

# DOIKAYT

A Jewish Tabletop Roleplaying  
Game Anthology



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# CONTRIBUTORS

## Organizers

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*For Howie/Dad, who taught us all how  
to love playing games*

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*To Evan whose creativity we admire,  
from your loving parents*

RMD

## ON PLAYING THESE GAMES IF YOU'RE NOT JEWISH

by JR Goldberg

One of my favorite Jewish folk tales concerns a young boy named Yankel. Yankel, by all accounts, was a pious and studious boy. He was the pride of his family and all in the village knew him to be kind and forthright. He had but one peculiarity: when it came time to pray on the Sabbath, Yankel would not go to temple. Instead, he would say goodbye to his family and friends and head deep into the woods, only returning at the conclusion of Shabbat the following evening.

One day, after years of Yankel going into the woods, his father begged him to come to temple. He implored Yankel, saying, "Don't you know G-d is the same everywhere?" Yankel looked at his father and replied simply, "But Father: I am not the same everywhere."

I share this story because it is at the heart of this collection. The Jewish experience is not monolithic. It is founded upon reflection and conversation and debate. The tenets of Judaism rely not only on introspection, but on the need for partners in your learning. Almost anyone that has undertaken the serious study of Talmud has at some point done so in a Havruta (partnership). Even the mere act of saying your thoughts out loud to another changes them and refines them, sharpens them, and guides them into directions previously unforeseen.

In some ways, it is this spirit that has allowed for the Jewish tradition to be mined so effectively for tabletop roleplaying games. In a roleplaying game, the narrative changes. It changes as the game unfolds, of course, as the story or object of the game is fleshed out and defined. But it also changes depending on the people involved. A game played with family and children on Shabbat would certainly result in a different experience compared to that same game played with new friends at a public game night. That isn't to say that one would be inherently better or worse, merely different. It matters where you are (and who you are with), for you, like Yankel, are not the same everywhere.

This same mentality was a major part of how Riley and I went about sourcing the material for Doikayt. We had both previously written explicitly Jewish games, but we decided early on that to put out work that only expressed our views would not truly be a Jewish collection. Instead, we took open submissions and pitches, working to not only represent games that we felt were mechanically interesting, but also to represent as many different viewpoints as possible in submissions.



The role playing game community can be in some ways insular, and the hope as we compiled this book was to find an audience beyond the people who already know what a lyric game is, or what “Powered by the Apocalypse” means. So! If this describes you, and you are picking up this book for the first time, or if it was gifted to you by a well-meaning friend: thank you and welcome. Please do not be intimidated. For within each of you, with nothing additional beyond some basic things you probably already have at home, you have what is necessary to play these games.

Firstly, think of this book as a kind of coffee table reader or short story collection. There is a thematic through-line that we have worked hard to preserve and present but there is no need to read this book in order. Find what seems the most interesting to you on that day. Find games that you feel would appeal to you on some personal level, that you have some connection with. If you are playing a game for the first time, personal comfort is immensely important.

There are very few wrong ways to play a TTRPG. As you look through this book and decide to attempt your first game, I would stress a few things to help your session. Before anything, look at any applicable content warnings or safety tools that the game encourages. Content warnings are there to help prepare and protect all the players. Safety tools are there for the same reason. While safety tools do not solve all issues (nor do they absolve players from acting in good faith at all times) they are hugely important to make sure that the appropriate expectations are in place for everyone at the table. Throughout the book, you will find safety tools that have been applied at the discretion of the individual designers. We made a conscious choice to allow designers to put tools in place that they felt would best work for their game. If you would like to learn additional safety tools, there are many that have proven track records of helping create safe playing environments. Feel free to research tools such as the X card designed by John Stavropoulos, lines and veils, and script change by Brie Beau Sheldon. All can be applied to any game and should be used liberally.

I would also encourage all first time players to go in to any of these games understanding that you are the true designer. If you love everything about a game except for one part, just don’t use it. If you think the mechanics of a game look great but you want to change the setting, do so! Everyone has designed and refined a game that they want to release in to the world understanding and knowing that our part of the creative process is complete. It’s up to everyone reading this essay to break and bend and twist these games to make them your own. Please trust that every designer on this project would be overjoyed to hear about someone playing their game in a way that wasn’t anticipated.

