



INTRODUCTION

THE WHEEL OF REBIRTH TURNS, AND CIRCLES 'ROUND ONCE AGAIN. GREETINGS AND WELCOME TO THE *BLUE ROSE Adventurer's Guide!* When John Snead first proposed the world that would become known as Aldea, it was just a short while after the third edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* had taken the gaming world by storm, revitalizing interest in the venerable tabletop roleplaying game and the hobby. Green Ronin Publishing already had successes involving the new Open Game License, including its *Freeport* setting (which premiered the same weekend as *D&D, Third Edition*, with the adventure *Death in Freeport*) and the *Mutants & Masterminds* Superhero Roleplaying Game. I had, in fact, come on-board full-time with Green Ronin at that time based on the success of *Mutants & Masterminds* to serve as line developer, but there were some other projects the rapidly-growing publisher needed addressed as well, and one of them was *Blue Rose*.

The concept was touted as “Romantic Fantasy Roleplaying,” a different take on the fantasy RPG genre from the high fantasy epics and blood-and-thunder adventures: A world of magic where connection, empathy, and kindness played important roles, and where good people worked together to uphold and protect a generally good society against the forces arrayed against it. Rather than rootless wanderers looting monstrous lairs, it conceived of the heroes as people who would be a kind of extended family, champions and protectors of the land that would come to be known as the Sovereignty of the Blue Rose, the nation of Aldis.

My own partner in nurturing the seeds of this vision and helping them to grow was none other than Jeremy Crawford, who *Dungeons & Dragons* players now know as one of the creative visionaries behind the smash success of the *Fifth Edition* of *D&D*, online Dungeon Master, and social media rules sage. Working on the first edition of *Blue Rose* together was the start of our friendship, one that I have treasured ever since.

Jeremy and I worked together to fill out the framework of Aldis and its surrounding nations created by John Snead, to detail the setting's mythology, cosmology, and history, and to breathe life into the world its characters would inhabit. Those in-the-know will find hints of Jeremy's later work with *D&D* woven into the fabric of Aldea, and we also sought to make the setting of *Blue Rose* as inclusive and diverse as the romantic fantasy fiction that helped to inspire it.

Jeremy, in particular, greatly expanded the role and history of the Roamers, detailing their heritage as scions of a lost and fallen nation during the great darkness that spread across the world, centuries ago, now following their prophetic visions and claiming only the open road as their home. He also provided the overarching mythology of the setting, detailing the primordials and gods, and incorporating diversity from the very beginning: The divinities of Aldea came in a wide range of appearances, forms, genders, and romantic and sexual orientations. We incorporated the Exarchs from Green Ronin's *Book of the Righteous* and later the *Book of Fiends*, both of which have also been since updated and released for *Fifth Edition* fantasy roleplaying.

ADAPTATIONS IN BLUE ROSE ADVENTURER'S GUIDE

Adapting the world of Aldea from *Blue Rose* to *Fifth Edition* required some modifications to make for a smooth fit with the game's rules and other terminology. For example, what *Blue Rose Adventurer's Guide* calls "the occult" is known as "sorcery" in other editions of the setting. However, since sorcerers are a character class, it was less confusing to simply rename sorcery in this version of the setting. Similar minor modifications have been made throughout this book to bring Aldea more in line with player expectations while preserving the overall style and feel of the setting. Likewise, in general, this book uses standard *Fifth Edition* game terms for things, including spells, character classes, and roles like the Game Master, for maximum compatibility.

At the same time, I took the initial rules-design work of the late, great Alejandro Melchor, and struck out in a new direction. At the time, Green Ronin was blazing new trails using the *d20 System* and the Open Game License to create stand-alone roleplaying games sharing some common "ancestry," as we had done with *Mutants & Masterminds*. That led to the decision to make *Blue Rose*, not just a *D&D* setting, but a romantic fantasy *game* unto itself. I drew upon my prior experience in designing *M&M* and the core system we later called *True20* emerged.

