

nest



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A WORLD OF
ADVENTURE FOR

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

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Nest

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed
in this work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, heroes,
anthropomorphic fantasy hybrids, alien insects from outer space, creepy
hollow-armor enforcers, or broken-toy minions is purely coincidental, but
kinda hilarious. Also please get out of our heads, it's crowded in there.

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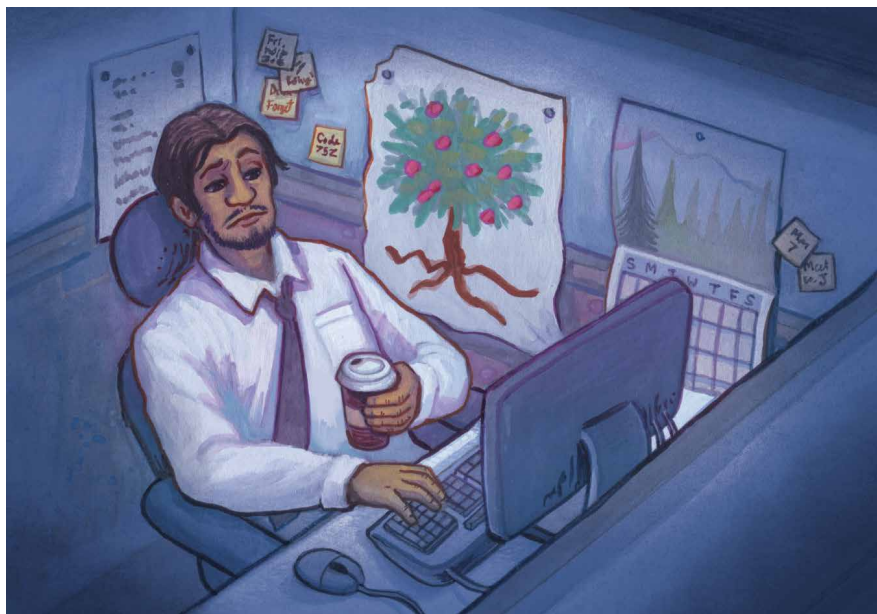
INTRODUCTION

Once We Were Heroes

Once upon a time you took the road less travelled in a yellow wood; you stepped off the subway at the station on Oak & Ash; you wished upon a falling star. You awoke to a world of magic and wonder, and you learned something you had never suspected: you were a hero. Then you drank from the Well of Waking and found yourself back in your own bed.

You barely remember those adventures. They were dreams; or, if you know in your heart they were something more, what does it matter? You have a job now, and people who are counting on you here. You're not really a hero, anyway; just ask the people you've disappointed. A hero wouldn't have made the mistakes you have.

So why, after all of these years, are you hearing the horns again?





The Kingdoms of Nest

You will be adventuring in the magical Kingdoms of Nest. Each Kingdom is different: Epoch is a land of giants and monsters, while Bungledyne is a steam and electric city peopled with talking animals. But they all welcome children from our world, who arrive by magical means and stay long enough to make their mark. They have a word for these children: heroes.

In *Nest*, you play regular workaday adults, summoned back to the worlds of your childhood fantasies. The people and places you once loved are under attack from a dangerous enemy, and they need their greatest heroes to defend them. But it has been a long time since you played that role. You barely remember your adventures, let alone how to wield a sword, a bow, or a magic spell.

Nest Is Like a Dream

Nest is not a place you travel to—it's a place to which you are transported. Maybe you fell asleep and woke up there; maybe you got lost on a hike. Maybe one journey was all you had, or maybe you dreamed of Nest every night one summer at you aunt's old house in the country. When you returned, no time had passed. You were left with a part of yourself wondering if it was even real.

A Lifetime in One Night

Time in Nest bears little relation to time in the real world: you may have spent years in the Kingdoms, and returned to find only a few minutes had passed. After a year in the waking world, a child might return and find that a month, or a year, or ten, have passed in Nest.

Time works that way for everybody who visits Nest—two heroes may never be able to reconcile their timelines. Still, if you meet someone twenty years older than you who journeyed in Nest, chances are that their stories took place before yours.

Nest Is for Children

You were between seven and ten the first time you visited the Kingdoms, and under seventeen the last time. You can age in Nest, although it's rare; most heroes' careers span a few months or years before they leave Nest forever. Regardless, you returned to the mundane world in the same body, and at the same age, as when you left. You've never met anyone who visited Nest as an adult—until now.

Return to Adventure

Beginning Again

When you return to Nest as an adult, you have a mundane set of abilities and experiences at your disposal. Your childhood heroics are a memory—so how will you survive in a world where hungry ogres are the least of your worries?

The answer is that your characters, while mundane, are anything but ordinary. Nest chose you for a reason—for your kindness and your cunning, your strength of body and of character. Now that you're older and wiser, even your everyday skills can appear remarkable, whether it's the ability to fix a car, fire a rifle, or program a computer. Add in the aspects that define you as a hero, and you are set to face whatever dangers you encounter.

A second answer is that the longer you adventure in Nest, the more you recall the qualities that once made you a hero. Milestones reactivate your old abilities, whether it was your skill with a sword, your ability to speak to the wind, or the strength gifted to you by the giants. Furthermore, by regaining the talismans you once wielded, you can muster the power you need to face your enemies.

What About Magic?

Magic is everywhere in the Kingdoms. The wizards of the College of Enigmas are the self-professed experts of the arcane arts, but there is a little magic in everyone. The Kingdoms abound with wishing wells, wandering oracles, magic swords stuck in the landscape, and countless other miracles.

As a hero, magic is a part of you. *Nest* does not present new rules for spells and magic. Rather, depending on your aspects, you may wield magic (invokes and declarations) or find yourself magic's pawn (compels). Either way, you are capable of feats that defy common sense. Like it or not, you are caught up in the web of destiny that Nest weaves around its heroes.

A New Enemy

Nest changed while you were gone. You return to a world assailed by an unknown Enemy, one who threatens the very land itself. If you can't save the world you loved, your generation may be the last to know the wonders of Nest.

PART 1: HEROES OF NEST

The Kingdoms of Nest

There are three great Kingdoms of Nest, plus the City of Eg at its center. While people can travel from one Kingdom to another, each obeys its own magical rules. Heroes are drawn to a Kingdom by mutual need: by the lessons they need to learn and by the challenges the Kingdom faces.

Each Kingdom is described here as the heroes remember it, including a short list of people or places you may have encountered on your adventures. Consider incorporating one or two when you describe your adventures, especially if you would like to make the GM's job a little easier.

Epoch

Epoch is a land of larger-than-life adventure: of mist-shrouded mountains, ancient bridges over bottomless chasms, and winding roads guarded by high-walled castles. The inhabitants live in picturesque villages at the edge of vast pine forests. Kings, queens, princes, and princesses rule over their own small realms.

The mountains and wilds belong to the monsters: ogres and giants are the most famous of those, but there are dragons and other beasts in the high places. Boons are a big deal in Epoch: promises to slay a dragon, retrieve the queen's book of magics, or grant one of your seven sons in marriage all have the force of law.

Heroes are drawn to Epoch by their bravery. Children are challenged by danger, and rewarded for doing the right thing.

PEOPLE AND PLACES IN EPOCH

- **Sagger Mems**, the great storyteller
- **Old Orin**, the kindly innkeeper of the Ivory Harp in Borderfall
- **The Wonder Fountain in Borderfall**, font of adventure
- **The Ogre Red**, terror of the high hills
- **Baron Edgar**, the boy ruler of Borderfall, cursed to be a werewolf





Bungledyne

Bungledyne is the City of Miracles, the Heart of Invention, the steam-driven engine of the kingdoms. The Incandescent Spire stands in the center of a vast crater valley. The city radiates from it in concentric rings of streets, crackling electric wires, trolleys, steamstacks, cable cars, canals, bridges, and airship docks. From their houses and shops, the citizens invent new marvels and launch adventures into the wilds.

The people of Bungledyne are humanoid animals: sober badgers, long-eared hares, bewhiskered ocelots, and every type of animal one can imagine. They dress in frocks or lab coats, and their diet consists of colorful giant mushrooms, grown in the mushroom farms surrounding the city. Geothermal power stations turn the gearshafts and dynamos of the city.

Heroes in Bungledyne find that their wildest inventions are possible. They might build steam rockets to launch toward one of Nest's many moons, or they might find themselves battling the runaway robots of the unwise Dr. Leo Luftwonder yet again.

Bungledyne is where children learn confidence in their ideas, and the value of both inspiration and elbow grease.

PEOPLE AND PLACES IN BUNGLEDYNE

- **Dr. Leo Luftwonder**, ambitious lion inventor and inadvertent cause of much mischief
- **The Hall of Wonders**, the museum holding the greatest inventions of all time
- **The Incandescent Spire**, the greatest wonder of Bungledyne and its seat of power
- **Winnifred Spool**, sloth girl genius and unofficial mascot of the Incandescent Spire

Conundrum

Conundrum is a curious kingdom of contradictions, of puzzles and enigmas. Beside the orderly farms, towns, and occasional castle, the countryside is dotted with mazes, backwards-running rivers, upside-down houses, horseless tinker caravans, mysterious pipe organs, and so on. Puns and puzzles are the order of the day; heroes are expected to be able to solve them, and to rescue those confounded by Conundrum's many mysteries.

The inhabitants of Conundrum seem mundane: shopkeepers, farmers, scholars, princesses, lamplighters. But a few minutes' conversation reveals that all Conundrums subscribe to a Riddle (as they call it), a particular rule of logic they follow. They treat their Riddles much like religions; some follow one their entire lives, others change constantly. Examples include:

- **The Riddle of Truth:** Only tell the truth.
- **The Riddle of False:** Only tell a lie.
- **The Riddle Contrary:** Always contradict another speaker.
- **The Riddle Congenial:** Always agree with another speaker.
- **The Riddle Obtuse:** Don't believe in anything you can't see right now.
- **The Riddle of Life:** Believe that everything is a riddle to be solved. This is by far the most common Riddle, and certainly the easiest to deal with.

Anybody without a Riddle is offered eager suggestions by every passerby. Conundrum is ruled by King Contrary and Queen Congenial, who are adept at solving problems by taking turns.

The College of Enigmas bears special mention as the training ground for magicians from all the Kingdoms of Nest—as well as more than a few heroes. Magicians follow the Riddle of Magic, and claim to understand the ways of destiny much better than anyone else.

PEOPLE AND PLACES IN CONUNDRUM

- **The College of Enigmas**, alma mater for many a brainy young hero
- **The Unchantress**, recurring villain and magician, who can unname and remake anything
- **Princess Punctual**, who knows the right time for everything
- **Prince Penultimate**, her brother, who is always the second-to-last to know or do anything



Character Creation

Quick Reference

Characters in *Nest* are built as in *Fate Core* with the following starting choices.

- **Aspects:** A heroic concept, a mundane life, a hook, and two free aspects.
- **Skills:** One Great (+4), two Good (+3), three Fair (+2), four Average (+1). Any Fate skill except Resources is appropriate.
- **Stunts:** Characters start with no stunts, but can gain them at milestones during play.
- **Talisman:** Talismans are items of power, built with an aspect and two stunts. Characters do not start with talismans, but they can describe one at character creation and try to recover it in play.
- **Stress:** Characters start with two stress boxes each in their physical and mental stress tracks, increased respectively by Physique and Will as in *Fate Core*.
- **Refresh:** 3

Choosing Aspects

Aspects in *Nest* reflect both your fantastic adventures and your life in the waking world. As you choose your aspects, ask: why did you need Nest? Was it an inspiration and a challenge? Or was it an escape from something—an abusive mother, grinding poverty, grief over a brother killed in a car accident? Did Nest give you the strength you needed to change your life?

Your first aspect is your **heroic concept**. This is who you were in your adventures as a child; it's the title Nest remembers you by. It should be evocative and hint at your adventures, but it should also reveal your strengths. Some examples: *The High King*, *The Kid Who Could Eat Fire*, *Speaker to Cats*, *The Boy Who Lived*, *The Girl Genius*, *The Knight In Copper Armor*.

While choosing this aspect, read through the Kingdoms of Nest in the previous section. Heroes are called to one of these realms, so describe an adventure you had there in a couple of sentences, then distill it down to your heroic concept. If you wish, incorporate a person or place from that Kingdom.



Your second aspect is your **mundane life**: the adult you became. It might suggest why you left Nest behind, or the lessons and skills you have learned since. Some examples: *Best Sales Rep on the East Coast*, *I Was Guitarist for Mud Guppy*, *Teenage Runaway*, *Trying to Be a Good Dad*, *That's Colonel Johnson to You*.

Your third aspect is a **hook**—something that still connects you to Nest and the other heroes. Choose a suggested hook from the list below, or discuss other options with your GM.

