (also known as heroes) in a world of your imagination. One player in the group, the Narrator, acts like the narrator of a story or the director of a play or movie. The Narrator (sometimes referred to as a Game Master in other systems) sets the scene and describes what happens in the world around your characters. Then the other players decide what their heroes do in response. The Narrator describes the outcome of those actions, and on you go, spinning your own fantasy story.

Roleplaying is much like cooperative fan fiction or simulation gaming, where a group of people work together to build a fun and exciting story. Although it's the Narrator's job to portray the various antagonists in the story, as well as the heroes' allies, the Narrator isn't playing against everyone else. In fact, it's the Narrator's job to help ensure everyone has fun and that the group tells an enjoyable story.

Think of a roleplaying game like an extended version of the various games of make believe we all played as children, only with rules to help guide the story and a central Narrator to set the stage and keep things moving along.

## WHAT IS ROMANTIC FANTASY?

*Blue Rose* is a roleplaying game about *romantic fantasy*, but what is that, exactly? In the high fantasy quests of authors like J. R. R. Tolkien, or the larger-than-life swords and sorcery of Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, and others, heroic loners or small groups of rebels, outcasts, or eccentrics perform great deeds and go on quests to

obtain power and glory or to protect the world from some dire threat.

In the mid-1980s, a generation of new fantasy authors—Diane Duane, Mercedes Lackey, Tamora Pierce, and many others—wrote fantasy novels different from any that had come before. The main characters in their novels occasionally started out as loners and outcasts before finding their place in society, generally as members of some prominent group or official organization that goes on exciting adventures to protect ordinary people from danger. Developing a sense of belonging and finding comrades are central features of these stories. Most of these novels are in series, and by the end of the first book, the main character has usually discovered a community where they belong. Many of the character's subsequent adventures involve either becoming a more fully integrated member of this group or protecting the group from harm.

Few of these novels contain elves, dwarves, or similar fantasy races, and many contain few or no other humanoid species at all. Instead, humans share their world with one or more types of intelligent or semi-intelligent animals, sometimes with a few magical human subspecies. Some of the intelligent animals are simply bright psychic pets, while others are free-willed, powerful spirits with animal bodies.

Romantic fantasy novels are often set in highly egalitarian societies, where people's occupations and aspirations are not limited by fixed gender roles. In these books, cultures and individuals that are sexist or homophobic are either ignorant and see the error of their ways somewhere in the series, or they are enemies who are eventually vanquished.

The heroes of romantic fantasy novels are usually environmentally conscious. Protecting wilderness areas and animals from depredation is a common plot element. In all romantic fantasy worlds, nature is a positive magical force, and anyone who protects it is on the side of good.

Attitudes about magic also differ from other fantasy novels. Instead of the scholastic magic of some stories—magic as a rare and powerful discipline involving complex rituals and arcane lore—many characters have innate

psychic or arcane powers as natural to them as sight and hearing. Heroic characters can often manipulate the natural elements and use their powers with nothing more than concentration and intent. These powers are seen as both an innate and positive part of someone's nature, and are only feared by the ignorant or evil.

More traditional magic does occasionally appear in these novels, but it's usually only practiced by villains to bind others to their will, or to summon horrific creatures and spirits from other planes of existence. The only motives given for performing such magic are a hunger for power or a desire for revenge. This type of magic is unnatural, dangerous, and often corrupting.

*Blue Rose* takes these elements of romantic fantasy to create a world of adventure, where you can build your own heroes and forge your own stories.

## GETTING STARTED

The first thing you need is a group of friends to play with, and one of you must take on the role of Narrator. While you can play with as small a group as one player and a Narrator, the game works best with a Narrator and three to six players. It is possible to play with more players, but that can slow down the pace of the game. The Narrator has a key position, so try to make sure that they really want the job! Running a game is fun, but it's a different experience than playing. **Chapter 8** explains the Narrator's role in detail.

Once you've settled on a Narrator, everyone else needs to make characters, also known as player characters (PCs) or heroes. Your character is your primary responsibility as a player in a roleplaying game. This is your alter ego in the fantasy world of Aldea, where your adventures take place. Over the course of many such adventures, your character will grow and change, but every hero needs a starting point. That is exactly what **Chapter 2: Character Creation** provides, giving you not only game stats—the abilities and corresponding numbers that tell you what your character is good at—but also a character concept, starting goals, and relationships with other characters. Once play begins, the portrayal and development of your character is all up to you. Playing your hero, achieving goals, and navigating the challenges and perils of a fantasy world—this is the fun of taking part in a roleplaying game.

