

A FLOCK OF CRANES

FATE + FICTION

is our line of original and classic short stories. Situations, characters, and other elements from the story are expressed as Fate RPG Aspects. Read and enjoy the stories on their own, then mix the Aspects you like into your own Fate Core or Fate Accelerated game!

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Fate Core System
Fate Accelerated Edition
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Fate was originally
created by Rob Donoghue
and Fred Hicks

By Gary E. Weller

“The Pinkerton lives?” Leopold Crane asked his younger brother in a winded breath. Leopold was fighting with his bow, testing its give and pull as he drew back on the string.

“Of course he lives!” James looked up to the eldest of the four brothers. Leopold saw the urgency in his eyes. Being the youngest he had not yet earned the right to use the bow as his weapon, he was still on fletching, but he was the best damned fletcher between the four of them. When James did get his bow, there wouldn’t be anyone better.

“Come on, Leopold!” James was tugging on Leopold’s sleeve. “We’ve got to move fast.” The elder of the Crane Brothers looked down onto his younger sibling. He could see himself growing up all over again. James’ freckles were fading but they would be coming back during the long trip. The sunlight brought them out and turned his head blonde.

“James, the Pinkerton learned how to take care of himself long before you were even thought of.” Leopold held fast as he nocked an arrow and fixed his eye to the target. James pulling on the sleeve of his thermal shirt didn’t help Leopold aim.

Leopold let out a breath. It was long and held the scent of the garlic from the cold spaghetti that the four of them had for breakfast. He had already seen where he was going to put the arrow within the straw target that was on the far end of the barn that the group used to practice their art. Leopold let the arrow fly and felt the weight of the bow follow the pent up energy as the arrow sped onto the path that Leopold had already seen.

The flight lasted less than a second, but Leopold watched the shaft spin as the feathers caught the wind. The tip had a hunting blade on it. Four delicately crafted razor blades punctured the straw target with little sound but much fury. Leopold smiled as he saw the stuffing come out of the back of the target. It was a clean shot and he was proud.

“Can we go now?” James was still at his side and still trying to pester him into action. He was growing into a passionate man. It was that passion that was either going to get James killed or make him the greatest archer on the planet. Leopold hoped it would be the latter, but with the way his younger brother was badgering him, the inclination to let him go and save the Pinkerton by himself was coming more and more to the forefront of Leopold’s brain.

“James,” Leopold pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration. “The detective is going to be fine until Reynaldo and Evan finish what they’re doing. There is no way I’m going without them to try to save the Pinkerton. We are Cranes which means that we think our way through things. We don’t go off half-cocked and unprepared.”

Leopold glared at James seeing that he didn’t want to understand what he was saying. James must have been showing the same frustration that Leopold was showing on his face. Passion was going to kill the boy one day. Leopold could only hope to save him from his own passion before it became terminal.

Situation Aspects

The Pinkerton wouldn't have hired us if we couldn't pull the job.

Reinforce the notion that the characters are on this adventure for a specific reason.

Character Aspects

The youngest had not yet earned the right.

There is a pecking order in the Crane family.

Consequences

Then we could all die!

A consequence to one Crane means
Consequences for all Cranes.

Boosts

We're Cranes, after all.

This will give a Crane a bonus to get a family member to listen and/or help. It can also work as an affirmation to aid with a skill the family excels at, such as archery.

"But," James started.

"No, James!" Leopold slapped his younger brother on the back of the head. "Think!" Leopold could feel the dark frown on his face. His muscles were tensing up in the unconscious effort.

"If we go without everything in place, what's going to happen?" Leopold could feel his cheeks beginning to flush. He was using his diaphragm to nearly bellow out the words. James stood silent, his own face turning red. It had been a long time since Leopold had to box his proverbial ear. "Answer me, boy!"

James' lip started to quiver as he held back the thoughts and words that so desperately wanted to come out. His breathing became heavier and more rapid. His fists were clenching and unclenching. Leopold knew how to push the young man's buttons. There were times it was completely necessary.

There were times when wickedness was not just the right tool, but the only tool. It had been years since Leopold had to use it on James. Leopold instantly felt guilty, but the dolt wasn't learning any other way. James kept letting his passion control him instead of controlling the passion and using it to his advantage.

Leopold raised his hand again and cocked his head as a warning to his younger brother. James stared up at Leopold, puffing his cheeks as his rapid breathing increased. This above everything else proved that James needed to spend another few years making the arrows instead of learning to make them fly.

"Then we could all die." James let out in a failed attempt at something between a snarl and a growl. It only came out as a hurt tone that reflected the ignorant childish passion he was feeling.

"Go on," Leopold let his hand down but kept the lock on James' eyes. "What else?"

"It would probably mean the end of the Pinkerton as well." James sounded congested. Leopold wasn't surprised. The boy was huffing and puffing like a lizard in the sunlight. It didn't make him tough. It only raised his blood pressure and caused his sinuses to become inflamed.

"That's right," Leopold put a hand on James' shoulder. "We four are all the family that we have." James bowed his head in embarrassment. Leopold breathed a silent sigh of relief. He had actually gotten through to him. "There is no way I'm going to rush off and let you or any one of us die in their hands. Besides, the Pinkerton wouldn't have hired us if we couldn't pull off the job. We're Cranes, after all!" Leopold smiled down at James.

"And that means we don't fail." James mumbled to the ground.

"No James. That means we're *family*."

About *A Flock of Cranes*

by Berin Kinsman

I hope you enjoyed Gary's story. That would make me happy, and I know it would make Gary happy. Yet even if you didn't, I hope you can see how even a piece of fiction you don't like can be mined for ideas, and ways that those ideas can be remixed and reimaged and used as material for your own Fate RPG game.