- **A shared history:** Invent an adventure from your days in Nest, and turn it into an aspect connected to another PC. It could describe how you remember them, or an old debt or obligation: *I Swore to Find Brian in the Real World*, *Cora Is Always Saving Me*, *Mark and I Were King and Queen of Conundrum*, *Shana Never Believed Enough*.
- **Legacy of magic:** You haven't forgotten your adventures, and you have a special gift or perspective to prove it, even in the real world: *Still the Fastest Around*, *Nobody Can Lie to Me*, *I Belong in Epoch*, *Always Look Behind the Curtain*.
- **A tie to the real world:** The waking world calls to you, leaving you conflicted. Or, maybe you rejected Nest out of anger, grief, or disillusionment: *I'm Getting Married Next Week*, *I Should Be In Jail*, *I Can't Leave My Sister Again*, *Magic Couldn't Save Mom*, *I'm Done With Kid Stuff*.

Your final two aspects are **free aspects**. Choose again from the list of hooks, or invent a strength, belief, or quirk. A good aspect is true, dramatic, and interesting—but humorously appropriate works too: *Worst Wingman Ever*, *Week Three of the Paleo Diet*, *Avid Naturalist*, *A Voice to Kill For*, *Thirty Volumes of Unpublished Poems*.

Choosing Skills

Characters in *Nest* are built with the standard *Fate Core* skills: a pyramid of ten skills, peaking at Great (+4). Your skills should reflect your character and your mundane life, either echoing your heroic adventures or standing ironically at odds with them. While all skills are available, Resources is a poor choice—you can't bring your bank accounts into Nest.

Most of your skills are the ones you use every day: a mechanic would have Craft, a doctor could have Lore, and a stay-at-home mom might have Will and Empathy. However, feel free to include talents from your adventures in Nest that you have neglected in the waking world. Even if your mild-mannered lifestyle reporter has never lifted a fist, that doesn't mean he can't have Fight at Superb (+4).

Ultimately, a character with a Great (+4) skill is pretty heroic to begin with, whether they think of themselves that way or not.

Stunts

Stunts in *Nest* function as in *Fate Core*. They represent heroic qualities and abilities, and are bound not by reality, but by storybook logic. Stunts can permit impossible deeds; a few examples from the genre are below, but feel free to create your own.

A hero can have up to 5 stunts at a time, but each one above the third adds one fate point to the GM's reserve pool. For more details, see "*The Reserve Pool*" on page 15.

Any Way But Up: You can walk on any surface, horizontal, vertical, or upside down, as though it were the ground. Climbing difficulty starts at Mediocre (+0), regardless of handholds, but can increase for loose or slippery surfaces.

Giant Slayer: When you successfully attack an opponent larger than yourself, you do a minimum of two stress.

Giant Strength: +2 on Physique rolls to lift or break objects. You may also use Will in place of Physique for the same purposes.

Flame Speaker: You can use Empathy and Rapport to create advantages on a scene as long as there is a flame present.

Flame Wielder: You can summon and hurl flames. Use Will in place of Shoot to make physical attacks—no weapon necessary.

Jack Be Nimble: If you defend and succeed with style, you vanish from view. Until the end of your attacker's next turn, or until you attack, anyone who tries to attack you must first succeed at a Fair (+2) Notice check. Failure means they must choose another action.

Jack Be Quick: Treat your Notice as 2 ranks higher when determining turn order.

Human Catapult: You can throw any object you can lift as a weapon with no penalty. Using Shoot, you can attack with the thrown object against anything you can see out to the horizon.

Like the Wind: As long as there is no barrier between where you are and where you want to go, you can use your action to go there with no roll, no matter how far.

Swordster: When you take this stunt, pick from attack, defend, or create an advantage. You gain +2 on rolls for that action while you wield a sword, but only as long as your opponent also wields a melee weapon. You can use any sword you pick up.

Tireless: You never need to make Physique rolls to avoid exhaustion. You do not need sleep, and get +2 to overcome on Athletics rolls that involve endurance.

Talismans

Talismans are powerful artifacts tangled with the stuff of stories, which can have unintended consequences for their owners. You can choose or invent a talisman when you start play, but must actually find it in Nest before you can use it. Alternately, you may simply discover one along the way.

If you find a talisman, you can use it. You can only have one talisman at a time; if you somehow recover more than one, you must choose one. Gaining a talisman adds two fate points to the GM's reserve pool (page 15).

To create a talisman, give it a name, an aspect, and two stunts.

- The **name** is what people call it.
- The **aspect** describes the talisman's role in the story, hinting at the abilities it grants and the complications it produces. GMs, use compels to give the talisman a life of its own, not to weaken its abilities.
- The **two stunts** can be anything, but a good default is one stunt that provides a new skill trapping or a rules exception, and one stunt that grants a bonus. A talisman should grant its wielder a special ability and make him good at it.

Some talismans are described below.

THE BUNGLEBUSS

A wide-mouthed musket that needs no powder or shot, the Bunglebuss is *The Gun That Knocks Sense Into Anyone*. It's an intimidating weapon, although the stress it inflicts is mental rather than physical. The wielder may find herself compelled to blurt out uncomfortable truths.

- When you acquire this talisman, pick Will, Empathy, Shoot, or Provoke. You can make mental attacks with the Bunglebuss using the chosen skill, defended against with Will.
- +2 to Will when defending against mental attacks.

THE ANSWER KEY

This heavy iron wand looks like a bizarre key, with metal teeth sticking every which way; it is *The Key That Unlocks Anything*. No ordinary lock can stand in its way, and even metaphorical puzzles open before it. However, its aspect can be invoked even against its wielder to discover aspects she'd rather keep hidden.

- You can simply ignore any lock with a difficulty lower than your Burglary—or Will or Craft, at the GM's discretion—and you get +2 to open more difficult locks.
- +2 to Empathy when you create an advantage related to a secret or paradox.



THE SWORD OF RIGHT

The Sword of Right is an ancient weapon of Epoch, *A Blade That Thirsts For Victory*. It seems to come alive in its owner's hand, but its wielders often find themselves compelled to see a fight to the finish.

- +2 to Fight when attacking an enemy with this blade, but only against a formidable enemy—one who has any physical attack skill of Fair (+2) or greater.
- On a failed attack, you can choose to succeed at cost. If so, the attack deals 2 stress to both you and your opponent.

THE HARBINGER HORN

An old war horn, belonging to no particular kingdom, the horn is *A Clarion Call to Battle*. When sounded, it can be heard in every direction, disheartening foes—but often calling new ones.

- To sound the horn, you must spend an action.
- After blowing the horn, whenever an opponent wishes to attack anyone in your party, they must first roll Will against Fair (+2) difficulty. Failure means they must choose another action. This effect ends at the end of the scene.
- After blowing the horn, you gain +2 to Provoke rolls to create advantages until the end of the scene.

Milestones and Advancement

PCs in *Nest* earn milestones by taking risks and facing foes. You can earn a milestone up to once per session, triggered by events in play. You can gain the benefits of the milestone immediately, or choose your benefit before the next session. In most cases, PCs achieve milestones individually, rather than as a group.

Milestones often represent the return of former abilities: strength in battle, mastery of magic, or force of character. A milestone means reviving some part of a heroic identity—or explicitly rejecting it.

The triggers for milestones are listed below. You cannot achieve a higher-level milestone until you have gained a lower-level one; a PC who meets the conditions for a major milestone without first gaining a significant milestone would gain a significant milestone instead.

Whenever you gain a milestone, you can always choose to take the effects of a lesser milestone.

YOU CAN GAIN A MINOR MILESTONE UPON...

- ...taking physical stress or a mild consequence.
- ...succeeding with style on a difficult roll (whose difficulty is higher than the skill rank used).
- ...succeeding at a major cost on any roll.

YOU CAN GAIN A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE, IF YOU HAVE ALREADY GAINED A MINOR MILESTONE, UPON...

- ...taking out an opponent.
- ...suffering a moderate consequence or higher.

YOU CAN GAIN A MAJOR MILESTONE, IF YOU HAVE ALREADY GAINED A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE, UPON...

- ...conceding a high-stakes conflict (GM's call).
- ...being taken out in a high-stakes conflict (GM's call).
- ...defeating a major enemy, such as a Vulturine. In this case, the entire group is eligible for a major milestone.

Upon reaching a minor milestone, you can add a stunt; replace one stunt with another; swap two skills that are adjacent on the skill pyramid; or rewrite one of your two free aspects. If you are comfortable with handling a milestone during a session, you can refresh your pool of fate points. You also can begin to recover a moderate consequence.

Minor milestones represent the gradual recovery of a heroic identity.

Upon achieving a significant milestone, you can rewrite either your hook or mundane life aspect, or you can swap any two skills in your pyramid, no matter what the ranks. You can also begin to recover a severe consequence. You do not gain new skill ranks.

Significant milestones represent sudden transformations from the mundane to the heroic.

Upon achieving a major milestone, you gain a point of refresh. You can also rename your heroic concept. You can also begin to recover from an extreme consequence.

Major milestones represent near-total redefinitions of one's identity as a hero.

PACING

PCs who seek out challenges will likely reach a minor milestone every session, a significant milestone every two to three sessions, and one or two major milestones in the entire adventure. It is possible for PCs to pass through a Kingdom every couple of sessions and reach the end of the adventure in four to eight sessions—or spend half a dozen sessions all in a single Kingdom.

PART 2: RUNNING THE GAME

This section provides rules and setting material for adventures throughout *Nest*, and is for the GM's eyes only. The rules variants below support a storybook style of adventure, where a small band of friends can accomplish amazing things together as they face increasingly deadly odds. This section also introduces the Enemy threatening *Nest*, along with his agents, found across all of the Kingdoms.

Rules Variants

Below are a few variations on the *Fate Core* rules used in *Nest*. While they are optional, taken together they encourage a heroic style of play.

Succeeding as a Team

Sometimes a group of heroes will need to succeed at a skill roll: using Athletics to go over a wall, for example, or Stealth to slip past the guards. Forcing each PC to make a roll leaves the group at the mercy of the PC with the lowest skill. Not only is this rather unheroic, but it can be discouraging for the PC with the highest skill suited to a situation.

To counter this, on a success with style, a hero can invoke her boost to allow the entire group to share in her success. Other heroes can assist on this roll, as usual. This lets a particularly skilled hero use her skills on behalf of the entire group. The GM may disallow succeeding as a team in situations designed to test the abilities of individual heroes.

The Reserve Pool

Just like in *Fate Core*, the GM starts every scene with a budget of one fate point per PC; fate points not used by the end of the scene are lost. However, in *Nest* the GM also gets a reserve pool of fate points she can use in any scene, which refreshes at the beginning of a new session.

The reserve pool is not original to *Nest*; it was introduced in the *Atomic Robo RPG*.

The GM's reserve starts at zero. Fate points are added to it under two conditions: Any time a PC adds a third or fourth stunt, the GM's reserve increases by one. Whenever a PC gains a talisman, the GM's reserve increases by two. As the game progresses, the PCs grow more powerful—and their adversaries gain resources.

Fantastic Declarations

Aspects in *Nest*—such as heroic concepts and talisman aspects—often suggest fantastic abilities. To reflect this, a player can spend a fate point to declare a story detail that manifests such abilities. For example, a PC who is the *Master of the West Wind* could spend a fate point to fly over a high wall. If a declaration seems overpowered—such as carrying the entire group over the wall—the GM might ask each PC to spend a fate point to “buy in.” This allows heroes to demonstrate their heroic abilities without purchasing stunts.



Three Themes

Games in *Nest* can take any number of themes, but here are three distinct variations of tone and story. Each will resonate more with some players than with others, GMs, so consider them when planning scenes and offering compels. You may even want to discuss tone and theme with your players before beginning the campaign.

Heroism

This is the brightest and simplest of the three: the quest, the continuation of the story the characters left behind in childhood. In this theme, the PCs must rediscover the heroes they were, find new strength and abilities, and defeat the villain.

The tone of this arc is most similar to the source material. The archetypal story of this type is *Prince Caspian*, the second of the Narnia books, where the children must save a world in which they are regarded as mere myths.

Redemption

This is a darker and more nuanced take on the quest. The PCs are not just the heroes of the land; they are also the ones putting it in danger. In growing up, they forgot the realm they once protected. The Enemy reflects the PCs' own flaws and fears, and if the realm falls, it will be because they let it fall.

This is similar to the Heroism theme, but it focuses on flaws rather than virtues. The archetypal story is Neil Gaiman's graphic novel *A Game of You*.

Deconstruction

This could be the darkest of the three themes—or it could be an old-school fantasy romp. The heroes are not the center of the realm at all: the threat now has little to do with them.

In this version, the deeper lessons of childhood seem trite; adult skills learned as a doctor or soldier might be more useful. The PCs are trapped in the realm, and must fight free whether or not they want to do the right thing. The resolution is more likely to involve a well-placed sniper than a well-timed epiphany.

