

# AN INORDINATE FONDNESS

*WE HOPE THAT, WHEN THE INSECTS TAKE OVER THE WORLD, THEY WILL  
REMEMBER WITH GRATITUDE HOW WE TOOK THEM ALONG  
ON ALL OUR PICNICS. -BILL VAUGHAN*

*LONG AFTER THE BOMB FALLS AND YOU AND YOUR GOOD DEEDS  
ARE GONE, COCKROACHES WILL STILL BE HERE,  
PROWLING THE STREETS LIKE ARMORED CARS. -TAMA JANOWITZ*

## MARK VALLIANATOS

**:: FEBRUARY 2007 VERSION ::**

## CONTENTS

They were inverted: wearing their shells inside their flesh, vulnerable to kin and enemies, the entire world.

They were builders whose nests were constructed to outlast their civilization.

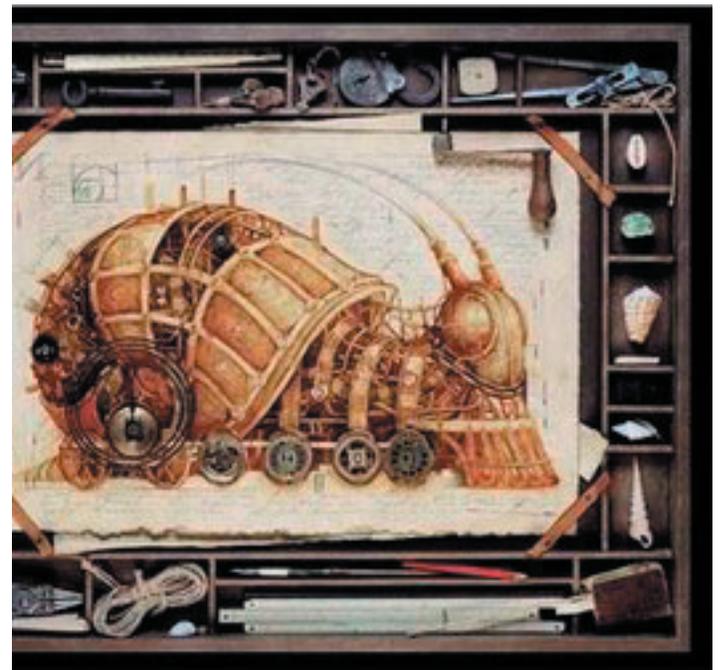
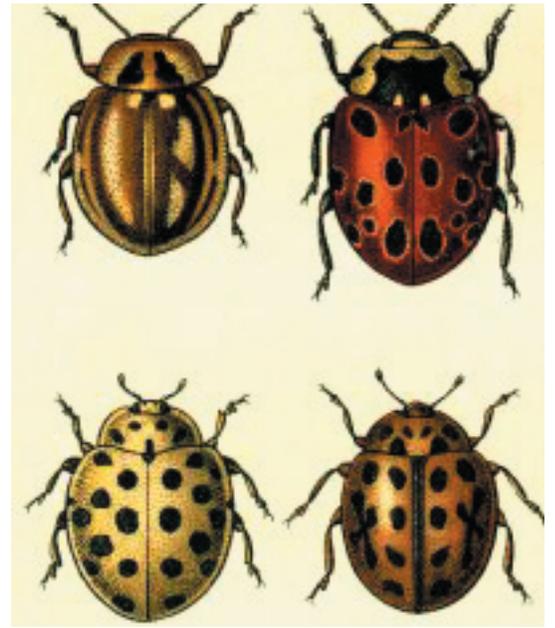
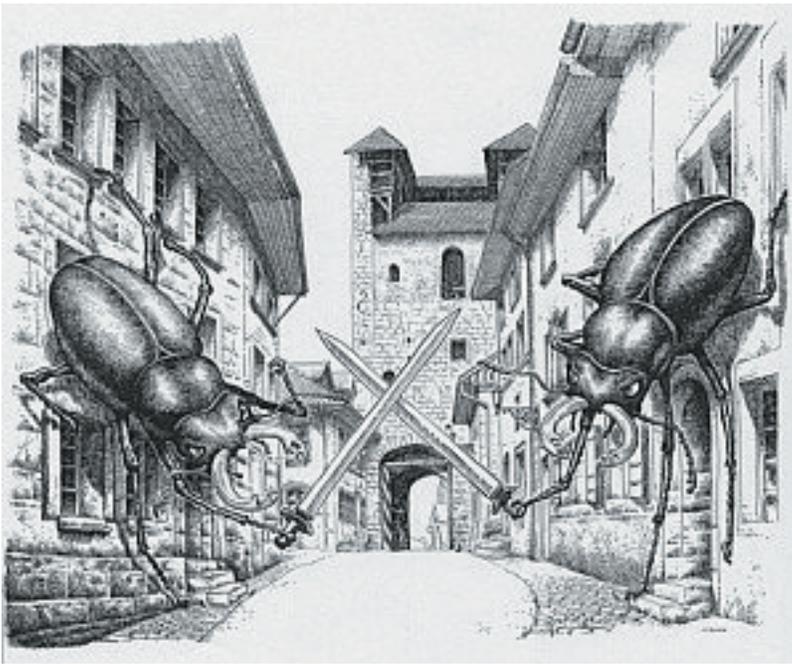
They were hoarders whose lives revolved around vast collection of manufactured items, some so esoteric that our wisest scholars are just beginning to decipher their use or ritual meaning.

