



CORVID COURT

BY *Spencer Campbell*

Special thanks to:

*Rowan, Rook and Decard for making an amazing
system to base this game on.*

My incredibly supportive partner, Kate.

Finally, the Black Vale. You know who you are.

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Take Flight

You are Birds, members of the *Corvid Court*.

Many in the city of Nest would call you a cult, full of killers, liars, and thieves. That doesn't stop them from paying your fee to get work done. The Court has blessed you with power, and it is up to you to take flight with it. Soar high, don't crash.

What is This?

Corvid Court is a tabletop RPG about bad people doing bad things. There's no way around it, you're the baddies here. But the city of Nest is filled with lots of vile people, so "bad" is relative. Sometimes, bad people do good things. Sometimes.

The players of this game, called Birds, are part of an organization known as the Corvid Court. The Court, for short, does dirty work for people who want to keep their hands clean. The Birds take on jobs, and the GM will play alongside them to see what happens along the way. Oh, and are you actually playing as birds? Probably not, but that's up to you to decide.

What Do I Need?

You'll need at least one player, up to four, and someone to be GM. This game uses six-sided dice (d6). Character sheets can be found later in this book, and online at gilarpgs.itch.io.

Resistance-Born

This game is made using the Resistance system made popular in the RPGs *Spire and Heart*, published by Rowan, Rook and Decard. If you've played one of those games before, a lot of how Corvid Court works will look familiar.

However, there are some modifications, as this game runs on a slimmed-down and lighter version of the Resistance system. If you have never played a Resistance game, don't worry, I'll explain everything you need to know along the way!



Rules of Play

During play, the GM will describe scenes and situations, and the Birds will respond. Most of the time that prompts the GM to describe some more, and the Birds respond again. This is called roleplaying. But because Corvid Court is a game, we're going to need to roll some dice.

When a Bird describes taking a risky or consequential action, they have to roll. This means they only roll when there are stakes, and when failure is both meaningful and interesting. If there are no stakes, or failure wouldn't really mean anything, then it's not a roll, it's roleplay.

A roll is made of a pool of dice. A Bird always starts a roll with one d6. They add one more d6 if they have a Skill that is relevant to the attempted action. Finally, they add one more d6 if their Domain is in play. The Bird rolls their pool of dice, and takes the highest roll to determine their result:

- 1-3: Failure, with a consequence.
- 4-5: Success, but with a consequence.
- 6: Success, and no consequences.

Consequences, Resistance, and Stress

Consequences should be narrative complications that the Bird has to deal with. It shouldn't be killing them outright (that's what Fallout is for). Instead, their character is put in a tough position, making them try a new tactic, or the same approach with the risk of making things even worse.

Consequences are tracked by stress, which is marked on a Bird's resistance tracks. Each Bird has three resistances:

- Claw:** Durability, bodily harm, endurance.
- Eye:** Mental stability, keeping a level head, focusing attention.
- Beak:** Social status, remaining undetected, Court status.

Anytime a Bird suffers a consequence, they mark one box of stress on the appropriate resistance track. If it isn't obvious which one, the GM will decide.

Fallout

All that stress takes a toll on anyone, even cutthroats like the Corvid Court. The more stress a Bird takes, the more likely the next consequence they suffer will have a lasting impact. If the highest die in a roll is less than or equal to the current stress for that resistance, the Bird suffers Fallout. This check is made after marking any stress from consequences of the roll.

A Fallout is an even worse consequence. Usually Fallout are permanent changes to the character, or at the very least are going to require some real work to fix. That doesn't necessarily mean dead, but something very bad happens. The severity should be based on the amount of stress the Bird had when the Fallout was triggered.

The GM will tell the Bird what has happened, the Bird has to fix it. Some examples of Fallout are listed below. Feel free to work together as a table to come up with an appropriate consequence.

Examples of Fallout

- Claw: Bleeding out, lose a limb, break so many bones, die.
- Eye: New phobia, hallucinations, mental breakdown, insanity.
- Beak: Cover blown, betrayal, Court blacklists you, go broke.



Removing Stress & Refresh

Once Birds realize how bad Fallout can be, they are going to want to get rid of their stress. There are four ways to remove stress.

First, anytime a Bird takes Fallout, they clear all of the stress they have in the track that triggered the Fallout. They keep their other stress though.