If you want to pick apart the rosy assumptions of childhood fiction, this is the way to go. Archetypal stories include *Wicked* or Lev Grossman's *The Magicians*.

Know Your Enemy

When the heroes arrive, they find that Nest is threatened by a powerful enemy. In fact, the Enemy, also known as the Master of Eg, has nearly won. His forces already occupy the Kingdoms of Nest, turning their magics to his own end.

Outwardly, their strategies and minions are the same, but their true natures and ultimate goals are very different. As the PCs learn more about their foe, they will have chances to uncover aspects that reveal more about them—and hopefully aid the heroes in their final confrontation.

GMs, select one Enemy in secret before the end of the first session, as that choice will subtly influence the rest of the story. You'll find details on each Enemy in "*The Three Enemies*" starting on page 47.

The Tyrant is a powerful warlord who is secretly a former hero. Terrified of returning to the waking world, she is conquering Nest so she can remain forever. Her minions ensure that no heroes arise to stop her.

The Night Mayor is the ruler of Fyrsome, once the fourth Kingdom of Nest. A master of terror and darkness, he seeks to return Fyrsome to its rightful place—or else bring all of Nest under his sway. His minions are transforming Nest into a place of fear.

The Invader is the queen of an alien swarm that rampages across worlds on a path that takes them directly to Earth. She cares nothing for Nest or its heroes, seeking only to harvest its resources for her next assault.

Encounters and NPCs

Rather than possessing skills from *Fate Core*, as the heroes do, each NPC has a set of unique skills reflecting their strengths and weaknesses. Whenever an NPC does something outside their skills, they roll with a Mediocre (+0) rank. The heroes will encounter NPCs in three broad categories:

Incidental Encounters are NPCs who might provide grounds for a conflict or information. Some are given nothing more than a name and an aspect; others have a couple of relevant skills, one or two aspects, and a single stress track, used for both mental and physical stresses. Groups of incidental NPCs are started out as mobs (*Fate Core*, page 216).

Major Encounters are NPCs who can serve as serious challenges—or as allies. They are described in more detail with a handful of skills, aspects, and one or more Stunts. They usually have both mental and physical stress tracks.

Enemy Encounters are a category to themselves; the four classes of Enemy minions are described in detail below. Their appearances throughout the adventure escalate as they increase in numbers and power.



Agents of the Enemy

The Enemy's minions are detailed here. While their forms and abilities are the same no matter which Enemy the GM chooses, their underlying natures and goals will vary considerably.

Crows are the enforcers of the Enemy. They appear as short, stocky figures in tattered black cloaks over a hodgepodge of leather and steel armor, faces hidden by helms like curved toothy beaks. They carry hooked polearms and oversized packs, into which they stuff prisoners (anyone taken out in a conflict). They speak in short, off-kilter sentences that sound like a bad radio speaker.

Crows travel alone or in murders. They are suspicious and nosy, but easily bluffed, afraid of arresting the wrong person. The first sign that the Enemy is in an area is when Crows show up in large numbers.

Jacks track down individuals who have evaded the Crows. They are grotesque clown-like figures: their faces are distorted Punch masks, and their long spindly limbs are covered with patches and rags. They hunt alone, but occasionally a squad forms. They squat on rooftops or march jauntily through crowds, usually with a murder of Crows not far behind.

Jacks are perverse: they enjoy the terror they cause, and might give a quarry an escape route just so they can pounce and dash his hopes at the last moment. They don't collect their victims themselves; they wait for a cleanup squad of Crows for that.

Jacks are transported in battered steamer trunks, delivered by Crows. They speak in intimate stage whispers.

Crows

ASPECTS

Hook-Helmed Collectors and Robbers

Single-Minded Servitors

Choose one: *Broken Toys*, *Empty Suits of Armor*, or *Insectile Aliens*

SKILLS

Fair (+2) at: Black Armor, Hooking and Catching, Noticing Out-of-Place People

Poor (-1) at: Chasing Things, Overcoming Arguments

STRESS



NOTES

A “murder” of three Crows has three stress boxes, Hooking and Catching at Good (+3), and a mild consequence slot.

Jacks

ASPECTS

Maniacal Masked Hunters

Perverse Jokers

Choose one: *Broken Toys*, *Nothing Behind the Mask*, or *Insectile Aliens*

SKILLS

Good (+3) at: Inspiring Terror

Fair (+2) at: Tracking People, Leaping and Bounding, Grasping and Grabbing

Poor (-1) at: Choosing Between Two Options, Reading, Not Being Set on Fire

STUNTS

Bounders: When jumping, Jacks can ignore any aspects that restrict movement, provided it’s something they could leap over.

Cacklers: A Jack can emit a cackling laugh as a mental attack against one target in the same zone by Inspiring Terror. Once per scene, it can use it to attack everyone within earshot with a Good (+3) mental attack.

Vengeful Stalkers: When a Jack is defeated by someone, the next Jack to appear will wear a stylized mask of that person, and will be able to track him or her with Great (+4) skill. Nobody knows how the Jacks communicate this information; they don’t share it with anyone, even the Enemy himself.

STRESS



CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Snipes are the lurkers the Enemy calls in when the Jacks fail. They are balloonish figures cloaked in black and brown leather, ten feet tall and nearly as wide, round pale eyes gleaming from beneath hat brims. They communicate with eerie whistles and hoots.

Snipes lurk for days, waiting for prey to pass or luring them from their friends with illusions. Despite their size, Snipes are masters of concealment, squeezing into dark alleys, eaves, and even chimneys or under beds. Typically, a Snipe will create at least one advantage before it pounces: either to help it Hide, or to create an illusion with Deceiving with Lures.

Snipes attack with barbed whips beneath their cloaks. These barbs are a vulnerable target, reflected in the aspect ***Deadly but Fragile Barbs***. Someone taken out by a Snipe is tucked into its cloak to be spirited away to the nearest Station; PCs who concede might be left pinned in a crevice.

Snipes

ASPECTS

Patient Masters of Tricks and Lures

Ponderous, Silent, and Camouflaged

Deadly but Fragile Barbs

Choose one: *Inflatable Toy*, *Empty Cloak*, or *Hideous Beetle*

SKILLS

Good (+3) at: Attacking from Cover, Hiding

Fair (+2) at: Sniffing and Spotting, Deceiving with Lures, Shrugging Off Blows

Poor (-1) at: Flying, Turning Corners

STUNTS

The Lure: Snipes can project a lure—such as a golden bauble or crying infant—on the end of a thin cord up to one zone away. When a Snipe creates an advantage using Deceive with Lures, it gains an additional free invoke.

The Strike: Snipes attack with barbs that whip from beneath their cloaks. On a successful attack, a Snipe inflicts a minimum of 2 stress.

The Snatch: When a Snipe snatches its prey from cover, witnesses must succeed on a Fair (+2) Notice roll, or a Great (+4) Notice roll if there are any aspects related to darkness on the scene. If they fail, they cannot see or attack the Snipe.

STRESS

□□□

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

The Vulturines are the Enemy's generals. A Vulturine looks like a child's illustration of a bishop crossed with a whirling dervish. Its raiments are layers of garishly colored robes, and its mitre is a baroque contraption far too heavy for its head. A Vulturine's face is lined with authority; it takes a keen eye to recognize it is a mask.

Vulturines lecture, threaten, and cajole, learning as much as they can about their foes. They have zero allegiance to the truth and will use their insights to spin compelling deceptions. They are usually in a position to make mental attacks.

Vulturines

ASPECTS

Manipulative Archpontiffs of the Enemy

Confident In Their Authority

Masters of the Mind

Choose one: *Mockery of Medicine*, *Image of Fear*, or *Loathsome Grub*

SKILLS

Great (+4) at: Knowing Your Deepest Secrets, Turning Them Against You

Good (+3) at: Being Impressive, Defending, Getting Away

Poor (-1) at: Understanding Positive Qualities, Swimming

STUNTS

Dream of Life: Vulturines use their mirror-staffs to show flickering images of the waking world—skillfully mixing truth and lies. When a Vulturine successfully creates an advantage related to real-world anxieties on someone, it can make a mental attack on the same person as part of the same action. A Vulturine can do this once per scene per opponent.

Flight: Vulturines can fly, ignoring any aspects that would hinder them on the ground. They usually use this to escape, but may swoop in for an attack if they are overconfident.

STRESS

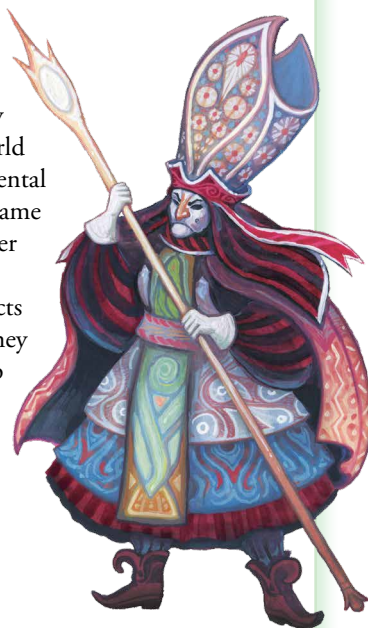


CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):



Escalation of Encounters

The ticking clock behind encounters in Nest is the Enemy's growing awareness of the heroes, and the increasing opposition sent against them. This is simulated by the ladder below.

The first time the heroes encounter the Enemy, it is a single Crow on patrol. Depending on the outcome of that encounter, the next encounter may be more serious—one step up the ladder. Encounters flow naturally from the story, happening when the characters do something that might attract attention.

Encounters escalate if the heroes defeat the Enemy's agents in a physical conflict; if a PC succeeds at a major cost on a skill roll; or if a PC accepts a compel on an aspect.

Encounters do not escalate if the heroes use social skills or stealth to escape an encounter; or if they lose a conflict through concessions or being taken out.

Encounters escalate as follows:

1. **A Crow, on patrol.** The heroes can probably talk their way out of the situation if they don't lose their nerve.
2. **Three Crows, looking for someone.** The Crows are much more suspicious, and will attack if they recognize a hero.
3. **Two Crows transporting a big steamer trunk containing a Jack.** The Crows most likely have descriptions of the heroes. They will release the Jack as soon as possible.
4. **A squad of Jacks wearing the faces of one or more PCs.** This may be a direct encounter, or the heroes may start getting strange looks from bystanders who have seen Jacks resembling them.
5. **A Snipe lays a trap.** The Snipe uses its illusions as a lure, possibly with the help of two Crows.
6. **Two Snipes, working with a Jack as a tracker.** On a successful Tracking People roll by the Jack, the Snipes take the heroes by surprise in a safe space such as their room; on a failure, the encounter takes place in a public area.
7. **A Vulturine, locking down a town with Crow bodyguards.** The area is likely under martial law, with an appropriate aspect. In a town, the Crows go house to house with the Vulturine; in the wilderness, they are beating the bushes.

Enemy Stations

The Enemy's agents operate out of ugly, identical Stations of black iron erected all over the Kingdoms. Each boasts a squat tower manned by a Crow, with a signal pylon rising above nearby buildings. Signals pass between towers through an array of blinking red and orange lights.

Stations hold up to twelve Crows, any Jacks in transit, and the occasional Snipe lurking in the tower. Vulturines do not stay in Stations, visiting only to send messages and take command. Since the heroes could easily find themselves assailing—or escaping from—a Station, they are described here in some detail.

GETTING INTO A STATION

Stations are ominous, but not heavily fortified. An Athletics overcome action with Fair (+2) difficulty gets a hero onto the tower, with a Fair (+2) Stealth roll to do so without being seen. An Average (+1) Burglary or Good (+3) Might roll will open the hatch on top, revealing a ladder down to **Processing**.

In addition, wagons enter and leave the gates at **Shipping and Receiving** at odd hours. This operation is overseen by three Crows, so it takes a Fair (+2) Stealth roll to beat their notice. Any scheme involving riding in on the bottom of a carriage has a reasonable chance of success. The gates require a Good (+3) Burglary roll otherwise, in addition to the Stealth roll.

Alternately, the heroes can simply walk in the unlocked front door, which leads to the **Interview Chamber**.

INTERVIEW CHAMBER

Official visitors to a station arrive in the Interview Chamber, a small room with a tiny grill high on the opposite wall and an iron door on one side. A cluster of tubes and lenses below the grill carry sound and images deeper into the Station. Captured heroes are brought through here first.

Visitors are interviewed by an officious voice from the grill, distorted by static. Typical questions include:

- “Do you have something to report?”
- “Please verbalize any complaints clearly.”
- “Identify yourself and your associations.”
- “The penalty for deception is detainment.”

The questioner is a Crow in **Processing** who has a *Voice of Authority*.

The only doors in the Interview Chamber, besides those heading outside, lead to **Processing**, and can be opened by succeeding on a Might or Burglary overcome action with Fair (+2) difficulty.



