

THE GATESHEAD ENGINE

A solo role-playing game about a machine and dangerous ambition.

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September 8, 1880

Visit from Lord E___ today. Hushed conversation while his hansom waited in the street below, the horses snorting and shaking their manes. Word of our project has gotten out, it seems, and my patron believes we are beginning to attract interest from higher quarters. I did not ask if this development pleased him; his countenance told me it did not. He says we must move up our schedule yet again. Warned him that it would be difficult, but that I would strive my utmost to do so.

After dinner, I found myself restless and unable to focus, so I resolved to go and see the machine again. I put on my coat and made my way through the streets, collar turned up against the chill, past shuttered factories and public houses that cast their glow into the night like beacons in the fog, until I came to our workshop on the river's edge.

I stood there in the dark, and gazed up at it. The sheer bulk of the thing, an unbelievable complexity of glass and rivets and polished steel, hydraulic pistons and copper tubing that glinted in my lantern's light. A peculiar sensation came over me then, and I felt as if I were looking up at a giant wave about to crash down and drag me into the depths.

And now, as I sit in my study with the plans for the Engine laid out before me, I fear I may have been right.

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INTRODUCTION

The Gateshead Engine is a single-player game set in an alternate version of Victorian England. In it, you'll take on the role of an engineer creating a steam-powered mecha for a powerful

patron, chronicling your progress, thoughts, and fears in your diary as you go. It can be played in a single session (set aside at least an hour) or split across several nights of play.

To play, you'll need the following:

- A deck of tarot cards (if you don't have one, you can use an online deck like bit.do/serennutarot)
- A notebook and pen
- A candle or gas lantern (to write by; optional)

The Gateshead Engine is a hack of Alone Among the Stars by Takuma Okada. Support the creator: <https://noroadhome.itch.io/alone-among-the-stars>

SETUP QUESTIONS

Before beginning play, answer the following questions:

- Who are **you**, and why did you agree to build the Engine?
- Who is **your patron**, and what, if anything, do you know about them? Why did they tell you they wanted the Engine?
- What is your **community** like? What do they value and what do they fear?
- What will **the Engine** do when it's completed, and what will it change? (This may shift during play; for now, decide what you think the answer is when you agree to build the Engine.)

Sketch a rough plan for the Engine on the first page of your notebook.

PLAY

To begin, draw a card. **Minor arcana** represent developments or complications you encounter as you build the Engine; the suit and the value determine what happens. **Major arcana** represent major events or problems. (See below for each card's meaning.)

Now, write an entry in your diary. Begin with the date, and then recount what happened and how you reacted. Make the entry as long as it needs to be, from a single sentence to a few pages. When you're done, draw another card, and write another entry.

Play until you finish the engine, or decide that you want to stop. If your creation gives you hope, keep your diary. If what you've built frightens you, burn it.

THE CARDS

MINOR ARCANA

SUITS

Cups: Community (friends, family, home, the larger public)

Swords: Authority (your patron, industry, the aristocracy, the Crown)

Wands: Self (your body, your psyche, your soul)

Pentacles: The Engine

RANKS

Ace: A celebration

2: A loss

3: A growing danger

4: A nightmare

5: A keenly-felt lack

6: A change of course

7: An unexpected boon

8: A mistake

9: Unrest

10: Progress

Page: An attack

Knight: A discovery

Queen: A temptation

King: An end

MAJOR ARCANA

The Magician: Someone proposes a bold—perhaps dangerous—solution to a problem.

The High Priestess: A trial occurs.

The Empress: An external force is controlling your patron.

The Emperor: You learn an unsettling truth about your patron.

The Hierophant: The project violates a social norm in some way.

The Lovers: A personal relationship interferes with your work

The Chariot: You go on holiday. When you come back, it's with a new perspective.

Strength: You boost the Engine's effect, making it bigger, stronger, smarter, or more dangerous.

The Hermit: A figure from your past unexpectedly returns.

Wheel of Fortune: Pure chance moves the project forward or sets it back.

Justice: A revolutionary makes an appearance.

The Hanged Man: The project requires a major sacrifice to proceed.

Death: You discover a consequence of the project for which you were not prepared.

Temperance: You're keeping a secret.

The Devil: Your patron asks for an ominous change to the Engine.

The Tower: You have been misled.

The Star: Something inspires you to redouble your efforts on the Engine.

The Moon: Someone has been tampering with the project.

The Sun: Word of your project has spread to someone who shouldn't have found out about it.

Judgement: A prototype of the Engine is put into use.

The World: You hear rumors of a brewing conflict.

The Fool: It thinks. It speaks.

TIPS

Interpret the cards as literally or figuratively as you want.

Words have multiple meanings. For example, a trial can be a judicial proceeding, a hardship, or a test. Take advantage of that.

Feel free to change the setting to whatever suits you. Maybe you're building a rocket-powered mech in the American desert during the 1950s, or maybe you're building a colossus with a clockwork heart in the Renaissance. Pick any time of rapid change.

Remember: Once you release a creation into the world, you can no longer control it.