



Nasocorn

A game about Original Absurdity
by Colin Creitz

Nasocorn (*Colin Creitz*) v0.13

Nasocorns and humans

About nasocorns

The nasocorn, *Cornubestia planinasala*, a giant herbivore with two horns on its nose, evolved on the savanna alongside the human, *Anthropus sophus*, a sort of foraging ground monkey. Humans left their ancestral home and colonized suburban office parks, where they analyze their service management paradigms, and fail to deal with emails that come from cloud-based social networks twice as fast as ground monkeys can read them. Nasocorns came to the suburban office parks somewhat later, where they became a keystone species, grazing on median strips and stomping on unattended workgroup printers.

Diseases in humans and nasocorns; the background and global situation of Nasocorn

We now know that humans and nasocorns share about 99% of their genetic sequences. Because of their high degree of relatedness, and intimate association, the two species frequently act as disease reservoirs for each other; the Great Nasocorn Fever of '78, for instance, probably started when ground monkey Department of Transportation workers herded infected animals off of grassy medians so that they could mow. In the final accounting, the fever killed more humans than the war.

Rhinocerosvirus

And now, there is the *rhinocerosvirus*, which has become pandemic. The name comes from classical words meaning “nose horn poison,” and that's just what rhinocerosvirus is. By a stunning coincidence, it contains that 1% of genetic information by which a given human and some particular, potential nasocorn differ, plus a bit more that will patch a human's geno- and phenotype alike to that of a nasocorn. Fortunately, it only affects immunocompromised individuals, such as those under a great deal of stress from having evolved on the savanna as foraging ground monkeys, but being required to deploy integrated cloud-based social networking service solution portfolios, under extreme time pressure, in order to obtain tokens which can be exchanged for root vegetables which were dug up by a machine operated by an equally maladapted foraging ground monkey who was also compensated with these tokens. The digging-machine ground monkey sometimes dreams of digging the root vegetables up himself, maybe just one, and simply eating it as he squats in the field, but his Boss would become angry, so he does not.

Absurdity entails cruelty

The crunchy parts

The game *Nasocorn*

You should really read the helpful outline of play (Exhibit A, “Outline,” below).

Summary of play

Characters in *Nasocorn* are humans, unless they compromise their immune systems due to the stress of maladaptation, contract rhinocerosvirus, and become nasocorns. They are described in terms of their Skills and Instincts, a Pool of dice, and a list of Conditions that may apply to them. They are required to implement a brand-new, sophisticated Business Process from scratch, before the Boss arrives at 4.

Create a character, as detailed below

To begin play, each player (all of them – there is no designated game master) creates a ground monkey character, as described in the next section. There is a character sheet at the end of this booklet which you must copy and use. Anyone can look at anyone's sheet at any time during play, and ought to do so frequently, to help leverage your teammates' Core Competencies, which will be described below. Starting with a player determined at random, and proceeding to the left, each player in turn organizes a meeting which

Take turns organizing meetings that culminate in a test

Meetings that include nasocorns are demonstrably superior in every way

features that player's character and at least two others, and which culminates in a situation in which all attending characters will test their choice of Skills or Instincts against each other, as specified below. Characters set up meetings in this way whether they are humans, far from the cradle-savanna, or nasocorns; being a nasocorn is much more relaxing, if we are honest with ourselves. Nasocorns, as a rule, don't schedule conference call with the cloud services management vendor when they should be on their way home to a nourishing dinner of root vegetables. Instead, they organize impassive grazing meetings on the grassy median, or else they call for a face-to-face in the vicinity of stompable, unattended workgroup printers – in either case, quite relaxing. They are perfectly adapted to the suburban office park.

"I speak, Boss, without fear of contradiction: it was their fault."

Conference Room K

The Winner may or may not find mercy

During each meeting, it is possible that some ground monkey characters will contract rhinocerosvirus and undergo an eldritch transformation into nasocorns. So, at the end of each turn, check how many characters are still human; play continues as long as there are at least two of them (that is, until only one character is, or no characters are, not nasocorns). The last human, if there is exactly one left, is the Winner, and will meet with the Boss, who is also a foraging ground monkey maladapted to the suburban office park. This meeting is scheduled for 4 PM sharp, in Conference Room K, the one with the stressful landscape poster depicting a suburban office park. The Winner will almost certainly have to explain to the Boss why the sophisticated Business Process hasn't been implemented yet. But mercifully, that meeting happens after the game ends. If somehow, among all the characters, someone has succeeded on tests of each of the team's Business Process Core Competencies, then you've successfully implemented a sophisticated Business Process, and that mercy, the only mercy in the world, is wasted on you.