## PLAYING YOUR CHARACTER

### *"What do you do?"*

When playing a roleplaying game, that's the question you must ask yourself all the time. The Narrator describes a situation, framing a scene for the heroes. It is then up to you to decide what your character does and why. You tell the Narrator what you want to do, as do the other players, and then you all work out what happens. Sometimes, you

use dice to resolve actions in a specific order. At other times, you simply interact with the other players and the characters portrayed by the Narrator, who are known as non-player characters, or NPCs.

### *"Who are you?"*

This is the question to keep in mind when making decisions. When you create your hero, you choose things like their goals and strong and weak personality traits. You can then flesh your character out further. There are two basic approaches to this: The first is to paint your hero in a few broad strokes and then jump right in to playing. The intention here is to come up with details about your character during play, often using the springboard of the current story to create connections to their past. This is a common storytelling technique and a perfectly valid approach if you don't want to spend a lot of time working on your hero before starting play. The second approach is to come up with a lot of details and roleplaying ideas before the first game session. If you can come to the table with a good idea of who your character is before the first dice are even rolled, that can help get the game going.

However you approach your character, playing the game will help you refine your ideas. After you have played your hero for a while, you should have a strong sense of their personality and an intuitive sense of what they would do in a particular situation. Of course, not all situations present easy choices, and it is from difficult decisions that tension and drama emerge.

## ADVENTURE, SERIES, AND SETTING

An adventure is a discrete story and scenario in a roleplaying game. Think of it as a single novel or an episode of a TV show. There may be several plot threads, but in the end it tells one tale. The difference between a roleplaying adventure and a book or show is that you have authorship. The decisions taken by you and your fellow players drive the story to its conclusion.

A series is made up of interlinked adventures. If an adventure is a novel or TV show, a series is a season of a show, or a complete set of seasons or novels. Some adventures may have self-contained plots, while others tie together to tell a larger story. During a series the characters advance, improve, and change. Over time they gain more powers and abilities, face greater challenges, and perhaps gain renown for their deeds. A full *Blue Rose* series can take characters from levels 1 through 20, and provide hundreds of hours of entertainment.

All of these stories take place in the setting of *Blue Rose*, the fantasy world of Aldea, particularly the region centered around Aldis, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose. The first three chapters of this book detail the history, geography, and cultures of that world. The setting of individual adventures can be anywhere within the context of the nations and regions described in **Chapters 2 and 3**.





## THE GROUP DYNAMIC

Much of this book is focused on teaching you the rules and how to make a character. It is important to remember that roleplaying is a social activity. There are two aspects to this: the adventuring group and the player group.

Your hero is one member of an adventuring group (also known as a party). Each character in the group has individual goals, but there are also larger group goals. The characters may have their disagreements and even conflicts, but for the game to go on they must remain together. The adventures themselves often assure this by their plot and structure, but a good group dynamic can help. This can start during character creation when everyone is settling on what they want to play. It's a smart idea, for example, to make sure you have at least one character of each class in the group. When working out Goals and Relationships, you can build in reasons for the characters to work together.

The people gaming with you make up the player group, and that, too, has a dynamic. You and your friends are going to be spending a lot of time together, so you want a group of people who fundamentally get along. Roleplaying is meant to be fun for everyone, so be aware of tension around the table. Some players try to make the game all about them, hogging the spotlight and attempting to insert themselves into every scene. Don't act that way—it just makes the other players frustrated. Everyone deserves a chance to shine, so be ready to take a step back when someone has a good idea or is pursuing something important for their character. Likewise, some players may make others uncomfortable with inappropriate behavior. When this happens, it is important for the group as a whole to make it clear such behavior won't be tolerated—the game is about everyone having fun, and that can't happen unless everyone also feels comfortable and at ease.

If a game session didn't go well for some reason, talk about it afterwards. It won't do any good if everyone goes home to stew. Try to figure out where things went wrong and see if you can come up with solutions so it doesn't happen again. If players have concerns, encourage them to bring them up for discussion.

A common problem is a player who is unhappy with their character. Maybe the character doesn't fit into the group well, or perhaps the player finds another class preferable after some play experience. This doesn't have to be an issue. It's perfectly fine for a player to make a new hero of the same level and retire the old one. It's preferable to do that than to make a player continue playing a character they aren't enjoying.