PROCESSING

Beyond the Interview Chamber is Processing, a cross between a busy office and the command deck of a submarine. It is patchily lit by flickering gas lamps, except in Bungledyne, where it crackles with electricity. There are usually three Crows here, the rest being on patrol or in the Barracks. Even if a distraction empties the Station, there will one Crow left. Exits lead to **Shipping and Receiving**, the **Barracks**, and the **Interview Chamber**.

Processing is a great place to find information; records are organized, if arcane. Heroes can create advantages with Lore against Superb (+5) difficulty to uncover an aspect about the Enemy; against Fair (+2) to uncover the fate of a prisoner or nearby talisman; and against Mediocre (+1) to discover alerts about the heroes. Success at a cost attracts attention to the heroes.

BARRACKS

Crows live in the Barracks, which vary with the Enemy: the Tyrant's troops rest motionless, the Night Mayor's troops are empty armor hung on hooks, and Invader's barracks are alien, from the nutrient pool to the sleep pods on the ceiling. Anyone examining the Barracks can roll Investigate or Lore to uncover the Enemy's agents aspect—the difficulty is Fair (+2) if the players make a good guess on the aspect, or Great (+4) if they aren't even close.

The Barracks are empty during the day. At night they hold about eight sleeping or inert Crows. They are hard to wake—an Average (+1) Stealth roll is enough to move around them. The only exit leads to **Processing**.

SHIPPING AND RECEIVING

Shipping and Receiving is a cavernous loading bay. Chains and pulleys suspend crates from the high ceiling in a byzantine system. An iron gate leads outside, a smaller door leads to **Processing**, and a trapdoor in the floor leads to the **Detainment Cells**.

Shipping and Receiving is empty except when cargo goes in or out, at which point three Crows are loading or unloading (*Rush of Activity*). A Stealth roll that succeeds at cost could mean a hero finds themselves lowered into the **Detainment Cells** along with a crate they are using for cover. When empty, the doors can be opened from the inside with only an Average (+1) Stealth roll.

DETAINMENT CELLS

The Detainment Cells are reachable through the hatch in **Shipping and Receiving**. Prisoners are lowered through the hatch on an elevator—just a round platform on a chain.

The cells are in an underground silo: a large cylindrical shaft ringed with tiers of iron-barred cages. There are six tiers, and each tier holds six cramped cells, accessed by a small square grate. Basic plumbing is provided by exposed pipes.

The cells are reached from the elevator by an extendable ramp. The elevator rotates from cell to cell, feeding prisoners is a time-consuming process. The elevator is raised or lowered by an operator in Shipping and Receiving, while a second operator on the elevator rotates the platform and deploys the ramp. A third Crow opens and close cells.

Opening the hatch silently requires successfully overcoming with Crafts against Average (+1) difficulty or Stealth against Good (+3) difficulty. Climbing into or out of the hatch without the elevator is a Great (+4) Athletics roll—but clambering up and down the chain when the elevator is lowered is only Average (+1), as is clambering around on the outside of the cells. Noises inside the shaft are inaudible in the rest of the Station, barring compels and costs.

Breaking out of a cell requires a Great (+4) Physique roll or a Good (+3) Burglary roll. A PC only gets one try per scene. Once out, it takes a Fair (+2) Athletics roll to leap to a moving elevator and hang on. Success at cost creates the aspect *Swinging Wildly*.

Created aspects or consequences can be compelled to knock an opponent over the edge. Accepting forces a character to overcome a Great (+4) difficulty with Athletics. Success leaves the character hanging from a cell; failure inflicts one physical stress for each shift of failure.

In a conflict, a cell is a zone; the drawbridge and the elevator are each a zone, as is the loading dock at the top of the shaft (*Higher Ground*).

Who is in the cells? It depends on the story so far. The cells are a temporary holding area, although there may be permanent guests.



PART 3: THE KINGDOMS IN PERIL

Story Structure

Nest is designed as a series of encounters across three Kingdoms, terminating in a showdown with the Enemy. While scenes are provided in a natural order, there is no single path: the GM should let the PCs' aspects and actions be a guide when selecting encounters. Some players may drive as hard as they can towards the confrontation in Eg, while others may become invested in the fate of one or more of the Kingdoms.

When in doubt, the ladder of escalation of encounters is useful to keep things moving. An encounter with the Enemy's minions qualifies as a major cost for an otherwise failed Contacts, Deceive, or Burglary roll. These "random" encounters provide useful fodder for milestones!

World Without Maps

There is no map of Nest. The Kingdoms are arrayed in a circle with Eg at the center, but as a practical matter, the GM can place landmarks and encounters wherever she likes. Nest is a magical place, and heroes will find that boundaries are fluid.

How big is Nest? A day's hike is about right to get from the edge of a Kingdom to the first point of interest, or half a day's walk for points within a Kingdom. Travel is a good opportunity to ask for a Stealth roll and then introduce the Enemy's minions—from far away on a success, or close up on a failure.

Boundaries between Kingdoms are important: they can represent a shift of focus from one PC to another, and a change in the tone of the action. Set the scene at each border, and share the Kingdom's story aspect with the players. The peril aspect should be easy to discover as well once the players start rolling Notice, Investigate, or Contacts.

Ultimately, the landscape depends on the players. Be prepared to elevate or eliminate encounters depending on what attracts their attention: the stories of childhood can be personal things, so don't be surprised if players latch on to people and plots you didn't expect.



Call to Adventure: The Threshing Stone

“It’s 10:00 on a Thursday night, Eastern Time. What are you doing?”

On an ordinary evening, the heroes are pulled into the world of Nest. Ask each player to set a scene: putting the kids to bed, sleeping soundly, working late at the office, partying at a club... If a canny player claims to be in the garage cleaning guns and trying on body armor, that’s fine.

Once the scenes are set, describe the Call for each player in a short scene. The Call is that moment when someone is pulled from the waking world into Nest. It is familiar but surreal, accompanied by a colossal chime ringing within the earth. It could start with a dream, a car stalled on a country road, or the pursuit of a suspect down a dark alley. End each scene with a moment of disorientation, and then...

The PCs find themselves in each other’s company, standing on a Threshing Stone. They are wearing whatever they had with them: pajamas, an evening gown, work clothes, or the above-mentioned firearms and body armor. They will remember the Threshing Stones: massive stone platforms carved with ancient spiral designs. Heroes from the waking world always arrive on Threshing Stones, usually in a place of honor, surrounded by greeters.

This stone is set in a bramble-covered ruin. The morning sky is barely visible through the thorny canopy, and the stone is half buried in moss and dead leaves. The broken walls and arches of an old hall surround it, and a single winding path leads away. The heroes have a few minutes to express their confusion and take stock of their comrades. They may even recognize each other. When they start going in circles, they are interrupted by a voice.

The Briar God

“What do we have here? Heroes! I thought you’d be... bigger.”

The speaker is the Briar God; his voice is a deep slow rumble, or a spooky whisper. It comes from everywhere: the Briar God inhabits lost places and thorn-covered wastes, and is essentially disembodied.

The Briar God has the aspects *God of Thorns and Lost Things*, *Protective and Reclusive*, and *Offended by the Enemy’s Existence*. His relevant skills are Empathy and Will, both at Superb (+5).



One or more of the heroes have met the Briar God before: a keeper of secrets and guardian of treasures, he features in many adventures. He is pleased to see the heroes, but is a bit of a pessimist. He can reveal the following through good roleplaying, invokes or compels, and Rapport rolls.

- He recognizes all of the heroes.
- He is protecting the last “free” Threshing Stone. The others have been captured by a being he calls the Enemy, or the Master of Eg.
- He knows little about the Enemy, who arose in the last ten years. No child heroes have arrived since the last hero, just before the Enemy’s time.
- Nest itself has summoned the PCs, reaching out to heroes strong enough to help. Adult heroes are not something he has seen in “a year of years.”
- The Threshing Stone does not work both ways: heroes must journey to the Well of Waking, in the City of Eg, to return home.
- He has little knowledge of old friends or talismans of the heroes, but can suggest one or two places to start looking—Borderfall, for example, or the Hall of Wonders.
- The heroes are currently at an ancient seat of bygone heroes whose name, Harfax, only the Briar God remembers. It is a day or two by foot from the nearest point of interest, chosen by the GM.
- Locals have been bringing gifts to the Threshing Stone in the hopes of summoning heroes. The Briar God is pleased people remember the old customs.
- A storm is coming. This sounds allegorical, but it’s not: there are dark clouds on the horizon. This is a tremendous forest fire, which will arrive in a few hours.

The Offerings

In an alcove in a crumbling wall are a pile of clothes, gear, and weaponry left behind by pilgrims for the heroes who may come to save them. They are lovingly wrapped in leather or paper, and run the gamut from the useful to the bizarre. Some of it is sized for children, but the PCs should be able to suit themselves out with shoes and clothing for everyone, and manage to find enough tools and weapons so they can use their skills. A PC who looks for something specific can spend a fate point to find it: a set of tools, a specific weapon, or another useful item.

Depending on what they take from the offerings, the group is left with an aspect: perhaps *Outfitted With Odds and Ends*. Otherwise, they are *Unarmed and Unprepared*.

The Path and the Storm

A small overgrown path leads away. The heroes can't dawdle: there is a fire sweeping through the underbrush, set by the Enemy to open the way to the Threshing Stone. Keeping ahead of it calls for a Physique overcome action with Fair (+2) difficulty from each PC. Anyone who fails this succeeds but gets a mild consequence—*Smoke Inhalation* or *Singed*, perhaps. Heroes who succeed with style can use their boosts to help their comrades. The Briar God whispers encouragement and warnings along the way, but as the thorns burn, his voice fades to nothing.

Resourceful PCs might start a counter-burn, hide in a stream, or take similar action. This requires one PC to create an advantage against Good (+3) difficulty. If this action is successful, other PCs need only succeed on a Mediocre (+0) Physique overcome action to escape, as before; the aspect created may be invoked as usual. If the fire passes them by, they may encounter a single Crow—part of the fire-starting party.

The Adventure Begins

One way or another, the PCs will emerge, sooty and tired, on the fringes of one of the Kingdoms. Which one? That's up to the GM. Each Kingdom is a mostly self-contained adventure, complete with hooks specific to heroes from that Kingdom. If one player has expressed a strong interest in a Kingdom, that's a good place to start. Otherwise, Epoch is a simple starting point.

Epoch

Story aspect: *Bold Hearts Win Great Rewards*

Peril aspect: *Anyone Could Be a Monster*

Epoch's castles and villages are scattered among the green valleys and misty crags, joined by winding and treacherous roads. The wind brings the scent of adventure: it rouses the heart and gives energy to tired feet. The Kingdom seems unchanged, both wild and beautiful.

This is because the Enemy has no interest in the wilds between the towns. His forces did not conquer Epoch; instead, they lent assistance against the monsters in the name of "The Master of Eg." Each town holds a Station manned by Crows, and human guards work uneasily alongside them, peering suspiciously at strangers.

One such settlement is Borderfall. Heroes of Epoch will remember it as the stepping-stone to many an adventure. It boasts a small but proud keep surrounded by a bustling market town, perched atop a cascading waterfall on the River Rahrin. Borderfall could easily be the last known location of a talisman such as the Harbinger Horn, kept in the Baron of Borderfall's armory.

Adventure Path

Heroes in Borderfall can take several approaches. If they just look for familiar places and faces, they can end up at the Ivory Harp, where they'll find themselves on a rescue mission for Young Orrin. Alternately, they may head straight for the palace, and try to lure a reluctant Baron Edgar into a revolution. If they are simply seeking a talisman to help against the Enemy, Edgar will point them to Ogre Red—which means a fight or another negotiation.

Any of these could be a goal in and of themselves, but they could also be steps toward kicking the Enemy out of Borderfall for good.

Arriving at Borderfall

Under the Enemy, the gates of Borderfall are closed, and the walls have been reinforced with iron spikes and patrols. Once, the gates were always open, and the stream of traders, performers, and adventurers never ceased. Now a handful of locals stand in line at the gates, waiting for their paperwork to be inspected.

Any hero of Epoch may be recognized here by compelling their heroic concept. Sagger Mems, an *Ancient Teller of Old Tales*, is the one to do it. Sagger's a useful font of information about the Enemy's minions. "Reinforcements, they say, from the new Master of Eg, not that we need 'em. You lot were enough for us, back in the day! Now they'll arrest you for sneezing, and they're none too fond of the old tales, neither." He won't expose the heroes, but he'll hint broadly to the guards or anyone he meets that "Change is coming, mark my words."

The two guards, Muggs and Gable, are stamping papers and checking forms. Succeeding with style on a Rapport roll ensures that they will lie for the heroes. Success at major cost means that they hurry the heroes through the gates just as the Crows show up, leaving the PCs *Under Suspicion* for their stay.