While our primary goal was to bring new players to the hobby, our secondary goal was in some ways the inverse: to expose existing players who aren’t Jewish to the culture and traditions that have shaped every contributor to this project. Because the Jewish experience is not monolithic, I will try not to speak for everyone, but throughout my life, I have lived places and been in communities in which I was decidedly other. There have always been people that have been special to me in some regard that I have wanted to share my faith with, not in an effort to convert or convince, but simply to help someone gain a fuller understanding of who I am. In truth, it has often been difficult.

This difficulty even extends to my wife. Raised in an agnostic household with no real interest in finding faith in any traditional fashion, she has often had trouble connecting with this part of my person, even if her efforts to understand were and are commendable. Describing the American Jewish experience and why I remain connected has been something I have repeatedly failed at. I find myself often faced with a choice to either present someone with a reading list (which, to me, feels overbearing) or stumbling through a truncated and paraphrased description of the rituals and aspects that are part of me.

When preparing my work for this collection, and helping to give feedback for the other designers, I often relied on my wife. As an avid game player with a decidedly different perspective than me, her feedback on the mechanics was invaluable. I knew it would be going in. What I did not expect was a newfound interest in the source material. In some ways, I was reminded of the four questions put forth by children on Passover. Sometimes, the simplest questions can be daunting and help not only the person who asked gain an understanding, but everyone present. I found myself digging for answers to help her, reading essays which I would have merely skimmed or skipped altogether previously.

It is Passover as I write this and the metaphor and timing feels profound. At a Seder, the questions must always be asked, even if there are no children present. A Seder between two rabbis would still see the younger of the two read them. This is instructional. We are never done asking. Perhaps even more importantly, we are never done answering. As people read this collection and play, our hope remains that all players, Jew and gentile alike, are made to discover that International Judaism has aspects that are both intertwined and multifaceted, that reveals themselves to us levels that are cultural, historical, emotional and spiritual.

The designers have helped to create this because like Yankel, they are not the same everywhere. But your part as the player and reader is even more important. You get to share and shape and change the things we have created. They are yours now. Always remember that you too are not the same everywhere.

# ON THE DIVERSITY OF THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

by Gila Green

I remember reading about a 2014 study in the *Nature Communications Journal* that confirmed what many of us already suspected; Ashkenazi Jews can trace their ancestry to a mere 350 individuals that supposedly date back 600 and 800 years. Indeed, the study concludes that similarities between Ashkenazi Jews are so intense that "everyone is a 30th cousin," according to Columbia professor Itsik Pe'er.

I have no background in genetics but I'm inclined to believe it. How else to explain the universally tight embrace of what's considered North American Jewish identity: The Wise Men of Chelm, golems, Yiddish, Rueben sandwiches, Jews eating Chinese food on Christian holidays, and a broad compulsion to hold Eastern European culture close, in spite of its often black and bloody history.

A review of the games in this anthology highlights all of these classic Ashkenazi Jewish elements that gives the work a familiar, comfortable feel. However, comfortable and familiar can easily slip into sheltered and unsophisticated and it's all locked doors and darkened windows from there. Any Jewish isolation means missing out on the spectacular rainbow-woven design that is Judaism. As a saying that nobody has ever heard or said and doesn't exist goes: Not all Jews are Ashkenazi.

As such, here's a glimpse into a wider patterned representation of Jewish culture and history for we dare not slip into a monochromatic depiction of Judaism that risks bleaching out our truly robust and colorful past. That said, on a more nuanced level, monochromatic suits an anthology of Jewish games perfectly. If that seems contradictory, stay with me. Let's look at another way of understanding the definition of monochromatic.

Fact, the mono in monochromatic means one. But rather than adding a second color to a palette, we have the option of adding the same color in a different shade and in this way, we create wild variety and retain oneness. From this perspective, we would be ill advised to begin thinking of a collection of Jewish creativity as anything other than monochromatic, as long as we ensure that we simultaneously recognize the myriad of shades that all stem from this identical, singular base. Done properly, the result is a deep appreciation of both the adaptability of the range of shades, and the irreparable loss to the cohesion of the whole, if even one variation is left out.