The final product was graced by a stunning, evocative cover painting by the fabulous Stephanie Pui-Min Law, who did some freelance work for Green Ronin and in the gaming industry at that time. Her elaborate, ethereal watercolors inspired much of the look and feel of the game and setting.

Blue Rose Romantic Fantasy Roleplaying drew quite a bit of attention, not all of it positive. It was criticized as "political" and its diversity "forced." Some vociferously hated the notion of a good nation founded upon magical verification of people's good intentions (a concept later used to good effect by author Rhiannon Louve in her novella "Faith and Deeds" in the *Tales from the Mount* anthology for *Blue Rose*). It was rightly critiqued for poor and clumsy handling of transgender issues at the time (something we addressed in later editions, including this one). Still, it was talked about, included on lists of games to look at and, most importantly, shared as a setting and game that made some people feel *seen* and included in gaming ways they hadn't been before.

Green Ronin produced three substantial books for *Blue Rose*: the core book, the *Blue Rose Companion* rules supplement, and the *World of Aldea* setting expansion, creating a complete trilogy. Eventually, attention and resources turned towards other games and projects, and the *Blue Rose* line ceased publication, living on in the games of those who continued to adventure in Aldea, and in the endless online discussions, recommended reading lists, and examples. The *d20 System* that inspired *Blue Rose* also moved-on through a *Fourth Edition* of *Dungeons & Dragons* and numerous expressions of the system through the Open Gaming License (such as *Pathfinder* and Green Ronin's own *Mutants & Masterminds*) and eventually through the world's largest open playtest for a *Fifth Edition* of the world's most popular roleplaying game.

But the Wheel of Rebirth, set in motion by the gods at the beginning of the world of Aldea, turns again and again, and *Blue Rose* returned when Green Ronin spun-off its successful *Dragon Age* licensed RPG into the Adventure Game Engine or "AGE" System, creating a general *Fantasy AGE Basic Rulebook*. One of the settings developed for the new AGE System was the world of Aldea.

Sponsored by a highly successful crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter, the new edition of *Blue Rose* was bigger, more detailed, and far more colorful; the original books having black-and-white interiors, whereas the new edition was printed in fabulous full color. It was followed by the *Six of Swords* adventure collection and a *Narrator's Kit*.

Longtime Green Ronin Joseph Carriker, Jr., took up the role of developer for the new *Blue Rose* line, shepherding the *Aldis: City of the Blue Rose* sourcebook through production and release, a substantial expansion of the details about Aldis and its world, with a number of other *Blue Rose* sourcebooks and adventures in the works.

Joe also stepped into the world of Aldea in a big way by writing the first official *Blue Rose* novel, *Shadowtide*, released through Nisaba Press. It has been followed by *Blue Rose* anthologies of short stories and novellas by a variety of authors, including Joe's novella *Pit of Vipers*, following on the events and characters of *Shadowtide*.

The notion of returning *Blue Rose* to its d20-based roots in some form or another was discussed various times over the years, but it took a pandemic closing down printers, distributors, and game stores to prioritize it in the company's busy schedule. Green Ronin is no stranger to the *Fifth Edition* landscape, having designed and developed two official *Dungeons & Dragons* books (*Out of the Abyss* and *The Sword Coast Adventurers Guide*) as well as publishing a *Fifth Edition* compatible edition of the *Book of the Righteous* and the hugely-popular *Tal'dorei Campaign Setting* sourcebook for the online streaming show *Critical Role*. With a large *Fifth Edition* audience and the opportunities available to us, it seemed that the Wheel of Rebirth had turned once again and it was time for a *Blue Rose Adventurer's Guide* to find its way into your hands.

Whether you are newly arrived on the world of Aldea or a long-time visitor, welcome! Welcome to a world of the arcane and the occult, of light and shadow, where the heart and mind are powerful forces indeed, where they are far more important than the form you wear, and where heroes are needed to keep people safe from harm and to inspire courage, kindness, exploration, and understanding. We hope you will take up the cause and raise your voice in salute with us.

For Aldis, and the Queen!

— Steve Kenson