Muggs and Gable, Two Gate Guards

ASPECTS

Twitchy Veterans; Hearts Aren't In It

SKILLS

Fair (+2) at: Being Suspicious, Polearms and Armor

Poor (-1) at: Being Straight-Up Evil

STRESS



Inside Borderfall: The Ivory Harp

The markets are a shadow of what they were. A Station has been built over the Wonder Fountain, where adventurers used to meet up to go on quests. Crows patrol the streets, and citizens are mistrustful of strangers. If the heroes draw attention to themselves, a compel of *Anyone Could Be a Monster* means the Crows get summoned.

Many old inns are closed, but the Ivory Harp remains—heroes of Epoch will remember it as a place of light and friendship. It still has a homely feel, from the great stone hearth to the oak counter, and Sagger Mems is a regular guest. The bar is manned by Young Orin, *A Kindly Host in Hard Times*. He is the son of Old Orin, once a beloved mentor and host. Old Orin has recently been taken by the Crows for “consorting with monsters.” If the heroes reveal themselves, Young Orin will beg them to rescue his father.

Rescuing Old Orin

Old Orin is indeed a prisoner in the Station, awaiting transport to Eg. It's not impossible to rescue him, just difficult. He's being kept in the Detainment Cells (page 25). Alternately, if the PCs wait long enough, a prisoner caravan will carry him and other prisoners toward Eg, guarded by several murders of Crows and a lurking Snipe.

Monsters Among Us

If the heroes ask about resistance against the Enemy, they will hear a rumor: some kind of monster is prowling the town at night, attacking Crows. Succeeding on a Contacts overcome action against Fair (+2) difficulty reveals that it appears as a giant wolf; succeeding with style turns up somebody who saw it sneak into the keep just before dawn. Heroes of Epoch will remember Baron Edgar's werewolf curse.

In fact, it is two wolves: the baron's two daughters, who have inherited his curse and are slipping out at night for a little vigilantism. The heroes can find them at night with Notice or Investigation; succeeding at a cost means they also encounter a group of Enemy minions. Fighting alongside the sisters is a good way to make a first impression. Once the thrill of combat has worn off, the girls are happy to meet new people, especially heroes; they can talk in wolf form, but can't shift back until day.

Emma or Eve, Werewolf

ASPECTS

Slightly Spoiled Teen Wolf; My Sister Will Save Me; Somebody's Got to Fight the Bad Guys

SKILLS

Great (+4) at: Skulking and Tracking, Ripping and Shredding

Fair (+2) at: Leaping and Bounding, Being Stubborn

Poor (-1) at: Thinking Things Through, Self-Restraint

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Meet the Baron

Baron Edgar still rules Borderfall. He was an adventurer as a youngster, and a friend to heroes; now he is married to the Lady Elody with two teenage daughters, Emma and Eve. Heroes who knew him possess his secret: he is a werewolf, cursed on an adventure as a child.

The Baron (*I Have Responsibilities Now; My Curse Is My Secret*) is paralyzed with fear for his family. He is right to be paranoid: there is a Snipe lurking in the keep, keeping an eye on him. The Baron is happy to swap stories and won't betray the heroes, but won't willingly go further. He does not know what his daughters are up to; appealing to their safety might move him.

He does not have any talismans. The last one—the Harbinger Horn, or whatever is appropriate—was taken into battle against Ogre Red years ago, never to be recovered. Ogre Red has recently become a problem, tossing rocks over the wall and running away.

The Ogre Red

Ogre Red lives in a jumble of crude towers atop a barren crag, a few hours' hike from Borderfall. He is the terror of the countryside: a ten-foot-tall brute with a red beard, bald head, and bad temper. While he seldom out-and-out murders people, he steals sheep and cattle, robs merchants, and generally causes trouble. It has always been easier to outthink him than outfight him.

His fortress is made of giant stones and ill-fitting oak doors. It's not that hard to penetrate: succeeding on an Athletics or Burglary overcome action with Fair (+2) difficulty should do it. However, it is the *Den of Ogre Red*, and moving around undetected requires succeeding on a Great (+4) Stealth roll.

Ogre Red is happy to fight the heroes for old time's sake. But he will also talk—it has been a while since a hero came by. These days, his foe is the Enemy, who has no respect for the old ways. He has been throwing rocks at Borderfall in an attempt to hit the Station; he would love to attack the Station with the heroes, if they let him into the city—this is the price of any talisman he is holding on to. It might also be possible to talk him into rallying other monsters, allying with the Baron, or going along with other plans.

Ogre Red

ASPECTS

Ogre Red; Terror of the High Hills; The Old Ways Are the Best Ways; Clever Like a Mule

SKILLS

Superb (+5) at: Feats of Ogre Strength

Great (+4) at: Bashing Things, Hurling Huge Rocks at Things, Shrugging Off Damage

Fair (+2) at: Seeing Things His Way, Not Being Completely Stupid, Catching You

Poor (-1) at: Hiding What He Wants, Maneuvering in Small Spaces, Change

STUNTS

Rocks Fall, Everybody Dies: By spending a fate point, Ogre Red can throw a boulder, using Hurling Huge Rocks at Things to attack everyone in a single zone.

Grin and Bear It: Ogre Red can use his mental stress track to absorb physical stress.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

Bungledyne

Story aspect: *If You Dream It, You Can Build It*

Peril aspect: *Not Enough Power to Go Around*

Bungledyne sits at the center of a crater-shaped valley. From the crater walls the Kingdom spreads out below like a compass rose: roads and canals radiate from the city at its heart. By day, the city seems unchanged, but at night the Enemy's influence is apparent: the Incandescent Spire is dark, and the city itself is lit only by a few dim flickering lights. An immense cable stretches towards Eg on hundred-foot pylons. Still, it is impossible to enter Bungledyne and not feel that anything is possible.

From the crater walls, it is about a day's walk to the city, unless the heroes hitch a ride on a wagon. The countryside is populated by mushroom farmers and tinkers; they are friendly and love to gossip, but can't do much more than shake their heads at the sorry state of affairs. Patrols of Crows are few and far between, but human heroes stand out—the farmers are mostly human-sized toads, moles, and goats.

Adventure Path

The transformer in the Incandescent Spire provides such an obvious destination that most heroes should end up there. Heroes who investigate at “street level” should encounter Gil Gamefoot first, with his modest plans for hijacking power. Alternately, seeking talismans at the Hall of Wonders brings in Leo Luftwonder, who will generally get in the way. Ultimately, the heroes should find themselves having to decide whether they should destroy, subvert, or ignore the transformer. Gil, Leo, and Winnifred all exist to complicate that decision.

Welcome to Bungledyne

There are no walls around Bungledyne. The roads are lined with shops, garages, hotels, cafes, and workshops in no particular order. No two vehicles look alike: there are some carts pulled by horses—the only animals not represented in the humanoid population—but the rest range from bicycles to steam-powered walking devices to cable-cars. Most of them sit still in the street: power of all kinds is scarce, and the drivers and inventors mope about the cafes.

There are several Stations of the Enemy, and Crows are common; the PCs will need to keep a low profile. The other inhabitants are animals: badgers, cats, owls, door mice, foxes, and so on. They dress in a pseudo-Edwardian style.

Powered Down

It's obvious where the power is going. The Enemy has taken over the dynamos, and cables snake through the city toward the Incandescent Spire itself. The Crows and a few Snipes patrol the cables, and the Enemy's Stations are built near the power stations. It's possible to reroute a cable to steal power—a Crafts roll against Great (+4) difficulty—but the Enemy will detect it in hours, or a day at the most, and repair it.

Even so, that doesn't mean people don't try. If the PCs spend time skulking around power couplings, they will encounter one of the city's Sparkrunners, rebels stealing power from the Enemy. A prime example is Gil Gamefoot, a young hare.

Gil wears goggles and a scarf to hide his face (but not his long ears), and carries a battery pack that he fills from the Enemy's cables. He is enthusiastic and slightly singed. He can fill the heroes in on the situation: the Enemy has been shutting down the power stations one by one, routing them through the Incandescent Spire, and sending them along an immense cable, strung up on high pylons, toward Eg.

He will happily accompany the heroes, and even has a scheme: there is so much power running through the transformer in the Spire that it should be possible to tap into it without being noticed. It is also possible to blow it up, but Gil doesn't think along those lines.

Gil Gamefoot

ASPECTS

Young Rebel Hare Sparkrunner; What Safety Precautions?

SKILLS

Good (+3) at: Hopping and Dashing, Acting Before Thinking

Fair (+2) at: Jury-Rigging Things, Ducking and Weaving,
Being in the Underground

Poor (-1) at: Sitting Still

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):





The Hall of Wonders

Bungledyne's museum is an obvious destination, home to Nest's greatest inventions. It is shuttered and dark with a "closed" sign on the door, requiring a Burglary roll against Fair (+2) difficulty to enter. Inside, the great halls and glass cases are a reminder of better times. The PCs can scavenge useful equipment here, including some outlandish weapons, but if they are looking for a specific talisman, it's gone; a printed card in the display case says: "removed for restoration."

There used to be a Threshing Stone in the Hall, but it has been crudely removed by the Enemy.

There is one other person in the Hall: a ponderous lion in a hat and overcoat, waxing nostalgic over a display of an old flying machine. He is Dr. Leo Luftwonder, now a bit gray in the mane but still an impressive presence. Bungledyne heroes will remember him as a recurring antagonist: not evil, but arrogant and misguided, and forever unleashing dangerous inventions on the city.

Luftwonder is charmed to meet the heroes. He is eager to show off his operation: a secret generating station in an abandoned gallery under the Hall of Wonders. His generator is a bunch of stationary bikes, cycled by volunteers. It generates enough power to keep a few devices going, but Luftwonder is far too proud of his meager accomplishments. He knows that any talismans from the Hall of Wonders were confiscated by the Enemy, taken by a Vulturine into the Incandescent Spire.

Luftwonder's *More Ambitious Than Courageous* aspect hides a deeper truth: he is collaborating with the Enemy, mostly by providing information. He won't immediately betray the heroes, but dealing with him escalates the next encounter, and he may show up later to prevent them from "ruining everything."

Dr. Leo Luftwonder

ASPECTS

Troublemaking Industrialist Lion Inventor; Older and (Slightly) Wiser; More Ambition Than Courage

SKILLS

Great (+4) at: Inventing and Using Unreliable Technology, Living to Fight Another Day

Fair (+2) at: Roaring and Blustering, Blasting Away Indiscriminately, Wading Into the Thick of It, Recognizing Ambition In Others

Poor (-1) at: Flying His Contraptions, Sticking to His Guns

STUNTS

Leo's Arc Pistol: Shoots electricity. On a successful attack, it does a minimum of 2 stress to a foe in the same zone as a metal surface.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Winnifred Spool

ASPECTS

Sloth Girl Genius Engineer; Stubbornly Curious; Surprising Bursts of Speed

SKILLS

Great (+4) at: Keeping Bungledyne Working, Clambering Around Machines

Fair (+2) at: Persevering, Giving as Good as She Gets, Leading by Example

Poor (-1) at: Knowing When She Is In Over Her Head, Moving Across Flat Surfaces

STUNTS

Gripping: Winnifred's claws mean she can climb pretty much anything, and ignores compels related to treacherous climbing surfaces.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

The Dark Spire

The Incandescent Spire is an impossibly high tower in the center of Bungledyne, a cross between a lighthouse and the Eiffel Tower. It once housed Bungledyne's government and engineering authorities; cable cars and power lines ran from balconies to all over the city, and experimental flying machines were launched almost every day. Now, aside from the great transformer growing like a tumor a hundred feet up, the tower is empty and dark.

The transformer is overseen by a Vulturine with a murder of Crows; if the heroes have reached the fourth level in the Escalation of Encounters ladder (page 22), there will also be Jacks looking for them. Cables from all over the city merge here, tying into a single immense cable running away toward Eg. It is set up in the mayor's audience hall, with holes for cables cut in the walls. Near the transformer there are *Arcing Bolts of Electricity*, and succeeding at a cost nearby will likely cause a 1-stress hit.

The transformer is maintained by an involuntary Bungledyne workforce. Among them is Winnifred Spool, a sloth about the same age as the heroes. They may remember her as a wire-climbing mechanical prodigy; now she is the city's top engineer, undercover with the captured work crew and finding ways to sabotage the transformer.

Winnifred is thrilled to see the heroes. Her goal is to cut the power by whatever means necessary; she's not afraid of the Enemy's minions, who are not great climbers. (She hasn't met the Jacks yet.) She may reveal that, if the Vulturine has any talismans, they are in the old mayor's office, through a door just beyond the transformer, which he has made his headquarters. If the heroes decide to bypass the transformer to pursue their own goals, Winnifred may act on her own.

Cutting Ties

Breaking the transformer is a Crafts roll, possibly Lore or Might, against Epic (+7) difficulty. Winnifred can help—or, if none of the heroes have the skills, they can help her. Success at a cost means it overheats and explodes, giving the heroes just enough time to get everyone out and leaving the Spire damaged and askew, listing among its cables.