A wider variety of role-playing games would enhance the message and purpose of creating a uniquely Jewish anthology at the root level. Consider a role-playing game in which everyone finds themselves in one of Israel's maabarot (refugee absorption camp). Could it not sharpen the message of any Jewish historical journey?

In our fictional game, the characters are struggling Jewish immigrants from Morocco, Iraq, Iran, and Yemen living in tents, trying to solve the problems of having no running water or electricity.

Similarly, how bridging for Ashkenazi women to find themselves embracing a game that takes place at a Yemenite henna celebration. Perhaps, the henna is happening at a rented Chinese restaurant in New York on Christmas Eve. Or perhaps it's going down in LA in an enormous hall that has rented out one room to celebrate a Yemenite henna and one room to rejoice at an Ashkenazi vort.

If I were a player in this game, I would indulge myself, combine my Yemenite and Ashkenazi backgrounds. The uncle in the first room tips back his chair and tells a tale and, as in all great stories, he needs a trickster and his choice is the classically named, double crossing Joha. Across the hall, the new father-in-law in room two, stands and recounts an old family anecdote about the evil Hershele, the swindler's name in all of Eastern European Jewry folklore.

In both celebrations, the guests have to bless the bride and groom and the participants have to come up with these blessings together. It is via the overlapping blessings for fertility, for shalom bayit, and a life together until 120 that the interlacing between Jewish cultures will be most easily revealed.

Then the dancing begins and here, too, we will find the monochromatic palette with its myriad of shades. Back in the Old Country, Yemenites traditionally performed in small, indoor spaces thus, the many vertical movements observed in their dances, "as if the feet were sinking in sand or water," says choreographer Sara Levi-Tanai in a New York Times archived 1986 article.

Levi-Tanai elaborates, "The hands even look as if they were always praying." Yemenite folk songs and dances—still popular in Israel today—were particularly influenced by seventeenth-century rabbi and poet Abba Sholem Shabazi, "whose poems of longing are filled with dreams of redemption from exile."

In contrast, the Ashkenazi guests would perform the most well-known Eastern European dance, often a hora, forming a large, wide circle. Or they might go for a long line dance. In both cases, leg movements are wide and they use large amounts of space and broad steps. They'd get down to some serious shuffle walking, two-stepping, and plenty of stomping.

Alternatively, in another fictional game, we're all followers of Shabbatai Zvi, who proclaimed he was the messiah in 1665 in Constantinople, and there's an argument in our family between those who believe in him and those who think he's a faker, who will bring destruction. How different this would be from the common associations many Ashkenazi Jews have with the word messiah.

If we were to take Randy Lubin's game inspired by Jewish history, culture, folklore, and mythology, we would find more variations. Mythology is peppered with symbols and the common ones that spring to the Ashkenazi mind: the star of David, menorah, shofar, chai would omit the many versions of the hamsah (eye embedded in palm of a hand), sheep's head, that precise light-sky blue that surrounds the doorways of so many traditional Yemenite homes.

There are certain games presented here for which I can find no parallel outside of the Ashkenazi world such as, Adira Slaterry's choice to reimagine The Wise Men of Chelm, as an improvisational comedy game. The eminent Yiddish writers such as, Issac Bashevis Singer and Sholem Aleichem are not part of a literary canon generally close to the hearts of North African Jews.

However, there are plenty of far older Jewish tales that do have Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Yemenite versions, that same-color-different-shade feel. I no longer know the title of this famous story, perhaps, What's a Smell Worth? because these were stories I heard as a child when titles were merely decorations.

In this familiar Jewish story, a poor, starving man stops to inhale and enjoy the smell of fresh bread wafting out of a bakery. The owner of the bakery races out of his store screaming: "Stop! Thief!" before the poor man can go on his way. The baker demands payment for the poor man's enjoyment of the smell of the bread and a dispute ensues with the poor man insisting that the baker sells bread, not the smell of bread. King Solomon is called to pass judgment and, in the end, he agrees with the baker that payment is due. He promptly tells the poor man to take a few coins and jingle them by the ear of the baker as payment.

