

Junk Nest City
Everest Pipkin

You are a family of tiny Borrowers who are moving into a new home. You have to find and borrow objects from the Humans to build and decorate your Nest. But don't get caught!

(In development, unreleased early edition— please don't share outside your group.)



Setup:

This game **must** be played in a home (or similar personal or domestic space). It won't work online or somewhere that isn't lived in.

Game needs: A d20 (20 sided die), a timer (on a phone or watch is fine), 4-10 players, a big piece of paper (letter size or bigger), pens or pencils, a home to play in.

The GM: The GM of this game is the person who is hosting. If multiple people in the group live in the space, they should pick between themselves. The GM will fill the role of *the Humans* in the house, as well as *the Oracle* in the borrower community.

The Borrowers: Everyone but the GM is a *Borrower*. You live secretly somewhere inside of the home you are in, in a collective community called *the Nest*. You are only a few inches tall, and your home is no more than a few feet wide.

Physical game bounds: The GM decides what parts of the house are in-game (eg, the kitchen, the office, etc) and what is off-limits (eg, the bedroom, the bathroom, two drawers in the desk, etc). The entire house can be in-game or just a small part, but make sure you leave an area accessible that has some accumulated household detritus and junk. Unless off-limits, drawers and cabinets can be opened, the freezer can be rooted through, etc- so the GM should consider this carefully.

Tools: Each Borrower rolls a d20 three times. The objects associated with the numbers you roll are your specific Tools. These are the things you carry with you on Borrowing missions; they will help you construct stories about how you retrieved your objects.

- | | | | |
|----------------|------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. Twine | 6. Floss | 11. Cork | 16. Toothpick |
| 2. Cotton-ball | 7. Twig | 12. Q-tip | 17. Safety-pin |
| 3. Pin | 8. Needle | 13. Candy | 18. Pebble |
| 4. Paperclip | 9. Coin | 14. Bottle-cap | 19. Rubber Band |
| 5. Match-stick | 10. Eraser | 15. Graphite | 20. Paper |

The Nest: Decide where in the house the Nest is located. This could be under the basement stairs, in a living room wall, behind the stove, etc. Pick a space that makes sense in your environment. Imagine you are there, sitting on bottlecaps, making a plan.

Describe the shape and size of the Nest, and where the secret exits are into the house. Lay the paper in the center of the table to represent the Nest (tiling multiple sheets if the Nest is bigger than the paper). Draw the outside shape of the Nest on the paper from a top-down view (like a floorplan), but don't mark anything specific inside- the Nest is currently empty of things.

Borrowing:

While the Humans are out of the house or sleeping, you must gather the detritus and junk needed to furnish and decorate the Nest.

The Oracle is a wise member of the Borrower community who has lived in several Nests. They can tell you what type of objects are needed. Each turn, every Borrower rolls a d20 twice, and must find an object that matches the given descriptor. (For example, if the Borrower rolls a 3 and an 8, they must find a Clean and Elegant object; if they roll a 15 and a 19, they must find an object that is both Wooden and Metallic; etc. Some objects will be hard to find— others will be easier.)

- | | | | |
|------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Clean | 6. Rigid | 11. Soft | 16. Cute |
| 2. Plastic | 7. Flimsy | 12. Flammable | 17. Strange |
| 3. Jagged | 8. Elegant | 13. Hard | 18. Gross |
| 4. Shiny | 9. Valuable | 14. Round | 19. Metallic |
| 5. Edible | 10. Confusing | 15. Wooden | 20. Flashy |

The gathered objects need to be small enough to get back to the Nest— think things that could be carried by someone who (although very strong) is only a few inches tall.

Once everyone has rolled the d20 and has their object descriptions, the GM sets a timer for an arbitrary period of time between 30 seconds and 2 minutes. The GM keeps the length of this timer secret from the Borrowers, and the length of time should change every turn. The timer represents the period where Borrowers may safely search the house for objects while the Humans are sleeping or away.

The GM counts down, saying "GO" when they press start on the timer. The Borrowers don't know how long they have to search before the Humans return, and should do it as quickly as possible!

The Borrowers must physically find and return to the table with an object matching the description they were given within that timespan. They might choose to search on counters, in junk drawers, under couch cushions, etc (never leaving the decided bounds of the game area).

If a Borrower has not found a matching object before the timer ends, they do not return with an object for this turn (but is not seen and maybe continue to borrow in the future).

If a Borrower is holding an object but is not back at the table, they may keep the object they have found, but have been 'seen' and are considered too risky to let search again. They cannot gather any more objects, sitting future borrowing rounds out.

Consideration of Objects:

After the timer ends and everyone is back at the Nest, each Borrower must present their object to the Oracle.

Tell a short story about what you were asked to find (the descriptors you rolled), where you found the object (where it actually was in the house), and how you got it back to the Nest (as a Borrower, what you would have had to do to retrieve an object from there, possibly using the specific Tools you carry).

The Oracle may reject the object if they feel it does not match what was asked for, in which case you must put back where it was found the next turn while you are looking for your next object.