Merely tapping into the transformer is only Superb (+5) difficulty, plus a Great (+4) Stealth roll not to be found, if the PCs can convince Winnifred not to simply destroy it. Tapping in might be a better idea in the long run, and doing so changes the Kingdom's peril aspect.

Defeating the Vulturine and breaking the transformer buys Bungledyne a week or so with no interference from the Enemy, plenty of time for the heroes to gear up for their next goal. Tapping into it does something similar but less dramatic. Either way, the PCs reach a major milestone.

Conundrum

Story aspect: *Life Is a Puzzle to Be Solved*

Peril aspect: *Bound By the Enemy's Rules*

Conundrum is an orderly place. The roads are well kept, the cottages are tidy, and even the forest edges are well-trimmed straight lines. It looks like something out of a picture book.

But in Conundrum, puzzles are everywhere. The birds whistle sonatas, seeking mates who whistle in the same key. Sheep graze perfect square acres, and shepherds skilled at math negotiate between herds when two acres don't quite meet at the edge. It is not unusual for one farmer to grow corn and another grow tomatoes, and for them to meet up on market day and exchange their entire crops with each other. Knights in various colors of armor engage in endless debates over who should fight whom based on hue.

Conundrum initially seems unchanged, aside from the occasional patrol. The biggest change is the appearance of the Riddle of the Book—its followers simply call it “The Rules.” Citizens are vanishing, more every day, then reappearing clutching small white books filled with obscure writing. They refer to their books constantly, guided by them in every decision. Their actions often contradict their personally held Riddles.

Adventure Paths

The heroes should encounter the Lost & Found Brothers, and the bandits, early on. At that point, two paths are available: they might investigate the College of Enigmas, and tangle with the Unchantress, or they might press on toward the Idea Market and Castle Conundrum. In the latter case, they might take an interest in rescuing Penultimate and Punctual, or they might unravel the secret of The Rules. Either way leads to a showdown at Central Processing.



Lost & Found Brothers

The heroes encounter a red and white wagon on the road. Stenciled on its side are the words “The Lost & Found Brothers. All Trades Accepted. Owner Operated. No Refunds.” It is pulled by a mule and driven by brothers Orp (*Truth Teller and Finder*) and Noc (*Liar and Loser* and *Follower of The Rules*), who argue constantly.

The brothers collect found things and trade them for things people have lost, with a side business in losing things forever. Their stock includes both objects and concepts. They are friendly, and heroes can accompany them to the Idea Market or barter with them for temporary aspects.

Orp follows the Riddle of Truth and cannot lie; his brother, though, carries a small white book—The Rules. In conversation, he often consults his book and gives hesitant, nonsensical answers to questions, then makes a mark in the book. When the book forces him to tell the truth, going against his Riddle of False, he winces in pain.

Orp will fight to keep the book from the heroes. If it is examined, it proves to be dense with cryptic symbols; a PC with a computer-related mundane life can make a Good (+4) Lore roll to determine it is basically an algorithm, and Orp’s marks are part of an ongoing calculation. It’s clearly not something a single person can decode; it strongly implies some kind of computer is in operation somewhere.

Information Highway Robbery

At some isolated point, the heroes are attacked by robbers, whether or not they travel with the Lost & Found Brothers. The robbers are students of the College of Enigmas, armed with improvised weapons—including a field-hockey stick and a metal ruler—and they are looking to steal ideas. They surround the group and threaten: “Throw down any esteem or resilience. We’ll take any insecurities. We’re not looking for gold, but if you’ve got the concept of wealth, we’ll take it.” The leader of the group is named Niles.

If the heroes concede, the robbers demand a toll, inflicting one or more consequences on the PCs. Consequences reflect a quality “stolen” from the character, such as *Missing My Self-Doubt*, *Out of Time*, or *Forgot About What’s-Her-Name*. The robbers will settle for two moderate consequences total from the group, and the players choose the nature of the consequences. The robbers are willing to bargain, and they’ll debate among themselves about which qualities to take.

If the PCs are taken out in a fight, the results are the same, but the GM chooses which PCs get consequences and the nature of them. The robbers collect their prizes in glass beakers, which former students of the College of Enigmas might recognize as school property.

If the PCs defeat the robbers, they can find out quickly that the robbers are working for the Headmistress, as they call her. If they wish, the robbers will lead the heroes to her—she runs the College. The robbers call it only that—they look blank if asked about “the College of Enigmas.”



Niles and Five Robbers

ASPECTS

Students Turned Metaphysical Bandits; Working for Someone; Afraid of the Enemy

SKILLS

Good (+3) at: Brawling and Highway Robbery, Being Loyal to Niles

Poor (-1) at: Resisting Logical Appeals

STRESS

□□□□□□ (each stress takes out one bandit)

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

NOTES

For every two bandits eliminated, reduce both Being Loyal to Niles and Brawling and Highway Robbery by one rank.

The College

The College of Enigmas was the most famous school of magic in all of Nest, training heroes and locals alike. Heroes will remember its moving rooms, vanishing doors, and statues that granted favors to those who answered their riddles.

The grounds seem untouched, but the hedge maze that once hid the College now leads straight to the gate. Inside, the halls and paintings seem...plain. Nothing hides or reveals, the statues do not speak, and there seem to be no secrets of any kind. The sign over the door simply says “The College.”

There are only a few students, and no teachers at all beyond the Headmistress herself. Students are studying geometry, logic, geography, and so forth—none of them remember that the school should teach magic. The students take turns playing robber, collecting new ideas for the Headmistress as their tuition. There is no sign of the Enemy.

A hero can overcome with Lore against Great (+4) difficulty to determine that the quality of mystery has been deliberately stripped from the College. Success at a cost leaves the hero's memory affected, with the situation aspect *What Magic?* until she leaves the grounds.

The Headmistress

The Headmistress is an old enemy of Conundrum: the Unchantress, who has the power to strip the name and identity from her foes. A plump woman in her middle years, she is composed and business-like in the robes of her office, but her eyes burn with pure will.

The Unchantress presents herself as a harmless professor, but she is the reason the College has not been destroyed by the Enemy. She has stripped “Enigmas” from the College’s name, and it has been forgotten by everyone in Nest. The other magicians have fled, been captured by the Enemy, or forgotten the place existed. The Unchantress is using the College as her base: her agents (such as they are) gather power for her when they steal qualities from their victims. These qualities are kept in glass jars in a large cabinet behind her desk; if the jars are broken, the qualities will fly free. She plans to eventually use her collected power to face the Enemy—and hopefully rule Nest herself.

The Unchantress can be an ally or enemy—she is inclined to attack the heroes for their heroic qualities unless they talk fast. She could restore the College and rally its students if she wished, perhaps as a concession. She possesses the Answer Key talisman or any other talisman that fits the story.

The Unchantress

ASPECTS

Mistress of Unmaking and Thief of Names; Words Are Power; Spare Me From Foolish Sentiment; What Is Unmade Can Be Made Again

SKILLS

Superb (+5) at: Wielding Pure Will

Great (+4) at: Seeing into Souls, Twisting the Truth

Good (+3) at: Base Physical Conflict, Making Friends and Influencing People

Poor (-1) at: Running from a Fight, Resisting Self-Interest

STUNTS

Un-namer: The Unchantress can make pure mental attacks, stripping her foes of their bravery, loyalty, and even history, doing a minimum of 2 stress on a success. When she takes out an opponent, she rewrites one of their aspects.

Un-maker: The Unchantress can weaken or transform inanimate objects—including weapons, doors, ceilings, and such—by creating advantages.

Un-chantress: The Unchantress gets +2 to overcome obstacles created by magic.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

The Idea Market

Operating outside of Castle Conundrum, the Idea Market is a permanent fair where people barter their hopes and dreams, a place where you can trade “a day of optimism” for “last night’s dinner,” or “royal birth” for “unfair luck.” Goods are traded as well, from apples to horseshoes, although merchants insist they are trading the concepts of ownership, not the items themselves. PCs can exchange any situation aspects, but the merchants will haggle for the exact wording.

The market has gotten seedy in the shadow of the nearby Station. Black-market ideas abound—smugglers will happily trade “a taste for vengeance” in exchange for “second thoughts.” The smuggler Auntie El (*A Smuggler Knows How the Wind Blows*) does some trade with the robbers.

A Contacts overcome action with Average (+1) difficulty reveals that Conundrum is ruled by Princess Punctual and Prince Penultimate—their parents are retired. A Good (+3) roll determines that the Princess is missing or captured, while a Superb (+5) roll suggests she is collaborating and has been seen at Central Processing.

Castle Conundrum

It is not hard to gain entrance to the Castle: the Enemy presence is light. The heroes can probably gain audience with (or sneak in to see) Prince Penultimate, who seems to be running things. At any rate, he sits on the throne, surrounded by guards and courtiers, including three Crows and a Jack as his jester.

Penultimate plays the careless heir as though his life depended on it. If the heroes can get him alone, he will reveal that the king and queen are under house arrest, hostages to his good behavior. If pressed, he will reveal that his sister is not herself; she has been acting strangely and is imprisoned at Central Processing.

The king and queen have actually been whisked away to Eg. In their place are illusions created by two Snipes, who wait to pounce on would-be rescuers.

Central Processing

Central Processing is the biggest Enemy installation in Conundrum, erected in the middle of the wilderness. It looks like any other Station of the Enemy, but much larger: the signal pylon can be seen from miles away, and a steady stream of Crows bring citizens in through Shipping and Receiving. The citizens leave through the front doors, looking shaken and clutching little white books.

Instead of the cramped control room found in other Stations, Central Processing resembles a factory floor. Citizens of Conundrum sit at booths, some clearly undergoing a kind of programming, others feeding their books into the machines. Computer-savvy heroes can recognize that the entire system, humans and machines both, amount to one enormous computer. If they can get themselves to a booth, succeeding on a Great (+4) Lore roll is enough to reveal the Enemy’s goal aspect.

Central Processing runs like clockwork under the watchful eye of Princess Punctual.

Prince Penultimate

ASPECTS

Feckless Prince of Conundrum; Prisoner of Fortune; Always Second to Last

SKILLS

Great (+4) at: Making Friends Honestly, Classically Trained Swordplay

Fair (+2) at: Getting By At Politics, Being Brave, Prince Stuff

Poor (-1) at: Showing Up Early, Making Hard Choices, Arts and Crafts

STUNTS

Just In Time: Prince Penultimate never rolls for turn order; he always goes second to last. By spending a fate point, or if someone spends it for him, he can enter a conflict anywhere in Conundrum, just before the last person in turn order acts during an exchange.

Let's Not Be Hasty: Penultimate can always use Making Friends Honestly in a conflict to create an advantage that defuses the situation. He gets +2 to do so.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Princess Punctual

ASPECTS

A Proper Princess of Conundrum; Enthralled by a Great Work; Everything In Its Own Time

SKILLS

Great (+4) at: Figuring Things Out, The Ex Machina School of Martial Arts

Fair (+2) at: Princess Stuff, Being Right, Having The Courage of Her Convictions

Poor (-1) at: Keeping Perspective, Outdoorsy Stuff, Delaying

STUNTS

Too Slow: Once per exchange, Punctual can leap away from a physical attack, giving her +2 to defend against it.

Right Place, Right Time: Once per exchange, Punctual can spend a fate point to interrupt a declared action with an immediate action of her own.