They were obsessed with death and the afterlife, preserving their dead in mobile metal tombs, on fabric platforms, in subterranean boxes.

They were uniform, their queens and warriors no more than five or six fold larger than the smallest minor castes and young. Even more astoundingly, they exhibited zero variation in body structure, evolving their vast nests and complex civilization without the aid of morphological specialization. (Some scholars point to the small quadrupeds whose skeletons have been found in their nests as a potential sub caste but the consensus is that these beings were symbiotes or favored prey species.) In any case, this lack of variety in their selves undoubtedly manifested in their culture as the urge to create that bewildering diversity of artifacts that characterizes their legacy.

They were impractical, dedicated to ritual and whimsy. As example, our sisters the spider can efficiently manufacture strong silks at body temperature from the digested flesh of prey. The inverted ones also created and wove strong filament materials, but as far as we can tell, they spun them in an intense acid bath heated to immensely high temperatures: it must have been a diabolical opera of heat and pressure and noxious gases, and it speaks volumes of their outlook on the world and propensity for exaggerated symbolic gestures.

- 1 :: THEY WERE**
- 2 :: INTRO**
- 3 :: PREPARE**
- 3 :: STATUS**
- 3 :: CHARACTERS**
- 4 :: INSECT CARDS**
- 4 :: TARGET CARD**
- 4 :: EXPLORATION CARDS**
- 4 :: DISCOVERY**
- 5 :: CONFLICT**
- 5 :: SWAP CARDS**
- 5 :: REVEAL CARDS**
- 6 :: ORPHANED DISCOVERIES**
- 6 :: THEORIZE**
- 7 :: COMPARE CARDS**
- 7 :: STATUS AGAIN**
- 8 :: REPLACE DEAD**



# INTRO

Intelligent insect societies have inherited the earth following the extinction of humanity. Characters are man-sized social insects – ants, termites, wasps, or bees – reacting to, exploring the relics of, and misinterpreting their human predecessors. Since the bugs are newly sentient they don't have any sense of history. They don't remember that humans viewed insects as inconsequential - when they weren't exterminating them as pests.

The game's title is from an anecdote about the biologist J.B.S. Haldane, who, when asked what one could infer about the creator from studying nature, is reported to have replied: 'an inordinate fondness for beetles.' The phrase also stands in for the insects' romanticization of humankind.

