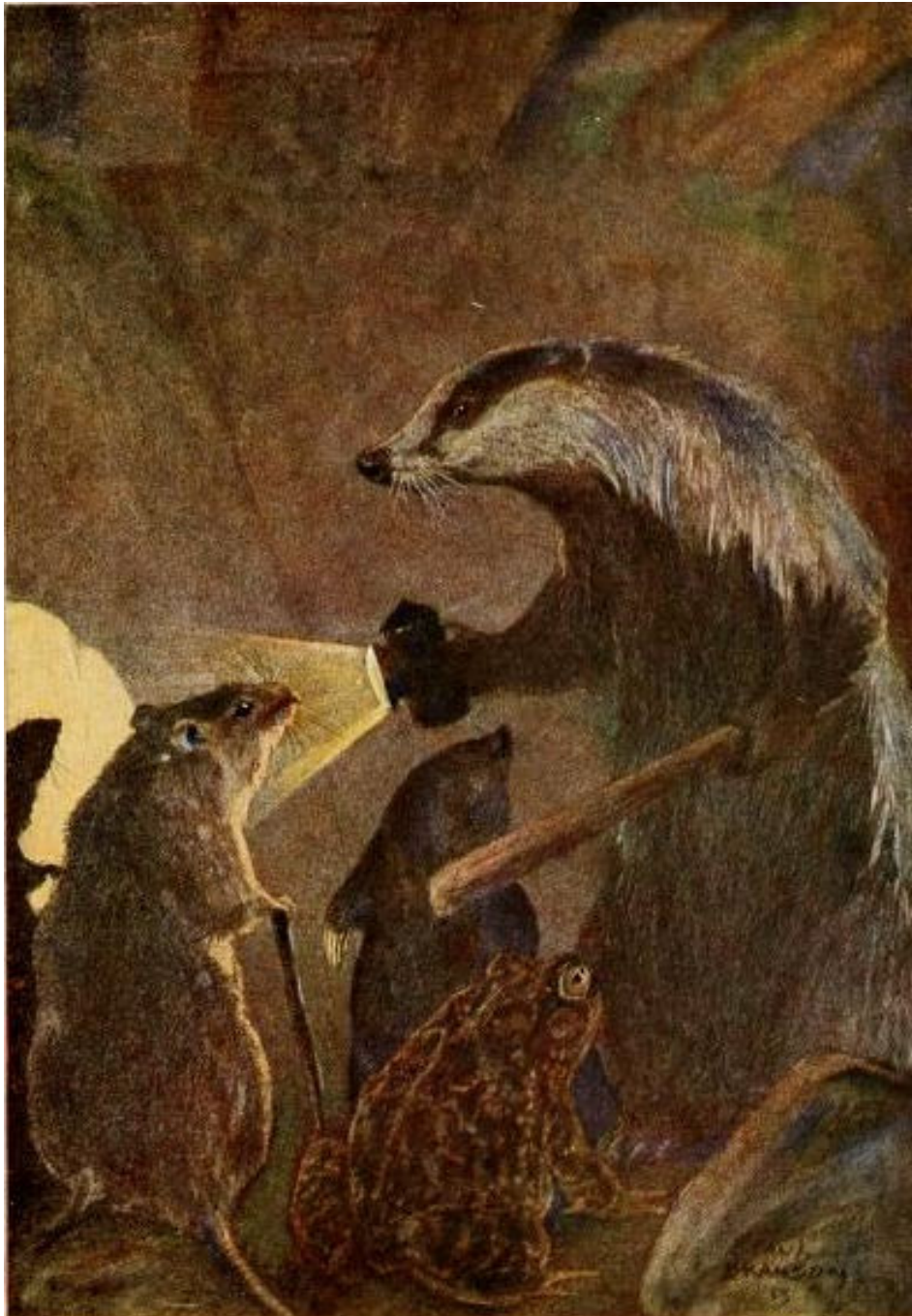


The Wind in the Willows RPG



A Roleplaying Game by Steffan O'Sullivan

24-HOUR RPG 2012

Written in 24 Hours, October 28-29
2012, for the rpggeek.com 24-Hour
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Italicized text is from the 1908 edition
(public domain) edition of **The Wind in
the Willows** by Kenneth Grahame.
Illustrations are from the same edition
and are by Paul Bransom.