Soul of the Machine: When Punctual invokes an aspect of the scene involving machinery, she gets +3 instead of +2.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

Consequence

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

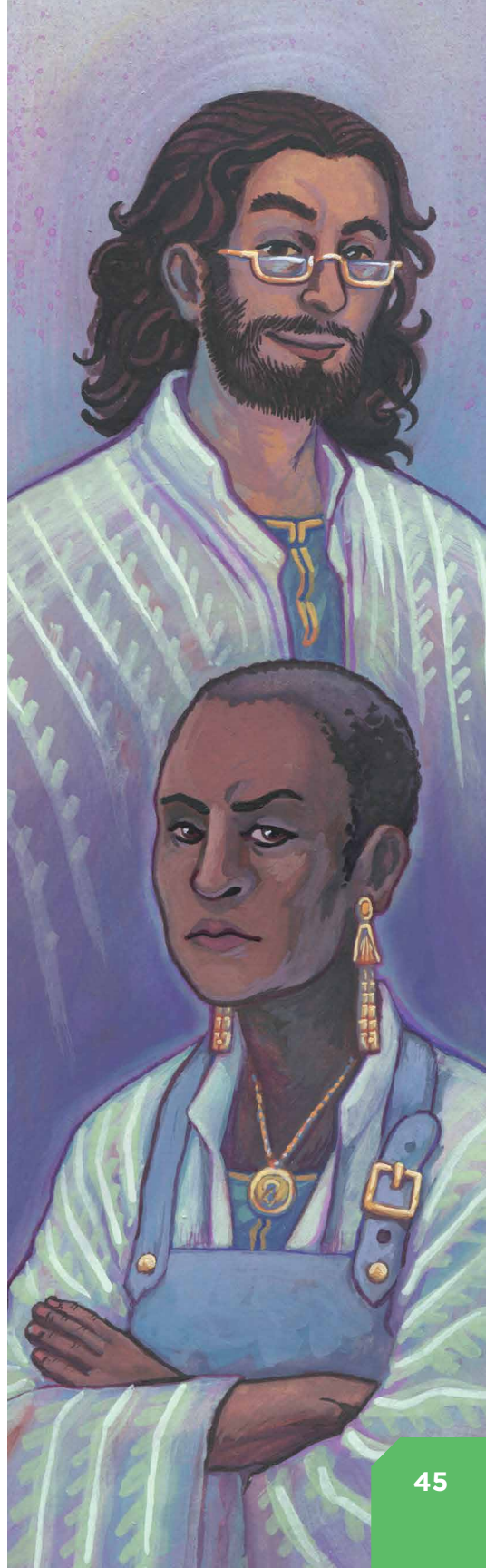
Heroes may remember the princess as a serious little girl with perfect manners. She has grown into a serious woman; with an aura of authority she strides about the walkways overlooking Processing. She is dressed in the robes of a princess wrapped in a workshop apron, and is attended by Crow minions, who adjust the machinery at her commands.

If confronted, the princess's first instinct is to defend the Station: she fights with her bare hands, moving with clock-like precision, supported by two murders of Crows. Central Processing has at least four zones, plus one for the catwalks, and the aspect *Inside the Machine*.

Compelling Punctual's *A Proper Princess of Conundrum* aspect can get her talking. In theory, she is here under duress, with her brother and parents as hostages. In practice, she has become obsessed with the entire system: Central Processing is using the Riddles of its inhabitants as a series of logic gates. The exact purpose of this vast computation depends on the nature of the Enemy, but the results—calculated as the books are input and output—are broadcast back to the Enemy in Eg.

The Princess can be talked around to the heroes' side. Anybody dealing a moderate consequence to her—through Rapport attacks, for example—can get her to turn against the Enemy, especially if her family is safe. She may also have a talisman.

Central Processing is an opportunity to turn the Enemy's tools against it. A PC with computer-based aspects can attempt to reprogram the system to change The Rules; overcoming an Epic (+7) obstacle is enough to change Conundrum's peril aspect, for example. The Unchantress, if she has become involved, might try something similar: she can also rewrite The Rules in Central Processing, controlling or enslaving the citizens who follow them.



The City of Eg

Story aspect: *The Heart of Nest and Gateway to the Waking World*

Peril aspect: *Fortress of the Enemy*

Eg looks as the heroes remember it—a painting in a storybook, shrouded in mist—but the illusion crumbles up close: the mist is a sooty smoke, and the buildings and engines of the Enemy loom over the streets. Crows are everywhere, Jacks perch atop streetlamps, and Snipes' pale eyes peer from the most unlikely places. Moving around generally requires rolling Stealth against Fair (+2) difficulty.

The description of the chosen Enemy, listed in “*The Three Enemies*” later in this chapter, will give an idea of what has happened in the city itself. The heroes can find locals to give them an idea of the landscape; depending on their actions elsewhere, the heroes might have already changed the mood of the city. In any event, there is only one real point of interest in Eg.

Adventure Path

While Eg is essentially a straight shot to the bad guy, this is where complications from previous Kingdoms may come into play. If the heroes have inspired enough change in the Kingdoms, they could find old enemies and allies at the gates of Eg: Edgar (or Ogre Red!) leading armies from Epoch, Winnifred (or Leo!) from Bungledyne, and the Prince and Princess (or the Unchantress!) from Conundrum. In that case, Eg could be a city under siege, or at least facing an infiltration.

In this case, the heroes may butt heads with one of these personalities. Ultimately, though, the Enemy has forces capable of meeting the armies raised against it—unless the heroes can get into the palace and face the Enemy directly while his defenses are distracted.

The Council Palace and the Garden of Dreams

The Council of Eg rules the city, and its members serve as arbitrators for the Kingdoms of Nest. It comprises a dozen representatives, half from the Kingdoms and half from Eg. Under the Enemy, the Council are prisoners (or worse), and the palace is under new management. The Garden of Dreams, which holds the Well of Waking, is only accessible from the palace.

The palace is an elegant building in the center of the city, but not truly a fortress—getting inside is usually a Good (+3) challenge. GMs, think about tailoring the difficulty to the heroes' strengths, and give them a chance to show off any talismans they may have picked up. Once inside, they may wish to free Council members or other prisoners, but ultimately they will find themselves facing the Enemy.

The Three Enemies

By the time the heroes come face to face with their foe, they should have a good idea of what they are up against, but their Enemy should still have a few secrets left.

The Enemies below are fairly dangerous, but heroes who are prepared for combat should be able to beat them. If the heroes dealt with previous encounters with ease, consider reinforcing the Enemy with a couple murders of Crows, a band of Jacks, or even a Snipe or two.

The Tyrant

STORY

The Tyrant is a fierce warlord, a master of the blade and of the dark arts. Unbeatable in battle and unmatched in strategy, the Tyrant seems certain to bring all the Kingdoms of Nest to heel.

The Tyrant's real name is Alice Wakefield. Like many other children she came to Nest in a dream, and became one of the greatest heroes the Kingdoms have ever known. After years of adventures, she came at last to the City of Eg, where the Council offered her a drink from the Well of Waking. She refused.

In the waking world, Alice lies in a hospital bed, and she believes that returning to her body will mean her death. She'd always hoped that Nest would grant her a cure; when that hope was dashed, she turned against the Council. Now nearly twenty in apparent age, some part of her still hopes for a cure, but mostly she is determined to never leave Nest.

The Tyrant knows many of the secrets of Nest, learned on her adventures. She has tapped the power drawn from the Well of Waking to create her minions, modeled after toys and stories of her childhood.

THE PLAN

The Tyrant's actions across the Kingdoms are defensive: she doesn't want anyone, hero or native, to send her home. In Epoch, she imprisons anyone she thinks could become a hero; in Bungledyne, she harnesses their power for her defense of Eg; and in Conundrum, she seeks to use riddles and magic to find a cure.

The Tyrant draws her minions from the Well, giving them life with a word. Once out of her sight, they function as part of her subconscious, combining her intent with a mélange of fears, insecurities, and inspiration from books and movies. Her capture of the Threshing Stones prevents any child heroes from arriving to challenge her, but unconsciously she may have done it so that adults could come and make everything better.

THE CLUES

The Tyrant's minions, when defeated, act like broken toys. There is nobody beneath the armor, the Snipes deflate like balloons, and so on. The Vulturines look more like surgeons, and their mirror-staffs reflect surgical lights. In addition, Enemy communications are in English, on ordinary paper and clipboards; many details in the Stations appear mundane. Finally, stories abound of the Last Hero, assumed killed by the Enemy.

FACING THE TYRANT

In the palace, clerks and courtiers take care of the day-to-day business of the city under the watchful eyes of the Tyrant's minions. The Tyrant herself spends most of her time in the Garden of Dreams. The garden is walled and guarded, but inside it is surprisingly unchanged: a restful glade of winding gravel paths and hanging plants. The Well of Waking is a still pool at its center.

The Tyrant can be found alone in the garden, staring into the Well. Anyone looking into the Well of Waking sees a vision of a hospital bed, where Alice's twelve-year-old self lies in a restless sleep surrounded by monitors. Keen observers can make out the templates for her minions propped up on the pillows: a tattered stuffed crow puppet, a Punch doll, and a round orange creature from a children's anime. There is no model for the Vulturines, who are inspired by the endless procession of doctors and nurses.

Alice's first response to intruders is to fight. She is an intimidating figure, helmed, armored, and bearing a two-handed sword. If she recognizes the PCs as heroes, she may be willing to talk. Anyone who looks in the Well can make a mental attack against her with a few well-chosen words. Consequences might include *You Understand Me* or *What Have I Become?*

Alice isn't a kid anymore, but she hasn't really grown up. She has every quality of a hero, warped by a justifiable bitterness about her situation, and is not easy to sweet-talk. Her death in the mundane world may not be inevitable—maybe she can beat it, if she tries. But nothing is guaranteed.

If Alice is killed in a fight, her body will fade from existence. Anyone looking at the girl in the Well will see red lights on the medical monitors, and doctors rushing to the bed with a crash cart—then the vision is gone.

Taking out Alice with a mental attack can get her to drink from the Well—even a concession might do it. Ultimately, that leads to a similar vision in the Well—excited doctors, but no clear resolution. The GM decides whether she dies, recovers, or remains as she is.

AFTERMATH

Once she is defeated or surrenders, her minions fall apart. The heroes can free her prisoners, release the Council of Eg and any other prisoners, receive accolades, and return home—if that's what they want.

The Tyrant

ASPECTS

Villainous Concept: *Hero Unwilling to Relinquish Her Crown*

Goal: *Nest Will Save Me*

Strategy: *Use What I Learned as a Hero to Be a Villain*

Agents: *They're All Just a Bunch of Toys*

Weakness: *Scared, Alone, & Conflicted*

SKILLS

Superb (+5) at: Wielding Her Great Blade

Great (+4) at: Exercising Her Iron Will, Heroic Reflexes

Fair (+2) at: Playing the Political Game, Acting the Villain

Poor (-1) at: Hiding Her Fears

STUNTS

Heroic Follow-through: When the Tyrant gets a boost from an attack, she can spend it to immediately attempt to create an advantage.

Armored: Unless she is attacked with a weapon that has a minimum damage, the Tyrant ignores any attack that deals only a single stress.

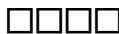
Riddle of Mastery: The Tyrant is bound to the magic of Nest. By Exercising Her Iron Will, she can create advantages against opponents using the elements and environment: fire rises from the ground, winds spring up, the ground grabs at feet, and so on.

STRESS

Physical:



Mental:

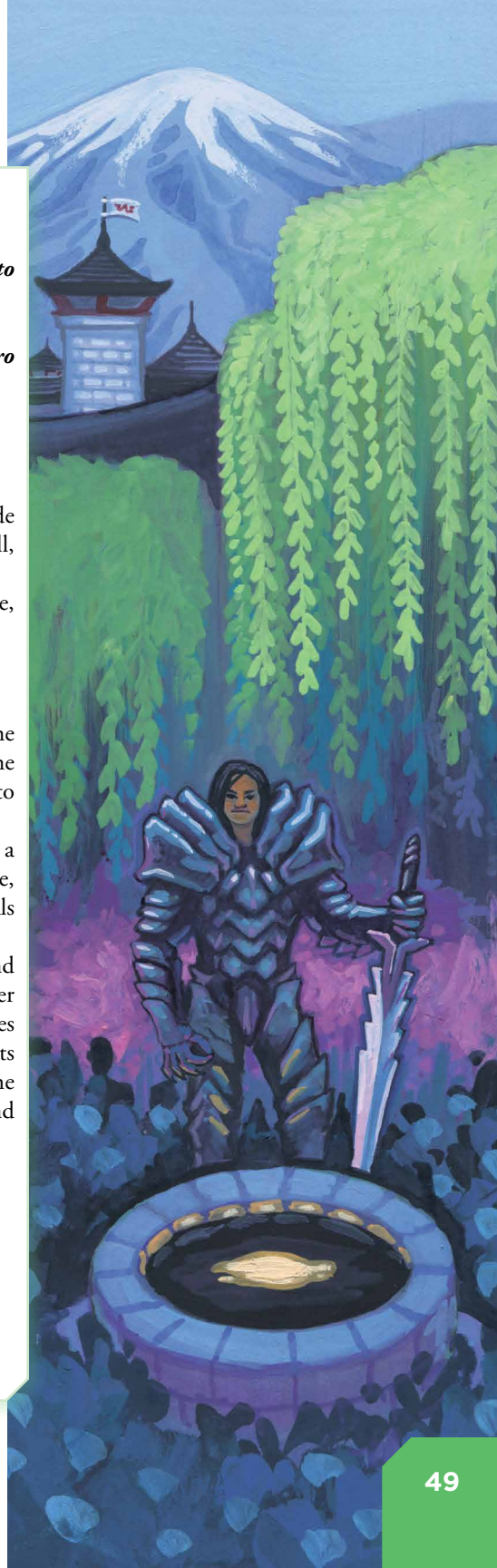


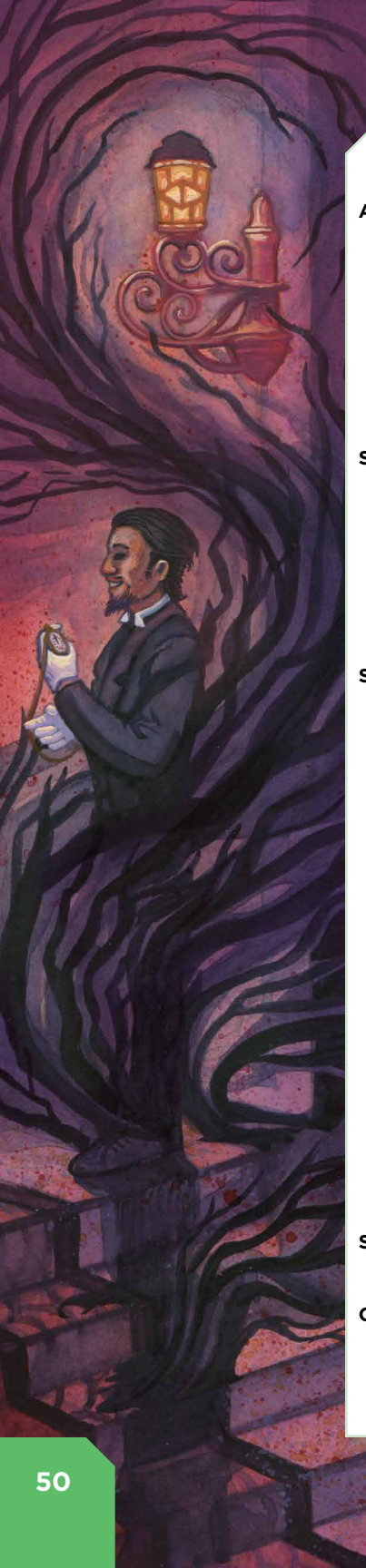
CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):





