# What is Flex⬥ Tale

## J. Evans Payne

# Colophon

## Author

J. Evans Payne

## Infinium Game Studio is:

| | |
|---|---|
| **CEO:** | J. Evans Payne |
| **Creative Director:** | J. Evans Payne |
| **Lead Editor:** | J. Evans Payne |
| **VP Marketing & Sales:** | J. Evans Payne |
| **CFO:** | J. Evans Payne |

**Artistic Director:**        J. Evans Payne

## Legal Stuff

**What is FlexTale** © 2016 J. Evans Payne.

Reproduction without the written permission of the author is expressly forbidden.

All characters, names, places, items, art and text herein are copyrighted by J. Evans Payne.  The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

# FlexTale

## What is FlexTale?

FlexTale™ is an attempt to make roleplaying game adventure content dynamic and interesting.  A module created using FlexTale is different each time it is run.  Treasure, monsters, plot activities, NPC backstories and character arcs, and various actions and plot elements can all occur differently.

Differences can occur using the roll of dice, or the GM can simply choose the content that s/he prefers or feels would be most engaging to the play group.

There are two ways that FlexTale can help make an adventure dynamic: **Dynamic Content** and **Dynamic Plots**.

## Dynamic Content

"Dynamic content" is a FlexTable term that refers to anything in an adventure that can be modified.  Whether one NPC is in love with another, or who murdered the vagrant in the alley behind the town pub—FlexTale dynamic content makes it possible to have several explanations or paths through a story.

Dynamic Content is made possible by something called a **FlexTable™**.



### FlexTables

Most roleplaying game resources have tables—lots and lots of tables, in many cases!  Typically, these tables are two-column, or perhaps three-column: you have one column that lists the dice roll result, and you reference that row as the outcome of the randomization.  This is all well and good, but it limits the scenario to that one set of probabilities and outcomes, without accounting for things that happen in the game that you might want to impact those outcomes.

## A Traditional RPG Lookup Table

**Table 1** is a typical "what's in the treasure chest" table that requires rolling a d100.  You roll a d100, and then you look up which row your roll falls into, and then you get your single result.  Interesting, to be sure, and it definitely provides for some variability... but the *extent* of that variability is constant.

**Table 1: Traditional Lookup Table**

| D% | Result | Description |
|---|---|---|
| 01-30 | **Nothing** | The treasure chest is empty. |
| 31-40 | **Minor Reward** | 1d20 gp and a silver locket worth 5 pp. |
| 41-80 | **Average Reward** | 3d12 gp, a gold-hilted dagger worth 10 pp, and two *potions of* cure light wounds. |
| 81-100 | **Major Reward** | 2d20 pp, a *potion of* cure moderate wounds, and a scroll of fireball (CL 12). |

## The FlexTable Difference

A FlexTable is used to do the same thing a normal RPG lookup table does.  What makes FlexTables different is that they have *multiple columns* to represent dice rolls.  Each of the columns represents a different situation or set of conditions under which that column is used to reference the result.

**IGS-FT-01: What is FlexTale?**

This seemingly simple change is used to make all of the following possible:

- Differences in **probabilities** for the individual outcomes.
- "Scalable" monsters and rewards that more appropriately match the level and power of the PCs.
- **Proportional rewards**, measured against the strength of a relationship or other conditions.
- **Circumstantial content**, restricted to certain conditions or prerequisites.

**FlexTable 1** is the same table we saw earlier, modified to be a FlexTable.

## Contexts

In the above example, there are now *four* columns used to indicate the range of the dice roll result. These columns are referred to as *Contexts*.

Before you roll on a FlexTable like this one, you will have to figure out which Context you should refer to. In the above table, the leftmost column is **Context "A"** (D%A), the next one is **"B"**, and so on. Each Context also indicates the dice to be rolled—in this example, you roll the same dice (d%) in each Context, but in some FlexTables, different dice may be used.

This straightforward example demonstrates the following differences in converting a standard table into a FlexTable:

- **Different Probabilities: Context C** is the most favorable, since it provides a much bigger range of rolls under which you would receive the "Major Reward". **Context B** is the next best, since it, too, expands the range that **Context A** has.
- **Circumstantial Results:** In **Context D**, not only are the favorable outcomes less likely, but there is a fifth result row that is only possible under this Context: "Cursed Reward".
- **Determining Context:** When you are called upon to roll on this FlexTable, the adventure will use some description to make it clear which Context to use. In the above example, perhaps the Context is determined by how favorable the party's relationship is with a local wizard... but if the party has fought or slain that wizard, then **Context D** is used to represent the soured atmosphere.