(I recommend hunting up the Ernest H.
Shepard illustrations, as those are by
far my favorite, but they're still under
copyright, at least in the USA, so are
not included here.)



Introduction

Well might tables and chairs be upset, and glass and china be sent crashing on the floor, in the panic of that terrible moment when the four Heroes strode wrathfully into the room! The mighty Badger, his whiskers bristling, his great cudgel whistling through the air; Mole, black and grim, brandishing his stick and shouting his awful war-cry, "A Mole! A Mole!" Rat; desperate and determined, his belt bulging with weapons of every age and every variety; Toad, frenzied with excitement and injured pride, swollen to twice his ordinary size, leaping into the air and emitting Toad-whoops that chilled them to the marrow! "Toad he went a-pleasuring!" he yelled. "I'LL pleasure 'em!" and he went straight for the Chief Weasel.

In this game, players take the roles of a Mole, a Water Rat (water vole, really), a Badger or a Toad. If you've read **The Wind in the Willows**, you know exactly what I mean. If you haven't, well, then, you really should read it. It's *easily* one of the five best books written in the 20th century. (All right, "*The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*" chapter isn't to my tastes, but the rest is superb.)

This is largely a traditional roleplaying game, requiring a game master (GM) and a number of players. Since this game is written in a 24-hour period, it is assumed you know what this means, as I don't have time to explain it to you.

(For purposes of clarity, the GM and generic non-player characters [NPCs] are referred to as "she" and players and player characters [PCs] as "he". Adjust pronouns as needed for your group.)

The animals in **The Wind in the Willows** are quite anthropomorphic: they wear clothes, use tools, wield weapons and in one case, even live in a mansion and drive a motorcar. You can play the actual characters in the book, or – if you wish to alter the personalities – distant cousins. The game is written with the idea that each player is a different animal, but if two players want to be Toads, who can blame them? Let them – it'll be more fun for all!

The setting is somewhere in rural Edwardian England – that is, in the first decade of the 20th century, with motorcars that go "poop-poop" rather than "zooo-oom". There is a prominent River, some farms, a canal, the Wild Woods, and roads meandering off to towns and eventually cities and the sea. E. H. Shepard drew a lovely map for it, well worth hunting up, but not included here for copyright reasons.

Equipment Needed

You will need some tokens in two colors, such as glass beads, or checkers, or pieces from the game of Go, or even small coins of two different denominations. These are listed as black and white, but you may of course substitute any colors depending on what you have. You'll need at most three tokens of each color per player.

Characters

Four types of characters are available:

Moles have:

Luck: 2

Wit: 1

Knowledge of tunnels and digging.

Fault: Low Self Confidence; trusts the judgment of others above his own.

Water Rats have:

Loyalty: 2

Practicality: 1

Knowledge of all things about the River.

Fault: Subject to poetical fits; becomes “anti-practical” at such times.

Badgers have:

Strength: 2

Common Sense: 1

Knowledge of tunnels, ruins, digging.

Fault: Gruff – “anti-charm”, even when trying to be charming.

Toads have:

Charm: 2

Acting: 1

Knowledge of the price of motorcars and gadgets.

Faults: More than you can shake a stick at, but just pick a couple. (E.g., Thinks he is highly dexterous and a great driver when he’s not even close; or *“Perhaps he’s not very clever – we can’t all be geniuses...”* or *“It’s no good, Toady; you know well that your songs are all conceit and boasting and vanity; and your speeches are all self-praise and—and—well, and gross exaggeration and—and—”* “And gas,” put in the Badger, in his common way. You’ll find others in the original novel.)

Running the Game

In addition to an area of Knowledge, each character has two positive traits, one of value two and one of value one. The higher value attribute is their primary one: each player starts with two black tokens to represent this ability. The lower value (secondary) trait is represented by white tokens: each player starts with two white tokens.

White tokens have a value of 1 each. Black tokens have a value of 2 each. You never get “change” if spending a black token to resolve an action requiring only a value 1 token.