The Night Mayor

ASPECTS

Villainous Concept: *Exiled Ruler of Fear and Shadows*

Goal: *I Will Restore Fyrsome to Its Rightful Place*

Strategy: *Demonstrate Fear's Dominion Over Every Kingdom*

Agents: *Phantoms of Fear, Puppets of the Mind*

Weakness: *Fear Can Be Conquered, Darkness Can Be Lit*

SKILLS

Superb (+5) at: Mastery of Fear and Shadow

Great (+4) at: Stagecraft and Misdirection, Rulership

Fair (+2) at: Dueling With His Cane, Monologuing, Stepping Lively

Poor (-1) at: Facing a Truly Brave Act, Looking Into the Light

STUNTS

Shadowstuff: The Night Mayor can use his Mastery of Fear and Shadow to create advantages as long as there are shadows around. He uses this ability to try to split the party, locking doors and dousing torches, or to hide himself in shadows.

Suit of Shadows: The Night Mayor can pass between shadows at will. As long as he is in darkness, he can ignore any aspects that would hinder his movement.

All Around You: The Night Mayor can appear before more than one person at once, provided they are in different zones and can't see each other. His "duplicates" all draw on the same pool of stress, consequences, and fate points, but take individual actions.

Welcome to Your Mind: The Night Mayor can use his Mastery of Fear and Shadow to make mental attacks against foes in the same zone, summoning images of pure fear. If he deals a consequence, the victim's nightmare persists for as long as the consequence remains.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):

The Night Mayor

STORY

The Night Mayor appears as a dapper, goateed man of indeterminate age. He dresses in an old-fashioned suit, complete with waistcoat, pocket watch, and silver-tipped cane. He speaks with a cultured baritone, but his words are echoed by a chorus of barely audible whispers uttering threats. The shadows dance and flex around him, sometimes hiding him completely apart from white teeth and gloves.

Fyrsome was once a Kingdom of Nest, inhabited by phantoms and monsters. Children who arrived there learned to overcome the darkness of their own hearts. But as time passed, Fyrsome grew darker. The heroes it produced became morbidly strange, and at last the Council of Eg severed Fyrsome from the waking world. Its Threshing Stones were removed, and the Kingdom drifted away from Nest.

A few years ago, the Night Mayor, ruler of Fyrsome, came to Eg to appeal the Council's verdict. When that failed, he brought his minions through the Well of Waking and imprisoned the Council, seizing control of Eg.

THE PLAN

The Night Mayor's plan is simple: spread fear across the Kingdoms. He has blocked the Threshing Stones, not to prevent rescue, but to leave the children of the waking world starved for magic. When his power is complete, he will open the gates and welcome them to a Nest ruled by nightmares and fear.

The Night Mayor's activities are not a means to an end; the terror caused by his minions is the end itself, and their apparent goals are mostly set dressing. His activities in each Kingdom are tailored to that Kingdom's virtues. In Epoch, he fosters paranoia, turning each person against her neighbor. In Conundrum, inhabitants fear banality and the loss of individuality. And in Bungledyne, it's the fear of helplessness and of the dark.

THE CLUES

The minions are empty suits of armor. When destroyed, dark shadows flit away like wisps of smoke. Careful examination of Enemy technology reveals it to be baroquely impractical, almost as if it doesn't do anything. In general, the harder the PCs look at anything, the less sense it makes.

FACING THE NIGHT MAYOR

The Council Palace is empty and shrouded in darkness. The city runs itself as best it can, and nobody goes out at night. The gates are guarded by Crows and Snipes; occasionally prisoners vanish inside the palace, but none ever emerge. Deliveries to the castle—mostly food destined for prisoners—are taken inside by the Crows.

Inside, the palace is *A Haunted Labyrinth*, dark and devoid of life. At its center is the Council Chamber, a ceremonial room with thrones for the Councilors from each Kingdom. The chairs have been roughly moved aside to make room for a throne of dark iron, with the name “Fysome” engraved on its back.

In the Garden of Dreams, the Well of Waking has been polluted with fear: its waters are black tar. A hero who drinks from it must defend against a Great (+4) mental attack, a nightmare vision of the waking world: their home burned to the ground, or a funeral of a loved one. It’s an illusion, but a compelling one.

The Night Mayor appears to the heroes in the Council Chamber or at any other appropriate moment. He is happy to talk, using Empathy to uncover and compel any fear-based aspects. He ascribes all the psychological woes of a generation of children in the Waking World to the banishment of Fysome.

His argument is simple: in blocking children from Fysome, the Council has created a generation of children who are prisoners to their fears, rather than masters of it. If he convinces the heroes, the fight could end here; while he wants to rule all of Nest, he will settle for restoring Fysome, conceding if anyone can score a major consequence on him, presumably with Rapport or Provoke.

Otherwise, he will fight, vanishing into the shadows at one moment and appearing to strike directly at the minds of his enemies. His powers are reduced by bright light, and he keeps to the darkness as much as possible. He can duel with his cane if necessary.

AFTERMATH

A concession on either side can lead to the release of the Council, who are languishing in the dungeons. The Night Mayor dismisses his minions with a word, leaving their armor on the ground. The same happens if he is defeated, although his phantoms slink away to haunt the shadows of Nest.

The heroes may find themselves pushing the Council to restore Fysome to its old place. This may or may not be a good idea. In any event, the tar drains from the Well of Waking and the heroes can return home.

The Invader

STORY

There are worlds beyond the Kingdoms of Nest that glimmer like sparks against a dark sky. One of these is a cold, dwindling realm with no name, the birthplace of an expanding insectile civilization. Its queens have launched themselves into the space between the worlds, infesting world after world as they propagate their species. Nest is merely one more realm to absorb—and the waking world of Earth is next.

The Queen is alien to Nest. She cares nothing for its magic and its heroes; they are simply energy and food inputs for her swarm. Once she has converted Nest to a swarmworld, she will leave behind a queen larva and move on to Earth.

The swarm found Nest over five years ago; their initial forces boiled through the Well of Waking and took the Council by surprise. Many were killed in that first attack; others are entombed in pods so the Queen can ransack their memories. The swarm are parasites: their guise of Crows, Jacks, Snipes, and Vulturines are forms of protective coloration that allow them to move through Nest as figures appropriate to the storybook setting. It has not been entirely successful: Nest, sensing the intrusion, cut off the Threshing Stones in an attempt to protect Earth—and summoned the PCs for good measure.

THE PLAN

Everything the swarm does is designed to turn Nest into a staging area for its attack on Earth. Prisoners from all over Nest are rendered into nutrients or kept alive in pods for their memories. Bungledyne is harnessed for its energy, and Conundrum is being used as a giant computer to “hack” the coordinates for Earth.

The invasion is nearing completion.

THE CLUES

The Enemy’s minions are alien and insectile behind their masks. The Stations betray alien and quasi-futuristic technology: weird symbols, incomprehensible writing, and nutrient pods in the barracks. Finally, nothing like the Enemy or its minions are familiar to anyone in Nest; they do not match any stories.

FACING THE INVADER

Eg is becoming a ghost town: many of its citizens have vanished, and many more have fled. The Palace of the Council is deformed by organic protrusions sprouting from the windows, and only the Enemy’s minions enter or leave. The Queen makes no attempt to govern. Minions encountered here seem creepier and more insectile than outside the walls, their masks slipping.

The palace is overgrown with a fungal growth. Nutrients pods hang from ceilings, while cables hum with stolen electricity, and glossy black monitors display incomprehensible data. A Fair (+2) Notice or Lore roll is required to navigate without getting lost, and the area is regularly patrolled by murders of Crows.

A hive engulfs the Well of Waking. The Well is surrounded by alien sensors and machinery. A holographic “map” overhead shows the swarm’s path through the worlds; an Average (+1) Lore roll reveals that Earth is next. The machinery is attended by technician drones, pallid white grubs with no combat abilities who lend the scene the aspect *Cowering Science Grubs*.

This is where the Queen spends most of her time, overseeing the final stages of the invasion. She appears as a humanoid figure in a simple red cloak and a bone-white mask. She moves smoothly and unnaturally, communicating telepathically with a commanding mental voice.

This “body” is just her head: her true form is hidden in the shadows, an immense millipede with long spiderish legs and multiple talons. Her red cloak is a fringed and tentacled mane; unfurled, it reveals bulbous blue eyes and a toothed red maw.

If the Queen spots intruders before they attack, she will spare a few words to determine who they are. If she learns they are heroes from Earth, she will attempt to capture rather than kill. Otherwise, they are mere annoyances, to be torn apart and devoured.

The chamber contains three zones, concentric rings around the well. The Queen inhabits the outer zone, but she will fill an additional zone each round.

The Queen is a straightforward combatant—arrogant, but not stupid. She will strike first at whoever seems most dangerous, but she can deal damage to everyone around her. If she takes multiple consequences, she will attempt to flee through the Well of Waking. That’s one form of victory, but it leaves the Earth still in peril.

AFTERMATH

The Queen’s defeat is not the end. Her minions scatter across Nest, and someone will need to hunt them down. There is also a new queen larva in the bowels of the palace or hidden elsewhere in the Kingdoms. Finally, the PCs may try to understand the swarm’s tech so they can help protect Earth from future attacks. Once the machinery is powered down, a drink from the Well of Waking can send the PCs back to the mundane world.

The Council of Eg is not entirely gone—some may be saved from the pods, along with other prisoners from around the Kingdoms. Still, many have been rendered for their nutrients; there is no completely happy ending.

The Invader

ASPECTS

Villainous Concept: *Alien Conqueror Queen*

Goal: *I Will Conquer Earth Next*

Strategy: *Burrow Like a Parasite*

Agents: *Insectile Aliens*

Weakness: *Can Never Understand the Worlds She Conquers*

SKILLS

Superb (+5) at: Entrapping with Coils

Great (+4) at: Clawing and Biting, Wielding Awful Strength

Fair (+2) at: Unmasking Her Horrifying Visage, Scenting Prey

Poor (-1) at: Discerning Motives, Recognizing Threats

STUNTS

Coils Everywhere: The Queen is immense, letting her inhabit up to three zones at one time. Rather than moving, each exchange she can spread to an adjacent zone or abandon one she is in. When she attacks, she can split her roll among targets in any of these three zones. She can be attacked with Fight in any zone she inhabits.

Overwhelm: The Queen can spend a fate point to attack every target in one zone she inhabits. In this case, each target must defend against the total attack.

Engulf: The Queen can grab a target and stuff it into her maw. When she creates an advantage by Entrapping with Coils, such as *Engulfed*, she can immediately make a physical attack as part of the same action. She can do this once per opponent per scene.

STRESS

Physical:

Mental:

CONSEQUENCES

Mild (2):

Moderate (4):

Severe (6):



SOURCES AND INSPIRATION

Magical Adventures

Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis

The Neverending Story by Michael Ende

Pan's Labyrinth (movie)

Peter Pan by J. M. Barrie

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster

Spirited Away (movie)

Summerland by Michael Chabon

Reimaginings and Deconstructions

American McGee's Alice (video game)

A Game of You by Neil Gaiman (comic)

Hook (movie)

The Magicians by Lev Grossman

Monsters and Other Childish Things by Benjamin Baugh (RPG)

Wicked by Gregory McGuire