Typically, just prior to a FlexTable, adventure content will summarize which Context should be used. The GM is encouraged to use his/her common sense and judgement in overriding this guidance as she/he sees fit based on the party and how the game is going. For example, a GM could choose to reference a specific Context even though the prerequisites aren't met. She could also choose to simply ignore the table entirely, and force a specific result without even rolling. Experienced GMs should use this power wisely to improve gameplay if necessary; unless you have a specific reason for overruling the recommended use of a FlexTable, you should try to use it as it was intended to be used.

**FlexTable 1: Sample Treasure Chest Contents**

| D%A | D%B | D%C | D%D | Result | Description |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01-30 | 01-20 | 01-10 | 01-30 | **Nothing** | The treasure chest is empty. |
| 31-40 | 21-50 | 21-30 | 31-40 | **Minor Reward** | 1d20 gp and a silver locket worth 5 pp. |
| 41-80 | 51-60 | 31-50 | 41-45 | **Average Reward** | 3d12 gp, a gold-hilted dagger worth 10 pp, and two *potions of* cure light wounds. |
| 81-100 | 61-100 | 51-100 | 46-50 | **Major Reward** | 2d20 pp, a *potion of* cure moderate wounds, and a scroll of fireball (CL 12). |
| n/a | n/a | n/a | 51-100 | **Cursed Reward** | 6d6 cp, a rusted dagger (useless in combat), and whomever opens it is struck with a bestow curse spell (CL8). |

Here's an example for the above table, assuming the example of the contents of the treasure chest scaling to the nature of the relationship the party has with the local wizard:

- **Use Context A:**
  If the party's relationship to the wizard is **Unfriendly** or **Indifferent**.

- **Use Context B:**
  If the party's relationship to the wizard is **Friendly**.
- **Use Context C:**
  If the party's relationship to the wizard is **Helpful**.
- **Use Context D:**
  If the party's relationship to the wizard is **Hostile**, or if the party has ever attacked the wizard (or slain her).

## Dynamic Plots

This is an impressive-sounding title, but the goal is quite simple to describe: *Let the story be different.*

There are two ways this lofty goal is accomplished in a FlexTale: **FlexNPCs**, and **FlexPlots**.

## FlexNPCs

A FlexNPC is one whose backstory, motivation, or actions may be different depending on the determination of the GM. Each such NPC has one or more **NPC Options**.

Simply put, **NPC Options** allow the GM to select, or randomize, many plot-related characteristics of the NPCs in the adventure. But before we talk about *how* this is done, let's briefly discuss *why* we would be able to do this without sacrificing anything about the story itself.

**FlexTable 2: Sample Plot Option**

| Plot Option: What Happens to Gloryth the Hog-Herder in the Attack | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **D%A** | **D%B** | **D%C** | **D%D** | **?** | **Result** | **Description** |
| 01-30 | 01-20 | 01-10 | 01-30 | ☐ | **Unscathed in the Attack** | Although quite shaken, the hog-herder sustained no injury in the attack. |
| 31-40 | 21-50 | 21-30 | 31-100 | ☐ | **Wounded in the Attack** | Gloryth took some damage, and will likely bear the scars of his injuries forever... but, as he puts it, he "can still rope the swine all right". |
| 41-100 | 51-100 | 31-100 | n/a | ☐ | **Slain in the Attack** | Panicked and in shock, the swineherd suffered a lethal blow during the attack. As a grisly bonus, though, he died amidst his herd. |

## The Role of NPCs in an Adventure's Story

A well-written NPC "feels real". They have some form of backstory or motivation, character quirks and traits, and a demeanor or perspective that helps the GM give them a sense of life and reality. In many adventures, the "realness" of the NPCs is a major component in how the game is received by the players, and how immersed everyone becomes in the story. NPCs are crucial in telling the story of most adventures, and their actions frequently dictate or help to determine the outcome of the main plot of the adventure.

That said, frequently, the details of a given NPC aren't necessarily critically intertwined with the core plot of the story being told. Yes, the evil lich king who holds the realm under his sway pretty much **has** to be evil, otherwise the plot would be completely different. But what sort of man that lich was in his pre-undead life, what decisions he made, and the enemies or alliances he formed could differ significantly, all without derailing the core plot of the adventure.