This game was written for the bibliodyssey rpg design challenge run by Nathan Paoletta, based on a insect-centric set of images chosen by Mike Addison. Thanks to both for the inspiration. Influences beyond the image set include the book *Motel of the Mysteries* by David Mccauley and the original *Gamma World* rpg by Jim Ward. I've enjoyed help play test Judson Lester's *Repertoire* and Jim Pinto's *George's Children*, both interesting post apocalyptic games, and their multi-stage structure influenced this design. Joshua BishopRoby's *Agora* and my own game-in-progress *Manifesto* gave me some ideas for the interpretation phase. The distorted psychourban shadow of *Lacuna*, by Jared Sorenson, also looms over *An Inordinate Fondness*.

Players control intelligent social insects that are exploring, misinterpreting and mythologizing the structures and detritus of vanished human civilizations. The game rotates between two phases: Exploration and Interpretation. During the exploration phase, the insect characters visit a building left over from when humans ruled planet earth. A flipped playing card indicates the type of structure: anything from humble tract houses and corner stores to the grandest stadiums and skyscrapers. A second card reveals whether the building is still pristine or is a pile of ruins to be dug through. Another card shows what type of conflict that the insects will face while exploring. A final card, kept face down, holds the key to overcoming the challenge. Players each choose a single object from or aspect of the building as their character's discovery. After higher status characters have a chance to swap cards with those of lower status, players reveal their cards. Players with a card that is the same as or adjacent to the hidden target card have survived the conflict. Surviving insects carry the discoveries back to the nest.

During the interpretation phase, players share their discoveries with the nest, (misinterpret) what the vanished humans used the discovered items/structures for, and create theories about the vanished race based on the new discoveries. Players can propose new theories, support theories, or try to dissent from established theories. Flipped cards are compared as poker hands, players that win have their arguments accepted by the nest, earning status that will help their insects the next time they are out exploring.

# STEP ONE: PREPARE TO PLAY

A game of an Inordinate Fondness requires at least two players, a deck of playing cards and a way to write (pen/paper or a computer).

The character are all nest mates from a single colony of social insects. Players decide whether to play as ants, bees, termites, or wasps. There are no game mechanic differences between the four insect types, but there are distinctions that will color the story. For example, bee and wasp characters can fly.

# STEP TWO: DETERMINE STATUS

For the opening exploration phase, each player draws a single card to determine their character's status within the group of insects heading out to explore the human ruins. Queens are high, followed by kings, jacks, tens and on down to aces, which are low. Players compare cards to determine status rankings. In the event of any ties, older players are given higher status.

# STEP THREE: NAME CHARACTERS

After players know what kind of insects their character are, and set status rankings, they should name the characters. Players probably want to discuss what kind of naming scheme is common in their nest. Do their insects go by bureaucratic designations (drone #3873, worker class Z40 from grub zone blue-20, etc.), have they earned names from accomplishments (the warrior who sliced the green centipede, crumb gatherer who grooms like silk, etc). Or have they adapted skewed versions of human symbols that their nests have discovered (HONDA, Epluribusunum, etc.).

# STEP FOUR: DRAW INSECT CARDS

Players each draw three cards. Without looking at the cards, players place them in a row in front of them. The front card in the row (farthest from each player) represents the head of their character, the middle row card in the thorax, and the rear card is the abdomen. Later in the exploration phase, players will try to draw upon these cards to overcome obstacles. When this occurs, the three different body segments will flavor narrations according to their biological functions.