In one Yemenite version (there are at least two), the enticing food is meat, not bread and the payment is the bleating of a goat, not the jingling of a coin, and the revered King Solomon is replaced by the local rabbi. Jewish folklore that is the same but different.

Tabletop role playing games have common characteristics well known to their fans: players control specific characters, and those characters have essential fictional relationships with other story features. What stands out to me is the basic element to every role-playing game; the actual role playing. Participants must embrace the roles of the characters in these games and react as if they are those characters.

If we could role-play Jewish life in the nineteenth century from the black brooding clouds hovering over Jewish communities from Eastern Europe to North Africa, we would find more commonalities than differences. Apart from shared oppression by Ottoman sultans or Russian czars, joint messianic and religious traditions and motivation would stand out. Jews were on the move in the nineteenth century, all over the globe. That shared history is in all of our DNA, uncolored. It's a matter of expanding our joint monochromatic palette to the same great effect doing so often has in design: discord is reduced while harmony is enhanced.

There are the obvious benefits of role-playing games: creative and critical thinking, team playing, and flexibility. But that's in a general context. As a saying that everybody has heard of and everybody has said and definitely exists goes: Is it good for the Jews? If we can use anthologies such as this one to break out of our Jewish tribal isolation rather than fortify it, the answer is yes.





# AYEKAH

by Riley Rethal

## in the beginning...

one of you is a god and one of you is a creation. you each are your own beings, but you are influenced and made up of the other.

choose two words to describe yourself and one to describe how you see your counterpart: gentle, stoic, loving, creative, forgiving, humble, watchful, arrogant, uncaring, scornful, inspiring, wise, innocent, violent, heroic, demanding, isolating, curious, anxious, lost.

answer some, but not all, of the following questions:

- where are you?
- what do you look like to the other?
- who is with you?
- how do you communicate?

shuffle a standard deck of cards and place the deck face-down in between you.

## playing the game...

there are four types of scenes in this game: **ritual**, **request**, **offering**, and **event**. you must each start with a ritual, but after that you may play any scene you'd like at any time and end when you feel the story has come to a natural end.

## ritual

when you spend time alone or with those who are not your counterpart, draw a card. based on that card, let the prompt below guide your scene. what happens during this time? what does not happen? which is more significant?

*spades*: community, disagreement, inclusion, dissolution

*hearts*: peace, stagnation, tradition, tension

*clubs*: fear, aggression, isolation, danger

*diamonds*: scarcity, appreciation, desire, greed

## request

when you request something of your counterpart, you each draw a card. the initiator (the one who is making the request) draws first; the card represents their intention. how do you ask?

based on the following table, decide what you are intending to request. then, the receiver draws a card; this represents their interpretation of the request. how do you answer?

## offering

when you offer something to your counterpart, you each draw a card. the initiator (the one who is making the offer) draws first; the card represents their intention. how do you make the offer?

based on the following table, decide what you are intending to offer. then, the receiver draws a card; this represents their interpretation of the request. how do you respond?

<b>A</b>	freedom	<b>8</b>	a purpose
<b>2</b>	language	<b>9</b>	vulnerability
<b>3</b>	innocence	<b>10</b>	knowledge
<b>4</b>	community	<b>J</b>	violence
<b>5</b>	beauty	<b>Q</b>	love
<b>6</b>	innovation	<b>K</b>	power
<b>7</b>	security		

## event

when something special and important happens, that is an event. you may use this scene at any time in the game and you may pick from the list or draw a card. “you” in any of the prompts can refer to whichever player character to which it makes the most sense.

- A you must leave where you are and go somewhere new. where?
- 2 you must denounce a creed or ritual of your past. what is it and why do you denounce it?
- 3 the two of you make an agreement, a covenant. what are the terms?
- 4 you are visited by a holy messenger in person. why?
- 5 you voice a disagreement with your counterpart. how do they respond?
- 6 an important symbol of your faith is constructed. what is it?
- 7 you disregard the instructions of your counterpart. what is your punishment?
- 8 you write a prayer. what is it for?
- 9 you abandon a tradition or expectation of your faith. what is it?
- 10 you change your name, or take on a new title or epithet. what is it and why?
- J one of you decides to abandon the other. how do you say goodbye?
- Q you discover something new about yourself that was hidden. who told you?
- K you fulfill a promise to your counterpart you almost couldn't keep. what is it?