Play, in detail

Instincts

Instincts, for humans and nasocorns

All humans have the same Instincts: Throw Rocks, Forage, Wander, and Talk To One Person At A Time. When their instincts are frustrated, as often happens this far from the savanna, they tend to become confused, enraged, and exhausted, as we'll see below.

Nasocorns are better served by theirs, though

All nasocorns have the same Instincts: Graze Impassively On Median, Stomp, Charge, and Make Loud Noises. Their instincts are rarely frustrated, because they are giant herbivores that charge and stomp. They are never confused, enraged, or exhausted. They simply are nasocorns, two-horned and majestic.

Selecting Skills

Skills, for humans only

All humans have four Skills, chosen as described below. They have skills because they are foraging ground monkeys whose instincts mostly get them into trouble once they leave the savanna. When their skill is not enough, they fail it and become livid and exhausted, and unable to try again, as we'll see below. Nasocorns do not have skills, since they are giant herbivores perfectly adapted to living in suburban office parks.

Select Business Process Skills first, to create a list of your team's Core Competencies. Your team was assembled to include exactly the experts needed to implement your sophisticated Business Process!

To select Skills: Starting with a randomly determined player, go around the table. Each player selects one Business Process (BP) Skill that hasn't already been selected from Table 1, "Business Process Skills," below. Everyone puts a slash in the box to the right of that Skill on their sheet, marking it as one of the team's Core Competencies. The person who selected it must fill in the bubble to the right of the Skill, and thus take it as one of their own Skills; everyone else may choose it later. Continue around the table, repeating this selection process until the list of Core Competencies has (1) at least five skills on it, and (2) at least one more skill than the number of players.

Then select some redundant Skills

Now, everyone takes enough additional skills from the list of BP skills already on the Core Competencies list so that they have four in total. Fill in the bubble to the right of each Skill you take.

What, precisely, has the Boss tasked your team with?

Priorities

Core Competencies

Consider, for a moment, the Core Competencies list. Take a minute to determine what, to your character, this Business Process word salad means. Is your team tasked with strategically deploying a comprehensive distributed groupware dashboard, or comprehending a groupware deployment dashboard distribution strategy? Write down your team's goal, making sure to use *all* of your team's BP skill words, on your character sheet. It is not important that any two foraging ground monkeys agree, and they will change their minds in the course of play. They will discuss their team's goal and correct each other, since it's undoubtedly the most important thing in their lives right now.

Dice Pool

All humans begin play with four dice in their Pool, which they can spend to test their Skills. Nasocorns don't have or need any dice in their Pool.

Test your Skills, using your pool – there are consequences to both winning and not winning

Making tests

To test your Skill: Roll as many dice as you like from your Pool (decide how many when you choose the Skill), and use the highest single die as your result. More dice represent more effort. If you win the test by having the highest result, remove all the dice you rolled from your Pool. Also, add one token to your Quarterly Productivity Bonus; the Boss values your contribution. If you don't win the test, remove all the dice, add two dice back into your Pool, and cross the skill you used off your list; also, check off the next Condition on the Condition track, described below. If the Winner of the test was testing a Core Competency, everyone should mark an "X" in the box to the left of that skill on their sheets.

Your Instincts probably won't help you, but you can try and hope

To test your Instinct: If you're a human, roll one die, not one of the ones in your Pool. That's your result, just as if you had tested a Skill using one die from your pool. If you win, remove a die from your Pool if you still have any. If you do not win, add two dice to your Pool and check off the next Condition. If you are a nasocorn, instead roll four dice. The highest value is your result. You don't have a Pool because nasocorns don't deploy solutions or set things on fire like foraging ground monkeys, so don't worry about winning or losing. Only think about grass, growing lushly in the median strips. Your lips are surprisingly delicate for such a giant herbivore; they gently pluck and shear the grass, rather than roughly tearing it from the ground as an ignorant human might imagine.

Grass and the lips of the nasocorn

When you succeed, you are always alone

Among all the characters who roll dice in a test, only one can win, and the rest do not win. If there is a tie, no one wins and so – naturally – everyone does not win. No one gets a Quarterly Productivity Bonus as a result of that meeting. Humans who do not win move along the Condition track, which is finally described in the next paragraph, because they are maladapted to the suburban office park biome, and the stress of this compromises their immune response.