Head: sensing, biting, manipulating with mouthparts

Thorax: running, flying, manipulating with legs

Abdomen: reproducing, digesting, stinging, emitting chemicals

*Adam, Gregor, and Heather sit down for a game of an Inordinate Fondness. They decide they will be ants, since they like the idea of a column of enormous ants crawling up and down ruined buildings.*

*Adam draws an ace of clubs, Gregor a 4 of clubs, and Heather an ace of diamonds. Gregor's 4 is highest so his character will have top status. Adam is older than Heather so the status order will be Gregor, Adam, Heather.*

*The players decide their ants will all be 'sisters' followed by a short description. Adam's character is sister small red. Gregor's is sister five legs. Heather's character is named sister scowl.*

*Adam draws a king of diamonds for his head, two of clubs for thorax, two of diamonds for abdomen.*

*Gregor gets a three of diamonds for head, six of diamonds for thorax, five of clubs for abdomen. Heather's cards are six of clubs for head, four of clubs for thorax, ten of hearts for abdomen.*

## STEP FIVE: PICK TARGET CARD

A single card is taken from the deck and placed face down in the center of the table. The concealed value of the card is the target which players will try to be able to match or have a card adjacent to for the resolution of the conflict during the upcoming exploration phase.

## STEP SIX: EXPLORATION CARDS

Players take turns drawing cards that will indicate what structure their character will explore, the condition of the structure, and what kind of conflict the characters will face while in the location. The player with the highest status assigns these three cards to different players.

The suits of location and conflict cards suggest broad types of buildings and types of threats to the expedition.

Location: club: government/municipal, diamond: commercial, heart: domestic, spade: industrial or monumental

Conflict: club: competing nests, diamond: other insects, heart: conflict inside the expedition, spade: threats from the location itself

Condition cards suggest how well maintained the structure is, with a low draw of ace, 2, 3 etc meaning the building is ruined or significantly degraded in some way; and higher cards (with Queen high followed by King) showing that the building is in nearly pristine condition.

Once cards are picked, the player assigned each role expands upon the information to set the stage for the exploration phase. The player taking the location describes how the insects find the building and what it looks like (remembering to not describe it with shortcuts of human familiarity). Then the player picking a condition card elaborates upon the description to tell what shape the structure is in and how the insects are able to enter the place or merely crawl upon and through the ruins.

## STEP SEVEN: DISCOVERIES

After the location and condition cards are explained, players take turns saying what single item found in the structure or feature of the building will be their discovery for the phase. Players describe what the discoveries look like but do not yet guess as their purpose or deeper implications. The lowest status player goes first and the highest status player last.

*Gregor takes a card and puts it face down between the three players.*

*Gregor decides that Adam will choose the location card, Heather will pick the condition card, and that he will get the conflict card. Adam draws a seven of diamonds. Consulting the chart, he sees that diamonds are commercial, and chooses a bank. Adam describes how the three sisters are following an old scent trail in a dense sector of ruins when they come across a stone building at the corner of two blackways. The building has thick walls and cylinders surrounding the entryway. A glimpse inside reveals a smooth floor and a grid of clearstone and a round metal nest cover at the other side. Heather draws a condition card, getting a ten of hearts. She says that the building is still standing but that scraps from the ceiling and all kinds of pulped paper and small metal implements litter the floor inside; while the metal nest cover, so thick it must guard a significant ritual center, is stuck shut so that the three of them cannot budge it.*

*Heather says that sister scowl is entranced by images on the inside wall of the building which show a group of precursors lined up with large animals, plants, and mysterious machines (a WPA era mural of the settling of this town). Adam's sister small red has found an entire skeleton with a small lump of moist green fabric or paper rectangles clutched in its hand. (money). Gregor's sister five legs brushes against a projection and a sharp vibration is felt throughout the entire structure; soon it grows muffled and stops.*

## STEP EIGHT: DESCRIBE CONFLICT

The player in charge of the conflict elaborates upon the challenge from the exploration chart, telling the other players what the threat is and how it is revealed.

## STEP NINE: SWAP CARDS BASED ON STATUS

After the conflict is set but before it is resolved, players can take cards from lower status players. This reflects the fact that lower status insects will instinctually defer to their higher status nest mates, defending them, looking to them for leadership, etc. Players able to swap can try to get a broader distribution of cards in their hand so that they are more likely to match or be adjacent to the hidden target value. However, players should be aware that during the interpretation phase, poker hands (of three rather than five card) are valued, so there is a balancing act to play between getting a spread out hand for the exploration challenge and a poker hand with a pair, mini flush (3 of the same suit) etc. for interpretation.