Second, they can just lay low for a while, recovering from whatever ails them and waiting for the storm to pass. If the players want to do this, that's completely fine, but let them know there might be fictional consequences to their inaction.

Maybe their window of opportunity to move on a target has shrunk, or while they were recovering their target shored up their defenses. The GM should decide how much stress is cleared when laying low, though the amount should depend on how long the Birds are staying cooped up.



Third, each class has a Refresh action. Birds and the GM should work together to decide what would qualify as their refresh action. If a Bird completes their Refresh, they roll a d6 and remove that much stress from their character, from whichever resistance tracks they like.

It is important for the GM to make refresh opportunities for the Birds. Without them, the stress will overwhelm them quickly and they'll break before they finish their first job.

Finally, all stress is removed at the end of the session, regardless of the outcome. Birds always take on their next job fresh and ready to fly.

Skills

Skills are labels for a set of related talents and actions. When a Bird makes a roll, they get an extra die if they have a Skill that is relevant to the task at hand. There are seven Skills:

- Caw - Commanding, compelling, persuading.
- Chirp - Deceiving, lying, misdirection.
- Dive - Pursuing, hunting, chasing.
- Glide - Sneaking, avoiding, blending.
- Murder - Killing, harming, lashing out.
- Spy - Studying, perceiving, understanding.
- Swoop - Stealing, finesse, throat cutting.



Domains

While Skills represent a set of related talents, Domains represent expertise or knowledge in a broad discipline. When a Bird makes a roll, they get an extra die if they have a Domain that is relevant to the task at hand.

Domains are added to the roll if they are directly related to the action (powering up an ancient engine is Tech) but also if the action is indirectly related to the task (attacking the mad sorcerer is Occult). There are seven Domains:

- **Bind** - Law, order, and bureaucracy keeping Nest together
- **Coin** - The flow of coin and trade
- **Courts** - “Legitimate” syndicates doing dirty work.
- **Crime** - Illegal organizations and networks, not Courts.
- **Occult** - The arcane arts of Nest.
- **Tech** - Working with old and new technology.
- **Worship** - The many faiths, followings, and creeds of Nest.

Combat

So what happens when a Bird decides to hurt someone? You’ll most likely be rolling Murder, plus any relevant Domain depending on the target or location. NPCs don’t have hit points to whittle down here.

The assumption is that if you try to Murder someone, and you succeed, they are murdered. This is especially the case for most run-of-the-mill goons out there. If you are facing a particularly formidable or dangerous foe, maybe you have to hit them a few times before they drop. But I’ll let your GM decide that.



Creating a Bird

Ready to take to the skies and work for the Corvid Court? Of course you are! Let's make a Bird.

Choose Your Background

You did something before the Court took you in. It may not have been glamorous, but you learned something from it, and the Court thinks that you have some value. Each background starts with some Skills and Domains.

Urchin

Gain Chirp and Swoop. You learned a lot from your time living on the streets of Nest. Have you always lived on the streets? Did you have companions, or did you prefer to go solo?

Cutthroat

Gain Murder and Crime. You've done pretty terrible things, just for a bit of coin or a hot meal. What was the worst job you took on? What did you do that got the Court's attention?

Trader

Gain Caw and Coin. You used to help the coin in Nest flow, but a deal went wrong. What did you used to trade in? What connection do you have that the Court finds valuable?

Scholar

Gain Spy and Tech. You once studied and taught many of the growing minds in Nest. What subject did you excel in? What paper or project of yours got you in trouble at your school, but gained you favor with the Court?

Priest

Gain Caw and Worship. You preached the good word of one of the many faiths or creeds of Nest. What was your faith, whom did you worship? Do you still believe, why?

Cultist

Gain Glide and Occult. Your beliefs are considered dangerous, heretical, maybe even insane. What was the ultimate goal of your cult? Does the Court fully understand your connection and role in the cult?

Wealthy

Gain Bind and Coin. You provide a face of legitimacy to the Court, and a revenue stream if they need it. Why endanger your comfortable lifestyle to work for the Court? What responsibilities do you need to keep up with when not doing Court work?



Choose Your Class

There are four different types of Birds, called classes, that you can play as. Familiarize yourself with each of the classes and then choose the one that fits the play-style you want.

Each class starts with some Skills and Domains. If you already have one of them from your Background, just choose another. You'll find a description for each class on the pages that follow, as well as a blank character sheet to fill in your details.