The eldritch transformation is cathartic

The conditions and the eldritch transformation

The Conditions, to which only humans are subject, are, in order: Confused, Enraged, Exhausted, Nasocorn. As soon as you check off the Nasocorn Condition, you succumb to rhinocerosvirus and instantly become a nasocorn, a majestic giant herbivore with two horns on your nose. You should immediately stop whatever pointless ground monkey thing you were doing and: find a median and start grazing impassively; make a loud noise; stomp something, like an unattended workgroup printer; or charge something.

Witnessing it is usually quite stressful, and humans respond poorly to stress.

Any human who witnesses this eldritch transformation needs to make some kind of Skill, not Instinct, test against your Instinct, with the usual consequences for winning or not winning. If they can't test a Skill, either because they don't have a Skill left or have no dice in their Pool, then they just do not win that test.

Every meeting is an opportunity to succeed

Organizing and attending meetings

Each player's turn takes the form of a meeting, organized by that player's character. The meeting organizer narrates who is present – at least three people should attend each meeting – and what the agenda will be, then indicates who will choose their Skills or Instincts in what order. **“It's 9:30. You, you and I are having a stand-up meeting in the server room, because all of the conference rooms were booked. You two go first.”** Then, each player indicated says what Skill will be used. *“I'll Deploy, with four dice!”* *“I'll dashboard, four dice.”* **“OK, I'll Talk To One Person At A Time.”** Roll dice. Starting with the winner, if there is one, and then proceeding in an order chosen by the organizer, each player narrates either improbable success or implacable total failure. *“OK, I got 6, 5, 2, 1 to your 4 and your 3, 3, 1, so I win. I really need another token in my bonus at the end of the quarter, so that's great. I'm holding a cold-replacement server in place on the rack, screwing it in. I'm totally creating shareholder value right now. I am a rock star stud!”* **“I want to talk about my family with you, but your single-minded focus on deploying, and the noise from the servers, frustrates and Enrages me. I'm Enraged, and I don't feel like I have any buy-in on the deployment! I jump up and down and scream, but it doesn't make me feel any better!”** *“And I am anxious because there really isn't an executive-level actionable dashboard, it's eating me up and I can't sleep anymore. I'm Exhausted. I put my head on the table a cry a little.”* Finally, the meeting organizer can optionally lead everyone in narrating a brief wrap-up. **“By statute, I feel terribly Enraged. How does this all make you feel?”** *“I point and laugh at you. But, strangely, I'm not very satisfied. I am less full of dread for when the Boss comes, I guess. Still, I worry – are we going to Solve before 4?”* **“Not unless we can deploy this Dashboard that tells people who don't understand the problem whether we've solved it, that's for sure.”** **“If we don't, then we won't be able to show the Boss a portfolio of cloud-based solutions! Better get on that.”** Remember that foraging ground monkeys have evolved to fail.

Not every opportunity will be fulfilled

It is important to get buy-in from your team

To increase stress, invite more people to your meetings!

You would be much more majestic if you were a nasocorn

Nasocorns and your nose

The cover of this booklet can be worn over your (the player's) plain, platyrrhine ground monkey nose, if you have one, to give the appearance of an attractive cornute nose, such as a nasocorn glories in. This is appropriate when you are playing a nasocorn character, but otherwise probably not.

The future belongs to the nasocorns

Soon nasocorns will graze impassively on a hundred thousand medians, in front of ten thousand suburban office parks arrayed far from the savanna, never troubled by management or deployment or maladapted foraging ground monkey Department of Transportation landscaping crews. They will mock-charge each other, bellow loudly and stomp on a million cubicle dividers until grass grows over them. They are perfectly adapted for this.

Isn't that a grassy median right there?

Words: Breton,, Quine
Cruelty: Kafka, Artaud, Judge, Sapolsky
Game: Morningstar, Harper
Dream: Coleridge, Ionesco, IBM
Thanks: Jason Morningstar, Jackson Tegu
Playtesters:

Kaleigh Barton, John Daniels, Kathy Daniels, Joe McDaldno, Jackson Tegu

Exhibit A: Outline

1. Gather a team (3-6 players, roughly speaking, with a team of 4 being ideal); each will need a character sheet, a pencil, and a handful of dice (at least six)
2. Create characters
 1. Name your player (optional) and your character; check the box indicating that your character is a foraging ground monkey
 2. Select four skills
 1. Constraint: Among all characters, the number of distinct BP Skills (that is, the team's Core Competencies) must be at least one greater than the number of characters
 2. Constraint: There must be at least five distinct BP Skills among the team's Core Competencies
 3. A good procedure for meeting these constraints is described in the main text, opposite the marginal comment "*Select Business Process Skills first...*"
 3. Decide what sophisticated Business Process your character believes the team is implementing, leveraging all of your team's Core Competencies, and write it in the space provided on the character sheet, labeled "Sophisticated Business Process, Due at 4"
 4. Put four dice on your character sheet
3. Determine a starting player at random
4. Organize and play out a meeting
 1. Organizer determines who is present – besides his own character – and where they are – regardless of what Conditions currently apply to them. Nasocorns organize and attend meetings like humans. Every meeting includes at least three participants.
 2. Organizer designates the order in which each present player decides
 1. ...what skill to use (or Instinct)
 2. ...if a skill, how many pool dice to risk
 3. All players of characters present in the meeting roll
 1. A number of dice from their pool, chosen in 4.2.2, for a skill (these dice are then removed from the pool), or...
 2. one die for Instinct if a human, four if a nasocorn
 4. If one player has the highest value showing on a single die, he becomes the winner of that meeting, and all other players are not winners. If there is a tie, no player is the winner
 5. The winner narrates his success in applying his Skill or Instinct
 1. If he used a Skill to win...
 1. ...he loses the Pool dice he risked, as described in 4.3.1
 2. If it was a Business Process skill, everyone marks an "X" in the box to its left on their sheets
 3. If it was a Business Process skill, he adds one token to his Quarterly Productivity Bonus
 2. If he used an Instinct, he loses one die from his Pool if he has any
 6. The non-winners, in an order chosen by the meeting organizer, do more:
 1. They mark off the next Condition on the track
 2. If they used a Skill, they cross it off their sheet
 3. They add two dice back into to their pools
 4. They narrate how their characters become Confused, Angry, Exhausted, or Nasocorn
 5. If one or more characters become Nasocorn, then in an order chosen by the organizer, they then organize a meeting around their transformation using the usual rules starting at 4.
 7. The organizer then may lead the group in wrapping up the meeting's action
 8. If, during a meeting, your character comes to believe that your team has been tasked with something different than what was written on your sheet at the beginning of that meeting, be sure to write a new entry under "Sophisticated Business Process, Due at 4" on the character sheet
 9. If more than one character is still human (that is, doesn't have the Nasocorn condition), repeat from 4, passing the turn to the left
 10. Else, wrap up the game (continued at 5)
5. Wrap up the game
 1. If exactly one player's character is not Nasocorn, he wins
 2. If all characters are Nasocorn, there is no winner (likely)
 3. If all of the business process skills have an "X" in the box on their respective lefts, then the only mercy in the world is wasted on the winner, if there is one. Everyone should consider what that meeting is going to be like. Aren't they better off grazing impassively on the median?

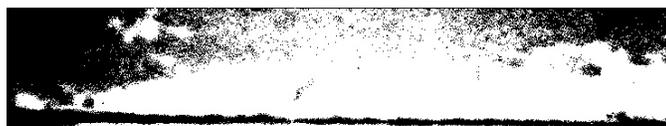
The page of flavor ideas

Ways to talk about succeeding

- Best practices (use this if you have nothing else to say)
- Best in breed
- Compliant
- Industry-standard
- Golden
- Platinum-iridium
- Rock star
- On fire (*fig.*)
- Process
- Win
- Empower
- Creating shareholder value
- Robust
- Repeatable
- Mature

Names for either a male or a female ground monkey

- Fang
- Nitya
- Krishna
- Kiran
- Kaoru
- Courtney
- Terry
- Karla
- Jeong-su
- Xiaosheng
- Widad
- Oluwaseyi (“Seyi”)



Ways to talk about not succeeding

- *Unmutual* (say this whenever you can't think of something else, and in a sinister way)
- Nuke from orbit
- Broken as designed
- Noncompliant
- Out-of-control
- On fire (*lit.*)
- Down
- Crashed
- Fail
- Casters- (*or belly-*) up
- Suckin' mud
- Naïve
- Improvised
- Underwater
- Worse than failure
- Leaking smoke
- Due yesterday
- Fragile
- Ad hoc
- Duplicate effort
- Obsolete
- Deprecated
- Lossage
- Plow and salt
- Bag-on-head
- Once more, with feeling





Humans and nasocorns evolved side by side on the savanna. Eventually, both species came to inhabit suburban office parks, replete with grassy medians.

Nasocorns are perfectly adapted to this existence.