- The 2nd lowest status player can look at their hand and the the hand of the lowest status player and, if she wishes, choose to swap any of her cards for any card held by lowest status player. (Make sure that other players, including the victimized player, cannot see the cards.)
- Then the 3rd highest status players can look at the hands of the lowest and 2nd lowest status player and swap a single card with either of them (not both.)
- Etc.
- Jokers in a lower status player's hand means that it is immune from being swapped

## STEP TEN: REVEAL CARDS

After all swaps are made, all player turn over their insect card hands, keeping the cards in the respective segment slots. Then the target card is revealed. Players compare their cards to the target card. If any player has a card exactly equal in value to the target card, then their character has actively defeated the threat, and all insects survive. If none of the players have matching cards, then players who have a card adjacent to the target card (a 3 next to the target 4, for instance) manage to survive the conflict, but do not achieve a clear cut victory; while players that do not have an adjacent card must describe how their characters perish, get lost or exiled, or otherwise fail to return to the safety of the nest. Players with matching or adjacent cards should tie in the body segment that it is associated with their matching/adjacent card with so that their victory or escape is explained by one of the functions of that body segment. Players should also try to tie in any status related card swaps.

*Gregor picks a 5 of clubs. Consulting the chart he sees that clubs are threats from competing nests. He states that soon after the vibrations end, six compact, velvet-skinned ants of a notorious slave-taking nest rush through the door and menace the three sisters.*

*Adam, as 2nd lowest status player, can swap a card with Heather's set of cards. He looks at his own three cards then Heather's. Since his mini flush of three diamonds has him covered for the next phase, he trades his two of clubs for Heather's six of diamond. This gives him a mini flush decent coverage, with a low, mid, and high card.*

*Adam has a 2,6,king; Gregor stayed with his 4,6,10 and Heather's hand is concentrated in the 2,3,5 range. The target card is flipped over. It is the seven of diamonds. Heather groans, but Gregor and Adam both have 6s, adjacent to the target. The three players narrate how their character fare against the marauding slaver ants. Heather, remembering that she sacrificed a card to Adam, states that sister scowl automatically placed herself between the slavers and sister small red. A guilty-feeling Adam adds that while the velvet slavers grappled sister scowl, sister small red scurried out the front entrance. Gregor says that sister five legs grabbed the green slips in her mandibles then spit some of them into the air to cover her escape in flurry of fluttering scraps. ::5*

If no players have any matching or adjacent cards, then the expedition and its discoveries are entirely lost, and players make a new set of characters.

## INTERPRETATION PHASE

### STEP ELEVEN: DIVIDE ORPHANED DISCOVERIES

The discoveries of players whose insects did not survive are divided among survivors. The highest status player picks first among 'orphaned' discoveries, then choices proceed until all are claimed.

### STEP TWELVE: THEORIZE

After surviving insects carry their discoveries back to their nest (either the actual physical object or a description if the discovery is large or abstract.) Moving from highest to lowest status, the players with surviving insects take turns a) describing their discoveries, b) their conjecture about what it was used for by the precursors, and c) a theory about the precursors that the discovery suggests/supports/ undermines. Discoveries inherited by surviving players are still narrated by the player who invented the discovery, although in the voice of the surviving insect.

Guesses on the purpose of the discovery **MUST BE MISTAKEN**, although players can choose to be off the wall or tantalizingly close to the truth.

Players must either suggest a brand new theory about the precursors; add supporting evidence to an existing theory, or undermine an existing theory with dissenting evidence. Theories must be expressed as: "They were..."