## BASIC GAME CONCEPTS

Before you dive into the rest of the book, here's a brief overview of the basic concepts of the game. You'll learn more about all of these things as you read on.

## DICE

*Blue Rose* uses six-sided dice, abbreviated as "d6." This is the most common type of die, and they can be found in many classic boardgames if you need to scrounge for some. In general, dice are rolled four different ways in *Blue Rose*:

- **1d3:** Sometimes you need to generate a number from 1-3. In this case you roll a d6 but halve the result, so a roll of 1-2 = 1, a roll of 3-4 = 2, and a roll of 5-6 = 3.
- **1d6:** You roll a single die and simply read the result. Sometimes there is a modifier attached, for example 1d6+3. In that case, just add the modifier to the die roll. If you rolled a 2, for example, you'd add the modifier of 3 to get a result of 5.
- **2d6:** As above, but you roll two dice and add them together. If you rolled a 3 and a 6, for example, your result would be 9.
- **3d6:** As above, but you roll three dice and add them together. If you are making an ability test, you must ensure that two of the dice are one color and the third a different color. That third die is known as the Drama Die, and it's important. The result of the Drama Die can determine your level of success and allow you to perform stunts.

## CHARACTERS

To play *Blue Rose* you create a character. You can play a human, one of several humanoid races, or a rhydan (an intelligent, psychic animal). You then pick one of three classes: adept, expert, or warrior. Your class defines the core of your character and determines the powers at your command in play. Your character begins at level 1 as a novice hero. By surviving encounters and overcoming challenges, they gradually gain experience and increase in level (commonly called "leveling-up"). Your character may eventually make it to level 20 and become one of the mightiest heroes of the world.

## TESTS

Your character has nine abilities, such as Intelligence and Strength, and each one has a numeric rating, with 1 being average. When your character wants to do something, the Narrator may call for an ability test. This is a dice roll to determine success or failure, and it's the most common roll in the game. To make an ability test, you simply roll three six-sided dice (3d6), add the results together, and add the appropriate ability. This generates a test result, which you want to be as high as possible.

$$\text{TEST RESULT} = 3\text{d6} + \text{ABILITY}$$

## INTRODUCTION

You may have to apply other bonuses or penalties, most commonly ability focuses that represent areas of special expertise. Once you determine your test result, the Narrator will let you know if it's a success or a failure and what happens.

### STUNTS

In combat your character can perform stunts. When doubles are rolled on a test, this generates "stunt points." You can then use these points to pull off a number of special effects or maneuvers. Stunts help to keep game play dynamic and fun and ensure characters get opportunities to do the kinds of amazing and impressive things heroes do.

## THE WORLD OF ALDEA

Blue Rose is set in the enchanted world of Aldea, which—in the language of the Old Kingdom—means "the lands" and is how modern folk refer to the world. The lands presented in Blue Rose are just a fraction of the greater world, a region encompassing five nations and the surrounding territory, but still well over a thousand miles across, centered on the city and nation of Aldis ("this land" or "the land"), the center of the Old Kingdom and the new.

### ALDIS, KINGDOM OF THE BLUE ROSE

The great city of Aldis, in the midst of a vast and fertile stretch of land along the Western Ocean, was once the heart of the Old Kingdom, which rose to greatness long ago. The Old Kingdom fell into corruption, however, overthrown by the vile Sorcerer Kings, who established their Empire of Thorns and spread shadow across the known world. In time, a Great Rebellion arose to overthrow the Sorcerer Kings, aided by the rhydan—thinking animals with arcane powers—and the mystical Golden Hart. Virtually all of the sorcerers were defeated and Aldis and the surrounding lands were free from their dominion.

In the centuries since, Aldis has rebuilt itself as a society devoted to justice and peace for its people. Its governing nobles are selected through a rigorous series of tests, the last of which is the touch of the legendary Blue Rose Scepter, which reads the heart and spirit to determine if the subject is truly worthy and well-intentioned. The sovereign of the nation is likewise not determined by birth or conquest but selected by the Golden Hart, the embodiment of the collective will—and wisdom—of the people. For generations, the Kingdom of the Blue Rose, as it is also known, has restored and rebuilt much of what was lost during the Shadow Wars and protected itself and its people from its enemies, while seeking to build peace and understanding between all peoples.