**FlexTable** 3 is an example of the backstory of a bartender.

As with the other dynamic elements in a FlexTale, the GM is encouraged to use this flexibility as he or she sees fit. It does add another layer of detail to the proceedings, and adds one more thing to keep track of in running the game.

## NPC Options

Every NPC in a FlexTale adventure is designated as one of the following:

- **Standard NPC** (fixed characteristics, as in virtually every RPG adventure you've ever played)
- **Flex NPC** (dynamic characteristics, determined by the GM before play begins)

**Standard NPCs** are used exactly as you would a normal NPC in a non-FlexTale adventure. FlexNPCs have characteristics that are not fixed.

Before running a FlexTale adventure, the GM should do a quick run-through of all of the FlexNPCs. Each FlexNPC will have one or more **NPC Options**, each of which allows for something about that NPC to be different with each run-through of the adventure.

**FlexTable 3: Sample Bartender Backstory**

| D%A | D%B | D%C | D%D | ? | Result | Description |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|--------|-------------|
| **NPC Option: Barkeep Elkfist's Backstory** | | | | | | |
| 01-30 | 01-20 | 01-10 | 01-30 | ☐ | **War Hero** | In the Great War, Elkfist was a renowned warrior, notable for saving the lives of his comrades as much as for ending the lives of his foes. |
| 31-40 | 21-50 | 21-30 | 31-100 | ☐ | **War Deserter** | Elkfist had his doubts about the Great War. Though it troubled him greatly, his conscience made him desert his comrades-in-arms rather than take up his blade against the innocent. |
| 41-100 | 51-100 | 31-100 | n/a | ☐ | **Walking Wounded** | Though he fought in the Great War, Elkfist returned from the battlefront a changed half-orc. His demeanor now is distant and sour, and he is prone to staring off into unseen distances for minutes at a time, lost in his own memories. |

Notice that, like with a FlexTable, Context columns on the left of the table allow for different outcomes and probabilities depending on the circumstances of the roll. In some cases, an NPC Option table does not have different Contexts.

The "?" column contains check boxes; this is meant to facilitate keeping track of which option is either rolled or chosen by the GM.

## FlexPlots

**FlexPlots** are very similar to **FlexNPCs**, except the decisions determined by the GM relate to the plot overall, rather than specific NPCs. Instead of **NPC Options**, there are **Plot Options**. The two concepts are mechanically identical, relying on a complex riff on the standard RPG lookup table to make randomized, contextually-sensitive determinations about plot details.

FlexTables will often refer to a certain **Plot Option** in dictating which Context to use on a roll.

Before running a FlexTale adventure, the GM should do a quick run-through of all of the **Plot Options.** Each FlexNPC will have one or more **NPC Options**, each of which allows for something about that NPC to be different with each run-through of the adventure.

**FlexTable 2** an example of the backstory of a bartender. Notice that, like with a FlexTable, Context columns on the left of the table allow for different outcomes and probabilities depending on the circumstances of the roll. In some cases, a Plot Option table does not have different Contexts.

The "?" conlumn contains check boxes; this is meant to facilitate keeping track of which option is either rolled or chosen by the GM.

## FlexTale Tracker

FlexTale's dynamic plot capabilities can make for a great deal of excitement and introduce an all-too-rare element of replayability to an adventure. However, these tools also add to the complexity of keeping track of everything that is going on in a series of gaming sessions.

Since GMs have enough to do as it is, FlexTale-enhanced adventures contain a **FlexTale Tracker**. This is a simple checklist where the GM can keep track of all the story- and character-related decisions that have been made. Think of it as a "cheat sheet" for the GM to remember all of the various **NPC Options** and **Plot Options** in a game.

In the **Appendices** of each FlexTale is a Tracker—basically a summary of all of the NPC Options and Plot Options possible in the adventure, with checkboxes next to each outcome. The GM is encouraged to use this resource in two important ways:

1. To facilitate **planning** before the first gaming session is started: the Tracker reminds the GM of all of the dynamic plot elements that need to be determined.

As a **reminder** during gameplay of the various determinations, either to dictate the reactions or actions of an NPC, or to help decide which Context to use in a FlexTable roll.