Choose an Ability and Equipment

Each class has a core ability that they start with. You also get to choose one more during character creation. Don't worry, you'll be able to unlock the others the more you play (assuming your Bird lasts that long). Running this as a one-shot? Have each Bird start with two advances as well.

The last thing to do is to describe three pieces of equipment that you keep on you. This isn't an exhaustive list of everything you carry, but instead three of the most important things you own.

These don't serve a purpose mechanically, but they may provide opportunities during roleplay that you may be able to take advantage of. Work together with the entire table when coming up with your equipment; you're in this together after all.

That's it. Get out there, the Corvid Court has work for you.



Crows

Crows are made to kill, literally.

They have the Murder Skill for a reason.

Crows can enhance their strength and speed to unnatural heights, and terrify those around them that witness their fury. Perhaps most horrifying of all, Crows can summon a flock of their namesake to them, picking apart and devouring their unlucky target. Crows are all about shows of force, and so they refresh by destroying symbols of those who would oppose the Court.

Refresh: Destroy a symbol of opposition from one of the Court's foes.

Skills: Dive, Murder

Domains: Crime, Courts

Core Ability

Once per scene you may act with supernatural speed and strength. Doing so again that scene costs 1 Claw stress.

Abilities

- Once per scene if an ally would take Claw stress and you could intervene, you take it instead.
- Gain Bind. You have license to hunt public enemies and those wanted by the law.
- Gain Caw. Once per scene you can raise your voice in such a way that someone will either a) tell you what you want to know b) shut up in fear c) attack you.
- Once per session you may engulf someone in crows, devouring them. Doing so again costs 1 Claw stress.

Advances

- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain a Domain
- Gain a Skill
- +1 die when using Murder



Ravens

*Ravens are the opposite of Crows.
They prefer to keep a distance and watch, to see the best possible
solution to any problem before them.*

Ravens understand technology better than most, and are able to use it in ways others can't. For example, no door can hold a Raven, but they can also use any door to hold off the rest of the world. Secrets are their trade, and gathering them up to support the Court's efforts helps relieve a Raven's stress.

Refresh: Discover a secret that will benefit the Corvid Court.

Skills: Dive, Spy

Domains: Bind, Tech

Core Ability

You don't check for Fallout until you have at least 3 stress in a track.

Abilities

- All doors unlock with your touch. Doors may also be locked so only you may pass.
- When you take Claw stress, burst into a cloud of ravens and reform somewhere within eyesight.
- Gain Courts. Wherever you are, you always know the most powerful, wealthy, connected, and vulnerable people in the area.
- Gain Murder. Once per session you can study someone you want to see dead. The GM will tell you two truths and a lie about them.

Advances

- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain a Domain
- Gain a Skill
- +1 die when using Spy



Jays

Jays love to be heard.

That might be because they hear voices in their head all the time, and maybe they're just carrying on the conversation for everyone else to hear. Either way, when a Jay speaks, people listen. They can use their persuasive voices to control others, drive them mad, maybe even kill. Jays are even known to mimic the sights and sounds of others, such is their mastery of persuasion. While the Corvid Court prefers to stay largely hidden, a Jay finds great relief in spreading the reputation of the organization to all that would hear it.

Refresh: Spread fear of the Corvid Court to those who think themselves immune to it.

Skills: Caw, Chirp

Domains: Occult, Worship

Core Ability

Those who can hear your Caw will follow one word commands from you.

Abilities

- Once per session mask your face and voice to match someone who you have seen and heard. Doing so again costs 1 stress in Eye and Beak.
- When you Caw with mad jabbering, choose an effect on those who can hear: madness, pain, paralysis.
- Gain Bind. Your words create an unseen bond between and those you deal with. Anyone who promises you something and breaks that promise will drop dead.
- Once per session you may speak a single sentence, no more than 7 words, and it is true. Take 3 Eye stress afterward.

Advances

- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain a Domain
- Gain a Skill
- +1 die when using Caw



Magpies

Magpies are covetous people. But that's because they know there is power in possessions.

Collectors of all varieties of trinkets, valuables, and really anything not nailed down, Magpies like to sneak in, take what they want, and be gone without a trace. They see links between possessions and their owners that others can't, and they know how to pull those strings. Take a favor from a Magpie and you'll be theirs; give a Magpie something and you won't be able to lose them.