### THE ADVENTURE GAME ENGINE

The rules system that powers *Blue Rose* is known as the *Adventure Game Engine* (or *AGE System*). It was originally designed for the



*Dragon Age RPG*, also by Green Ronin Publishing. It was later published in a stand-alone book, the *Fantasy AGE Basic Rulebook*, as well as being used to create the *Titansgrave: Ashes of Valkana* setting and adventures, seen on the online series *Tabletop*. If you learn *Blue Rose*, you can easily pick up other *AGE System* games. Although they are not identical, their basic structure and rules are, and you should find them easy to learn. If you enjoy playing in the world of *Blue Rose* with the *AGE System*, you may want to explore the family of other worlds and games from Green Ronin Publishing based on it.

### THE THEOCRACY OF JARZON

To Aldis's east lies the Theocracy of Jarzon, once a part of the vast Old Kingdom, now an independent nation, governed by the priests of the Church of Pure Light. These priests led the dangerous rebellion against the forces of Shadow and are now determined their land and people will never again fall under its yoke, no matter the cost. Jarzon is a land of harsh realities where devotion to faith and a demanding creed have allowed people to survive and prosper. They are suspicious of outsiders, including the people of Aldis, who seem to embrace many of the liberties the Purists believe led to Old Kingdom to ruin. Some Jarzoni are intrigued by foreign ways while others would like nothing more than to impose discipline and sense upon their neighbors to avert disaster.

Jarzon knows full well what is at stake, for to the south and east of their lands lie the Shadow Barrens, a vast wasteland devastated by the rise of the Sorcerer Kings and the Shadow Wars that followed. Once the beautiful land of Faernaria, it is now inhabited only by darkfiends, twisted shadowspawn, and the tormented souls of the unliving. Faernaria's remaining people have become the Roamers, vagabonds without a homeland, who travel the roads of Aldea in their small bands.

### THE PLAINS OF REZEA

To the west of Aldis stretch the great Plains of Rezea, home to clans of nomadic people who follow the migration and lead of their beloved horses across the grasslands from foaling to wintering grounds. The Rezeans are a fierce and free people, not always friends of their Aldin neighbors







to the east, but the envoys of the crown seek to maintain good relationships with the various clans. Rezeans trade their goods and horses and some of them serve as mercenaries—or raiders—in the nearby lands.

## THE KINGDOM OF KERN

North of the vast forest of the Pavin Weald and the sentinel peaks of the Ice-Binder Mountains lies the dark Kingdom of Kern, the last remnant of the domains of the Sorcerer Kings. It is a bleak land where slaves work the mines and smelting furnaces and common people scratch out a rough existence through subsistence farming or working in the slums or wealthy houses of the great city of Sarn. The evil Lich-King Jarek once ruled Kern, but was destroyed in conflict with Aldis and its Queen. Now Jarek's closest lieutenants—the so-called “Shadowed Seven”—vie for power and control within the kingdom while maintaining a fragile alliance against outside forces that would see Kern wiped from the face of the world, given the opportunity. Sooner or later, a new ruler will seize power in Kern, and the dark kingdom may threaten the world once more.

## THE MATRIARCHY OF LAR'TYA

Sail from the southern shores of Aldis, past the islands of the Scatterstar Archipelago, to the south and west and you will reach the isles of the Matriarchy of Lar'tya, a tropical paradise where the local people took in refugees from the Shadow Wars of the mainland long ago. The Matriarchy

has a strict caste system ruled by women, who are considered the most fit to rule and manage society's affairs. After the Great Rebellion, Lar'tya reestablished ties with the mainland nations, becoming a trading partner to many, but remaining carefully neutral in all other matters. Still, the influence of outsiders has begun to change Lar'tyan culture—and not for the better according to some.

## A WORLD OF ARCANE ADVENTURE

In some regards, Aldea is not unlike our own world during the Renaissance and the great “Age of Sail,” a pre-industrial civilization where rigged ships and spyglasses and astrolabes are among the most advanced technologies. In other ways, Aldea is a very different world, indeed, a world of arcane and spiritual powers that have shaped civilization and the destinies of its people.

## ARCANA

Nowhere is the nature of Aldea more clear than in the existence of arcana: supernatural powers wielded by certain people. Those with the right talents can learn how to sense beyond the five physical senses, to exert control over their own physiology and that of others to heal or harm, and to shape and influence the physical world in a wide number of ways. While powerful master adepts who wield many arcana are relatively rare, some degree of talent is found



among many people, and some of the races of Aldea possess innate arcane potential.