When an incident occurs which may or may not succeed, the GM assigns a **difficulty level** to the encounter. She does not have to tell the players what the difficulty level is, though she may hint when something is well above or below average:

Very Easy: no tokens needed

Easy: a token of value 1

Almost easy: tokens of value 2

Medium: tokens of value 3

Hard: tokens of value 4

Very Hard: tokens of value 5

The player(s) need to give the GM the correct value (or more) in order to succeed at a given task – they may help each out in these tasks. This is accomplished by playing their roles in such a way that it’s obvious they are using their primary or secondary trait. The sole meaning of “obvious” in this case means the GM is convinced.

Example: Toad is confronted with a witness who refuses to talk. The player plays Toad as very charming in soliciting information. The player slides a black token (as his primary trait is Charm) towards the GM, who

must first decide if Toad was indeed charming enough to warrant this expenditure. She decides that Toad was indeed charming enough, and takes the black token. However, she says, the witness, though softening, is still not giving any information. At this point the player of the usually practical Ratty offers the witness some food, and slides a white token (as his secondary trait is Practicality) towards the GM. The GM hesitates, and then decides yes, this witness is indeed hungry, and the total value of 3 is enough to win her confidence and she tells the player characters what she knows.

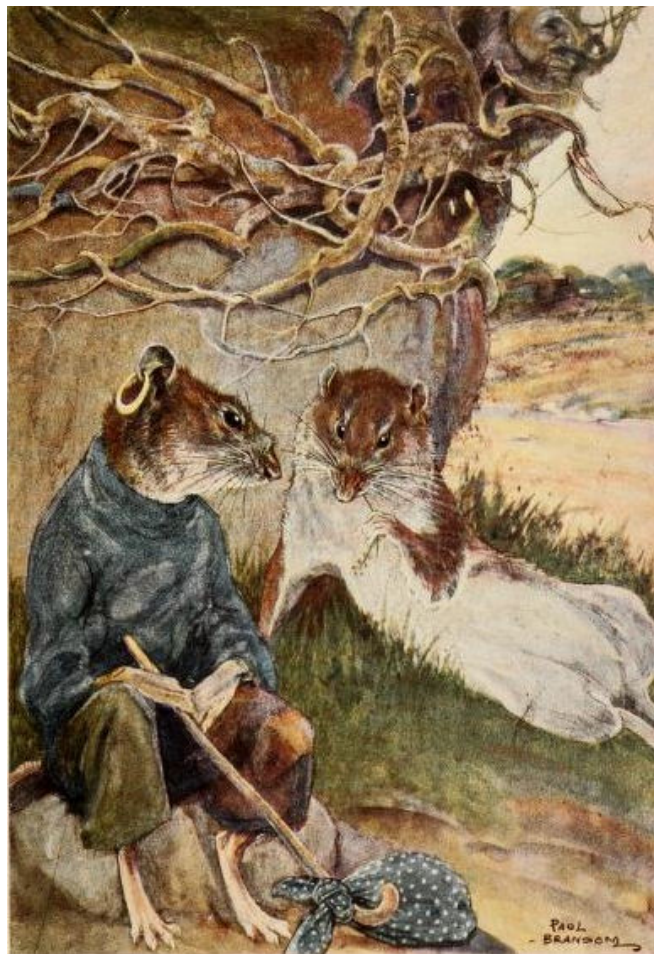
A player would have to be *very* Charming, Lucky, Loyal, Strong, etc., to earn the right to turn in two tokens of the same color at once.

Gaining Tokens

Each player starts with two of each color token and spends them as above. The maximum a player can hold is three tokens of each color. The principal way to gain tokens is for a player to roleplay his character's Fault. If the GM (at least!) is entertained by the roleplaying of the Fault, the GM may reward the player with one or more tokens, of either (or both) colors. The key is to be entertaining – play it to the max!

Theoretically it is easier to gain tokens as a Toad than as a Mole, because Toad's Faults are more entertaining. Allowances should be made for Moles – it's not easy to entertain while decrying your ability to do things well. And a word to Badgers: your gruffness is most entertaining when you're actually trying to be charming but blowing it badly! And so as not to leave the Rats out, a bout of poetry will probably not happen

in the heat of action, but can hit just before or after. Here we can see it triggered by listening to the tales of a wandering seafaring rat:

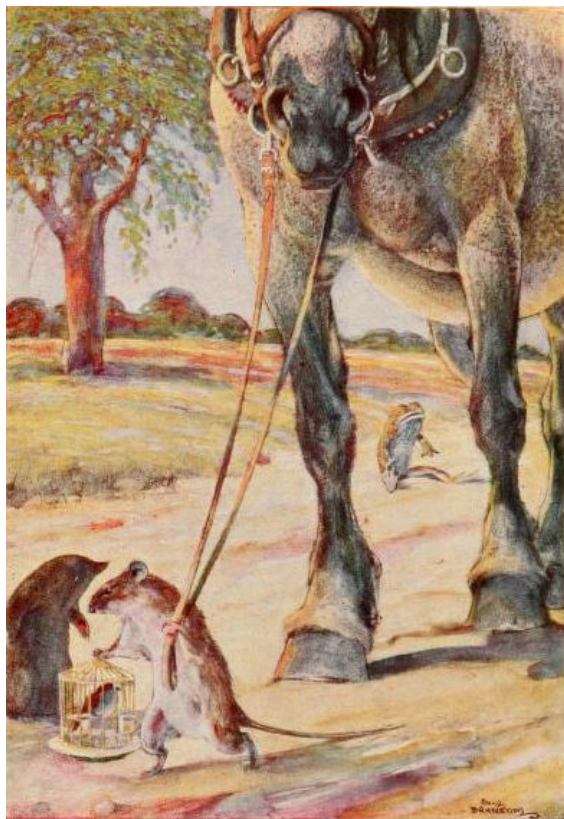


Um, Okay, but What If ...

What if characters want to do something outside their listed traits? In the original book, for example, they all fought the weasels and stoats, yet only Badger in this game has a trait that looks applicable ... oh, I suppose Rat does too, if he's coming to someone's rescue, no matter what the odds, or Mole could use his luck to score a hit in an attack.

But there will come a time when Toad really *does* have to take some sort of action, when Charm and Acting simply

won't let him escape from the jail he's thrown into for stealing a motorcar, or flee a hostile band of police intent on recapturing him, or from an angry barge woman whose horse he's stolen...



Right. There are some things the players can do in these situations:

One is simply to find some way to make their traits work for them. Be creative in applying the traits, such as I listed in the first paragraph in this section: Rat's Loyalty, or Mole's Luck.

Another way is to **support** another character who **does** have an appropriate trait. The GM should be generous when players work together, even if it might seem like they're trying to skate by.

Examples: "If we all help Badger try to move the rock, can his black token count as a 3?" Or perhaps, "Seeing

Ratty charge loyally into battle inspires me, and I follow, yelling my battle cry: A Mole! A Mole! Since his Loyalty motivated me, can his black token count as a 3?"

If they're being entertaining and creative, reward them. (If not, don't let them get away with it, the weasels!)

A third way is to allow the players to use their Knowledge areas as if they were virtual tokens. That is, no tokens are passed in these cases, but Rat, for example, can succeed at a task by swimming or boating or by knowing every twist and bend of the River.

"Believe me, my young friend, there is NOTHING—absolute nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."

And finally the GM can simply tell the players in these cases: "Roleplay it." The players' tokens won't work in these situations – they have to tell the GM what they're doing in such lovely detail that she's swept along in the sheer brilliance of the moment and agrees with them. In fact, a player may actually *earn* a token if roleplaying his character's fault, and still succeed at an action! But this is a roleplaying game, so roleplay it well if you want to succeed.

That's Really All There Is to It

Basically, the GM comes up with a plot and runs the characters through it. There is no character progression – the game is played solely for enjoyment! – and no one dies, not even the weasels. Think of each session as a one-shot game, without worrying about a sequel.

A sample adventure is included in the following pages. **If you wish to be a player** (as opposed to the GM), **do not read any further!**

Attention: For the GM Only!