Now let's deconstruct the story, pick out some of the elements that are present, and discuss ways that you might use those as possible Aspects in your own Fate RPG game. Understand that the following interpretations are only *my* interpretations, and not the only possible interpretations. The object of Fate+Fiction is to help you learn how to mine stories for pieces and parts that you can adapt for your own purposes.

Let's begin by trying to summarize the story. It's admittedly a little light on plot, more of a character piece with a compelling plot hook. The Cranes have been hired by a private detective – the unseen Pinkerton – presumably to assist him. He's apparently been captured, but we're not sure whether that was his plan all along or not. The Crane Boys are going fulfill the job, knowing that it will work out okay because as a family they have each other's backs.

The Situations

There are as few Situation Aspects that we can pull out of this story. These Aspects, or something like them, can then be adapted to your own Fate game. Let's take a look.

The Pinkerton wouldn't have hired us if we couldn't pull the job.

As an Aspect, that's pretty powerful. It implies that they'll be successful. It implies that the Pinkerton, and the agency he works for, might be willing to extend resources and information to the Cranes should they need it; it may also imply that the Cranes don't need the Pinkerton's resources, and that they were hired because they have means that the Pinkerton agency does not. The player characters can Invoke something like this when things get rough – *we're not supposed to fail!* The gamemaster can also use it to Compel the players to stay on task, if their belief in the mission or their ability to complete it wavers.

If we go without everything in place, then what will happen?

Stick to the plan and things will work out, no matter what the specifics of the situation are. This is part of what binds the Crane Boys together, and can apply to almost any adventuring party with a common purpose. It can be Invoked if the player characters have, in fact, worked out a plan and stuck to it. It can be used by the gamemaster to either entice players to make and keep the plan, or to stray from it; have a Fate point for getting sloppy.

The Characters

Now let's examine the characters in the story. For your own Fate game you don't need to use these exact characters. Look at existing player characters and supporting characters, and see who might fill the same roles in relation to the Situation Aspects. Who might the relevant Character Aspects, or something similar, be appended to?

Leopold Crane is the oldest of the brothers, and obviously the leader. For the context we have, he also seems to be the father figure, which can imply a number of other things about the Crane brothers, their bond, and their need to take high-risk jobs. His field of expertise, and that of all the Cranes, seems to be archery.

James Crane is the youngest, making him the least skilled and wielding no

Situation Aspects

If we go without everything in place, then what will happen?

Stick to the plan, and nothing can go wrong. In theory, at least.

Character Aspects

Spend another few years making the arrows instead of learning to make them fly

More than just "fletcher", this Aspect implies that there is a social context, and it's not that he can't use a bow; he's not yet allowed to.

Pinkerton man

There is a lot of cache that comes from working for the Pinkerton company, regardless of the time period or incarnation of said firm.

Consequences*Social Consequences*

This about the impact of failure on an organization or family group, and how that can have a ripple effect on things like relationships, reputation, employment, and self-confidence. There are some effective Consequences to be mined from these concepts

Boosts*Catch Phrases and Battle Cries*

When spoken, you know something big is about to happen and the characters are about to do something awesome. Overused, they lose all power.

authority in the family. All he seems to be allowed to do is fletch arrows. The phrase *the youngest has not yet earned the right* leapt out at me as an Aspect, establishing the fact that there is a clear pecking order among the Cranes. It can be Invoked by James to get out of doing something he doesn't want to do, or to avoid responsibility for making decisions. It can also be used to Compel him to obey his brothers' orders and do what is expected of him.

Reynaldo and Evan, the middle Crane brothers, are not seen or fleshed out. Presumably they have skills and authority in between Leopold and James, and similar archery skills. In an expanded story or sequel, they might be supporting characters or player characters; there's plenty of room to invent them to fill whatever needs you envision for your game.

The Pinkerton is more of an abstract concept, both employer and victim to be rescued in one. I'm assuming that he's employed by the Pinkerton company, founded in 1850, which has provided everything from personal security to private investigation and risk management services throughout its long history. What a Pinkerton employee is doing depends on when the story is supposed to be set, and Gary doesn't say. In your game, you have a wide range of history and alternate history that you could work with.

Consequences

Not every action has a clear or specific consequence, and sometimes we need to dig a little bit to discover them within a story. Here's what I found.

Then we could all die!

I would play this to mean that, because of the close bond between the Crane boys, a Consequence to one would mean a Consequence to all of them. Not that if one of them were killed, all of them would literally die, but there would be an emotional toll. The loss might cause a temporary penalty to die rolls because they're all too distraught to focus. It might cause a loss of reputation, leading to a lack of employment. It might lead to fighting and the laying of blame for the failure, injury or death of one of their own, causing a rift between brothers that leads to a tense working relationship or the breakup of the family. These things can lead into dire story Consequences that might make James *simply wish* they were all dead.

Boosts

Boosts are another set of elements that don't always make themselves explicit within a story. It often takes some probing and a little bit of imagination to discover something that could potentially provide a Boost in a Fate game.

We're Cranes, after all!

You may be wondering why I'm putting this down as a Boost, rather than a Character Aspect. As the gamemaster, I'd put a restriction on this one, limiting it to once per session at most. When two or more Crane boys are together, and one of them speaks this inspirational phrase out loud, all of the Cranes in the scene get some sort of advantage to their next action. It's practically a battle cry, up there with "*All for one, and one for all*" or "*Avengers Assemble*" or "*Yo Joe!*" It's really just a catch phrase, the sort of thing that in a movie or television show lets the audience know that things are about to get *real*.

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