The GM (acting as the Human) will also decide if they would *actually* miss the object if it went missing in their own life. (Because being discovered by Humans is the most pressing threat to a Borrower, they won't keep things that are missed.)

If the GM decides they would *actively search* for the object if it went missing in their real home, the Borrower must spend the next turn carefully returning it to its original location. They may not borrow a new object during the next round.

To avoid this situation, Borrowers should probably avoid taking objects that are obviously specific (the only copy of a key), highly valuable (a gold ring), or sentimental (a family photograph). However, things that are precious are not always obvious, and finding the edges of what is and isn't important to a person is part of the core of this game!

Put the all the objects that will be kept in a pile in the middle of the table. (Imagine them piling up in the corners of the Nest, towering over you.)

Decoration:

After a successful caper, the Borrowers work to integrate their new objects into the Nest. Acting as the Oracle, the GM rolls a d20, matching it with a construction project.

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Chair | 6. Planter | 11. Piping | 16. Stairs |
| 2. Table | 7. Wallpaper | 12. Stove | 17. Picture |
| 3. Larder | 8. Bed | 13. Storage | 18. Flooring |
| 4. Water-spout | 9. Shelf | 14. Light | 19. Couch |
| 5. Window | 10. Bath | 15. Counter | 20. Ladder |

The Borrowers will then attempt to build the selected project out of the items they have gathered.

Starting with Borrowers who have been 'seen' and are no longer gathering objects, the Borrowers go around the table, selecting objects from the pile to help build their project.

Borrowers place these objects on the paper map of the Nest as they build, representing the construction that is happening there.

For instance, if the project is a bathtub, one Borrower might pick a lump of clay, forming it into a bowl and placing it in a corner of the Nest. Another might put a drinking straw across the back, for water. Another might poke a hole in the bottom of the tub and use a pebble as a drain cover. These three items sit in a loose approximation of a bathtub on the paper map.

You don't need to physically find every part of your construction project, but rather gesture at the idea of a functional system. Different projects will take different amounts of objects, but a good number is 2-3.

Projects (made of objects) remain on the map indefinitely and may be built on top of. In doing so, you will slowly build a tableaux of your Nest.

The Oracle continues in the section, rolling for new projects until there are no free objects or you get stuck on a project (AKA - there are no available objects that fit your needs). If you get stuck on a project, set it down until after the next borrowing cycle. You will complete this project the next turn, before rolling for a new one.

The Borrowing-Consideration-Decoration cycle repeats, stopping when all of the players have been seen (and can't safely gather any more objects), or when the Oracle and other Borrowers decide the Nest is fully decorated. When the Nest is fully decorated, you have won the game!

Simplified game loop:

Borrowing-

- Roll a d20 twice, search for an object that matches the description
- GM sets a timer (30 seconds to 2 mins, secret) and says GO
- Borrowers scatter, looking for objects in the house
- If they do not find one before the timer goes off, they do not bring an object back this turn
- If they have an object but are not back at the table, they keep the object but are seen and sit future borrowing rounds out

Consideration -

- Borrowers present objects, explaining what they were looking for, where they found it, and how they got it back to the nest
- Oracle accepts or rejects the object based on if it matches the search descriptors (if rejected, Borrower must return the object the next turn)
- GM decides if they'd *actually* miss and search for that object if it disappeared in their house (if yes, Borrower must return object next turn and cannot gather another during that turn)
- Borrowers place objects they are keeping in center of table

Decoration -

- The Oracle rolls a d20, selecting a project
- Going around the table, Borrowers pick objects to be integrated into the project
- Place objects on the paper floorplan of the Nest, loosely illustrating what is being built
- The Oracle continues to roll for new projects until all of the available objects are used, or the community gets stuck on a project
- If the community gets stuck on a project, set it down until after the next Borrowing and Consideration cycle

Repeat these cycles until all Borrowers have been seen, or the Nest is fully decorated!

Notes on play, possible modifications:

Player accessibility: Depending on player mobility and other various needs, changes can be made to the gameplay of the borrowing period. The timer can be set for longer, or the GM can bring junk drawers and miscellaneous objects to the table to be hunted through. (Some changes can be made to assessment if wanted, such as an increased emphasis on names, or on matching the best possible object to the prompt.)

GM accessibility: As the GM, you may have very specific boundaries around your home and what is comfortable to share with others. If you know this to be true but still wish to host, consider gathering and staging interesting small objects in the public spaces of your house before guests arrive.

Respectful use of space: Always respect the boundaries the GM laid out in the setup. Do not enter spaces that are not part of the game. Be careful with their things when searching. Ask before looking in a place if you are not certain.

Mindful storytelling: Always warn the other players if you want to take the story in a direction that could be scary or difficult. Similarly, pause the game at any point if you are feeling scared or upset by the story, or just need a moment to recenter. *Player health always comes first.*

The floorplan of the Nest: Although not required, you may choose to label your projects, or draw extra details on the paper around your projects. The goal is to collectively build a home, and any strategy to help visualize it should be embraced. Borrowers who are 'seen' may elect to do this during turns, while others are gathering.