Sample Adventure: The Terror of the Wild Woods

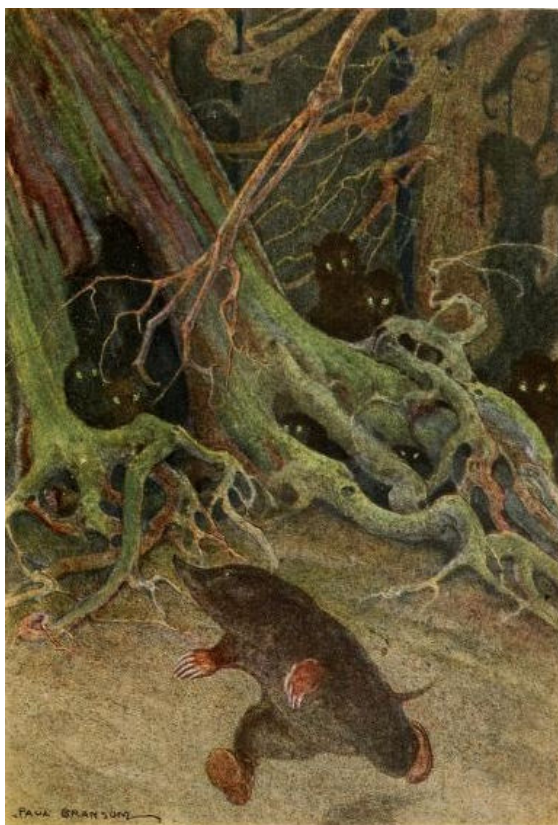
He thought it was only falling leaves at first, so slight and delicate was the sound of it. Then as it grew it took a regular rhythm, and he knew it for nothing else but the pat-pat-pat of little feet still a very long way off. Was it in front or behind? It seemed to be first one, and then the other, then both. It grew and it multiplied, till from every quarter as he listened anxiously, leaning this way and that, it seemed to be closing in on him ... In panic, he began to run too, aimlessly, he knew not whither. He ran up against things, he fell over things and into things, he darted under things and dodged round things.

The player characters are visiting Ratty's house and just finishing a springtime luncheon picnic when a worried field mouse shows up. The young mouse is very nervous, but apologetic and shy and it takes a bit to get her story out.

"It's my brother, Sirs. He's been missing since last night and we're ever so worried about him. Dad always says you gentlemen have been kind to us mice since even before his time. So I've come to ask your help."

After much more of this, she finally reveals that a rabbit reported this morning having seen her brother, Roderick, in the Wild Wood yesterday evening. Nothing has been seen of him since. It turns out the PCs know Roderick – he's the current star of the plays the field mice put on, and it's feared his theatrical swashbuckling persona has overcome his good sense.

The GM should play on the PCs' code of honor towards the small folk, and how much they enjoy the field mice's shows. It shouldn't take too much to enlist their help in finding Roderick.



Roderick is deep in the Wild Woods, and very frightened. He actually went in on a dare and is regretting it. He's holed up beneath the roots of a very small shrub (so the weasels, stoats and ferrets can't get at him) but is too frightened to leave.

The PCs will have to explore the Wild Woods to find him – he's nowhere near Badger's place. While getting to the Wood, tempt Toad with a motorcar, apparently abandoned, though the owners are actually picnicking over a hill.

"I wonder," he said to himself presently, "I wonder if this sort of car STARTS easily?"

There will be witnesses in the Wild Wood, but most are too frightened of the "mob" to dare to tell much. There should be mouse footprints which are sometimes covered up with weasel tracks and perhaps a dropped mouse

glove or two. If there's no Badger in the party, threaten the PCs with being overwhelmed by the Wild Wooders. (They wouldn't dare if Badger's there. In that case, use some large feral dogs instead of weasels and stoats.)

Tell the PCs they know the following quotation from the book (indeed, it's Ratty who says it):

There are a hundred things one has to know, which we understand all about and you don't, as yet. I mean passwords, and signs, and sayings which have power and effect, and plants you carry in your pocket, and verses you repeat, and dodges and tricks you practice; all simple enough when you know them, but they've got to be known if you're small, or you'll find yourself in trouble.

Have them come up with some of the passwords, signs, sayings, plants, verses, dodges and tricks themselves.

There should be a bit by the River, so Rat can shine, and some tunnels so Mole can come to the fore, and some old Roman Ruins with secret passages so Badger can show off his knowledge, and perhaps an abandoned bicycle or other gadget so Toad can be heroic – or at least spectacularly comic!

Ultimately, there will be a final showdown at Roderick's hiding place between the PCs and the Wild Wooders (with or without feral dogs, depending on Badger's presence). It should be a close match, but if the players are creative in their descriptions of how they take on the Wild Wooders (use of the aforementioned signs, plants, verses, tricks, etc., will help), they should win the day, gallantly chasing off the weasels, stoats and ferrets (and possibly feral dogs). And a good time will be had by all.