While they prefer holding on to whatever they get their greedy wings on, Magpies refresh when finding items that the Court would find useful.

Refresh: Acquire someone's cherished belonging to fill the Corvid Court's coffers.

Skills: Chirp, Glide, Sweep

Domains: Coin

Core Ability

Once per scene you can rummage through your belongings and produce an item that you need. It needs to be able to fit in a small pouch or pack.

Abilities

- **Gain Tech.** Once per session you can reach out and sense every valuable belonging within 100 ft of you. Rolls to acquire any item detected this way have an extra die.
- When someone takes a coin from you, they must obey a single word command you give them.
- When you acquire a trinket from someone, you can always track their location.
- Once per scene you may appear anywhere you can see. Describe how you got there.

Advances

- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain an Ability
- Gain a Domain
- Gain a Skill
- +1 die when using Swoop



Advancement

After completing a Conspiracy, every Bird takes an advance regardless of how the job went. We learn from our mistakes and build on our successes, right? After doing so, all stress is cleared. However, any Fallout might still remain, if it requires the Bird to do something specific to get rid of it.

Playing & Expanding the Game

At its heart, Corvid Court is designed to be a slimmer RPG using the Resistance system. Some of the best parts of playing a game like Spire is watching your characters become these incredibly weird and powerful people if they live long enough. Birds of the Corvid Court burn bright, and then burn out.

This means that a “campaign” of Corvid Court has a lifespan of about six sessions. At least, that’s how many advances you can get. After that, it is up to you as a player and as a group to decide if you want to continue to see where the story goes.

Your Birds are probably roughed up by the end of session six, but they’ve also become decidedly more powerful than when they began. Will they use that power to keep the Court in power, take even more power, or tear it all down? That’s up to you to decide!

Expanding Corvid Court

If you are looking to expand your experience with the game, you could consider adding more Skills and Domains, and increasing the number of advances a Bird can take. Whatever Skills and Domains you add will have a big impact on what the city of Nest is all about, and the tone of your campaign. Adding Domains like High and Low Society signal that you’re interested in class warfare, for example.

Use the blank character sheet in this book to brainstorm your own class. What would a character based on a Kingfisher look like? Sure it’s not a Corvid, but maybe there is a new Court in town? Tinker with Corvid Court, hack it apart, build it back together the way that you want. I know I will be, so I look forward to seeing what you put together, and showing you what I’ve done as well.

Nest

What the city of Nest looks like is going to depend on your table. In fact, you and I might have very different ideas about what time period this game takes place in, and that’s ok. Let me tell you what I think of when I think of Nest. Feel free to use as much or as little as you want, and of course make it your own!

- Nest is a layered city, one level built on top of the next. Transportation is much more focused on vertical movement than horizontal.
- Birds are usually brought into the Corvid Court, instead of actively seeking it out. The best candidates are those who have nothing to lose.
- Occult practices are relatively common. It’s not unheard of for a family to keep a talisman in their home, or practice a low-impact ritual on a daily or weekly basis. Anyone with any real power usually keeps that wrapped up.



- The currency of choice is called Seed, and it is made of coins in a variety of shapes, sizes, and values. But haggling is a common practice at all levels of Nest.
- The Cult of the Crimson Spire worships a city that visits us in our collective dreams when a blood red moon hangs high. Sound familiar?
- The Corvid Court isn’t the only one out there doing dirty work. Most Courts do not get along, but there are times when working together is essential for survival.
- Are you birds, or just humans in a bird-themed cult? I’m not telling...

CORVID COURT

CHARACTER SHEET

Name:

Look:

Pronouns

ABILITIES

Advances

Class

- ☐ Crows
- ☐ Ravens
- ☐ Jays
- ☐ Magpies

Skills

- ☐ Caw
- ☐ Chirp
- ☐ Dive
- ☐ Glide
- ☐ Murder
- ☐ Spy
- ☐ Swoop

Domains

- ☐ Bind
- ☐ Coin
- ☐ Courts
- ☐ Crime
- ☐ Occult
- ☐ Tech
- ☐ Worship

EQUIPMENT

REFRESH

Resistances

Claw ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Eye ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Beak ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

FALLOUT





**Birds
of a
Feather**

***Kill
Together***



GILA RPGS
2020