*As highest status player, Gregor inherits Heather's mural discovery.*

*Gregor recounts the vibrations he triggered and guessed that the structure was a temple or meditation center to a deity whose effigy was kept behind the stuck door. The vibrations served to summon worshipers to pay their respects at the appointed time. Gregor's theory is that: "They were terrified of the power of some of their gods and kept them locked behind impregnable slabs, only to be visited at the most auspicious times." Gregor tells the other players that his ant is trying to establish a new theory.*

*Sister small red shows the nest elders the small pile of green rectangles she gathered. Adam conjectures that they had powerful medicinal properties and that patches were dispensed to heal infections that bedeviled the precursors' carapace-less flesh. His new theory is that the precursors lived in great pain and spent much of their lives applying soothing ointments and narcotics to their exposed softness.*

*Heather then speaks as Gregor's sister five legs and informs the nest that brave sister scowl gave up her freedom for the expedition and to ensure that these marvelous discoveries were recounted. Sister scowl would have wanted you to know that we found an evocative depiction of the precursors next to large animals and squat machines. She believed that this image was a pictorial representation of the metamorphosis that precursors, or at least an important nest or clan,*

# STEP THIRTEEN: COMPARE CARDS TO SEE IF THEORY IS ACCEPTED

The narrating player then tests her hand of cards against the collective wisdom and worldview of the nest to see if their theory is accepted. The character chooses a card or set of cards from all available cards in their hand. This can be a single high card (ace is low, queen beats king). Or it can be a pair, three of a kind, mini straight of three cards, or mini flush of three of the same suit. Straight flush > three of a kind > flush of three > straight of three > pair > high card.

- Players' hands are tested against a hand of cards drawn from the deck. The number of cards drawn varies:
- Establishing a new theory: 5 cards: success by the player in getting a hand equal to or above the deck's hand means that the theory is accepted, written down on the nest page, and ranked as credibility 3.
- Supporting evidence to an established theory: 6 minus credibility of theory. Success adds the evidence, which is written down under the theory, and adds one to the theory's credibility.
- Dissenting evidence to an established theory: credibility of theory. Success adds a written note of dissent to the theory and subtracts one from the theory's credibility.
- Theories reduced to 2 or 1 credibility are considered rumors.
- Theories reduced to zero are entirely discredited and can never be reintroduced.

# STEP FOURTEEN: CALCULATE STATUS FOR NEXT EXPLORATION PHASE

After all players have explained their theories:

- ☒ If a theory you introduced that turn (or supported the turn it was introduced) is still a credible theory: +3/+1
- ☒ If a theory you introduced that turn (or supported the turn it was introduced) is knocked down to a rumor: -2/-1
- ☒ If a theory you introduced that turn (or supported the turn it was introduced) is destroyed: -3/-2
- ☒ If a theory you dissented against that turn is still credible: -1
- ☒ If a theory you dissented against that turn is knocked down to a rumor: +1
- ☒ If a theory you dissented against that turn is destroyed: +2
- ☒ If a theory you introduced anytime is currently the theory with the highest credibility: +3 (no award in the event of a tie)
- ☒ If a theory you introduced during an earlier turn is knocked down to a rumor: -1
- ☒ If a theory you introduced during an earlier turn is elevated from rumor to credible: +1

*believed that they would make to quadrupeds and then ultimately machines. Heather says that this desire of the precursor's to 'shed their skin' for hard metal is supporting evidence for Adam's theory.*

*Gregor and Adam both face opposing hands of 5 cards. Gregor's 10 high loses to a powerful mini-flush of the king, 6, and 3 of hearts. Adam has a mini-flush of his own, which beats the 9 high of his opposing hand. Heather is opposed by a draw of three cards. Her five high is defeated by a 10.*

All bonuses/penalties are cumulative. Players' total scores determine the status order for the next exploration phase. In the event of ties, the higher status insect from the prior round gets the edge.

## STEP FIFTEEN: MAKE REPLACEMENT CHARACTERS

Any players who lost insects during the prior exploration phase make and name a new character.

*Only Adam scored any points. He got three for establishing a new theory. The status order for the next phase will be Adam, Gregor, and Heather.*

*Heather replaces poor, enslaved sister scowl with sister stretch-waist.*