Although arcana are primarily the tools of a living mind and will, arcane energies can infuse inanimate objects, enchanting them towards particular purposes. The existence of arcana and arcane items in Aldea means the “technology” available to some nations, like Aldis, is far in advance of the bygone eras of our own world, comparable—or even greater—than the modern world, in some regards. For example, arcane items provide light, heat, and clean water in the great cities of Aldis without the need for machines or fuel. The ministrations of arcane healers and their arts reduce incidences of disease and allow people to recover from more serious injuries. Plant-shapers improve the growth and yield of crops while earth-, stone-, and water-shapers can build more delicately than even the most modern tools. Even warfare is influenced, with arcane crystalline wands known as crystons replacing the existence of gunpowder weapons, save that these enchanted devices cannot kill, merely stun.

The power of arcana infuses society as well. Truth-readers ensure oaths and testimonies are honest to the best of the teller’s ability and psychics can aid in the treatment of maladies of the mind and spirit. In Aldis, those who would serve the people as their noble leaders must truly be noble, passing the test of the enchanted Blue Rose Scepter, which glows only from the touch of a noble heart.

## SORCERY

There is a dark side to the arcane arts, however. Arcana is power, and power can be misused towards selfish, cruel, and destructive ends. The shadowy arts of sorcery involve the application of power without regard for consent, compassion, kindness, or the natural order of things, and the rush of power and control that comes with them is both addictive and seductive. The misuse of arcana led to the rise of the Sorcerer Kings in the Old Kingdom, adepts who cared about no one and nothing more than themselves, who willingly bartered their hearts and souls to Shadow for greater power and control.

Although the united forces of Light overcame the Shadow and overthrew the Sorcerer Kings, the temptations of sorcery still exist, and all wielders of the arcane arts must be on guard against them. Giving in to a momentary weakness to use their great power irresponsibly can lead the gifted down a terrible path, allying them with sinister forces. The people and nations of Aldea remain vigilant against threats like the Sorcerer Kings ever arising again, some by teaching understanding and control and constantly remaining accountable for their actions, others by seeking to ban or destroy all forbidden knowledge to place it beyond the reach of those who might be tempted by it.



## THE PEOPLES OF ALDEA

Although humans make up the vast majority of people in Aldea—in all the dazzling varieties found in our world—the term “person” is broader here, meaning any thinking being of free will, for there are peoples other than humans in the world.

The sea-folk are much like humans, but adapted to life both in and out of the waters that are their home: sleek-bodied swimmers with a bluish or greenish tint to their skin and hair. The vata are half-human descendants of the ancient and venerated vatazin, who were wiped out by the Sorcerer Kings. Their descendants include the vata’an, milk white of hair and skin, and the vata’sha, with white hair but skin as black as night. The vata all possess a measure of the arcane potential of their ancestors. The night people are also arcane in nature, but descendants of a slave race flesh-crafted by the Sorcerer Kings. Their ancestors won their freedom and now the night people seek to make a place for themselves in a world that sometimes still fears and misunderstands them.

The remaining people of Aldea are the most unusual, the rhydan, awakened beasts possessing intelligence, will, and psychic potential. The rhydan arise from many different species of animals, particularly great cats, wolves, horses, dolphins, and bears. They stand between the wild world of nature and civilization, and are staunch allies of the Light and people of good intent. Rhydan honor the great griffons and unicorns of the sylvan and wild places of the world as their nobility and revered leaders, and many rhydan establish a deep friendship and connection—the rhy-bond—with representatives of the other peoples.

## WHERE NEXT?

If you are a player, **Chapters 1-7** are for you. They provide the key information you need to know about the world of *Blue Rose* and how to play the game. When you are ready to make a character, go to **Chapter 2: Character Creation**. It explains the process to get you going.

If you are the Narrator, you should familiarize yourself with **Chapters 1-7**, as they contain the core of the setting and the game. You should then move on to **Chapters 8-12**. They explain your important role in a tabletop roleplaying game, as well as giving you valuable advice and resources. When you’re fully acquainted with the game and setting, there’s an introductory adventure, “Shadows of Tanglewood,” in the back of the book to help launch your new *Blue Rose* series and start your characters off on their exciting adventures.

You are now ready to enter the world of *Blue Rose*. May the Light guide your heroes to achieve their destiny!