# IF YOU CAN'T TAKE THE HEAT, GET OUT OF THE RING

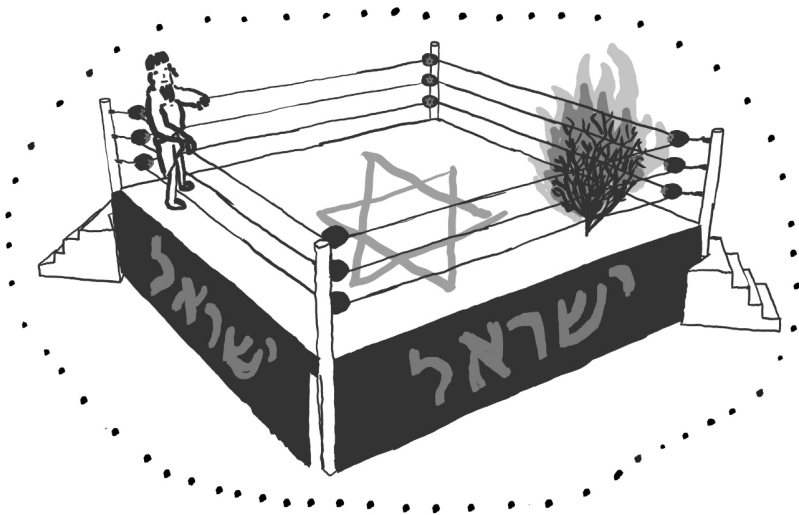
by a. fell

this is going to be the biggest fight of your career. you know it. your managers know it. this is the one that's gonna propel you to superstardom in your class. the bookers have to make this worthwhile for everyone to watch. the story climaxes here.

when you see who you're booked with, though, you're confused. your opponent is billed from parts unknown, which you understand, but you have never seen this name before—you've never seen them fight or even heard whispers of them in the scene. there must be a typo on the program, but when you ask about it, people give you a weird look.

it's not until you get into the ring and you're facing your opponent that you realize that you've been booked to fight an old man. or, maybe not? you're honestly not sure, they seem to be old and young all at the same time and you can't quite keep a memory of their exact features. and it's not til they smile at you that it hits you like a physical blow— they're not a mortal human. they are, you realize, god himself.

oh, this is going to be a fight for the ages alright. you've been waiting for this day for your. whole. life.



## THE BOOKING

this is a two player game. one of you will be playing the wrestler. the other will be playing god and the audience.

you'll sort of be playing a complicated card game called shithead, so you'll need at least one deck of regular playing cards with no jokers. you can add decks if you want to elongate the fight. if you want to try playing the game without telling the story a couple of times first, to get a feel for how the movement of the cards work, the rules of the game are included in the rules for the match.

the wrestler decides if they're a heel or a face. god is both simultaneously, but you both still ascribe to the rules of wrestling, of which there are many. (you don't need to know the rules of wrestling to play this game, but please abide by the laws of physics at the very least. god does not cheat at wrestling—at least, not out of kayfabe.)

wrestler, answer these questions:

- what's your usual gimmick in the ring? are you a jobber, booked to lose to boost other wrestlers? are you a monster, typically unbeatable? are you also from parts unknown?
- what's your finishing move?
- what's your relationship with the audience? you can be a heel that everyone considers to be an excellent bad guy or a face that everyone only grudgingly cheers on.
- what is your relationship with god? (you may actively believe in them, you may doubt them, you may not believe in them at all. but you'll never turn down an opportunity to fight them. this should inform your play.)

god (well, the audience), answer these questions:

- what's the draw of this match? (is this a headlining match, eagerly anticipated by everyone watching? was it an impromptu match no one in the audience was expecting?)
- what kind of match is it? (is it hardcore? is it a cage match, where you're enclosed in a giant wire cage? note: this is not a tag team match.)

## THE ENTRANCE

to set up, shuffle your deck of cards and deal three, face down, to the table in front of each player. these are your last three cards. neither player may look at these cards.

deal another three cards, face up, on top of the face down cards. these are the cards you play second-to-last. then deal a final three cards, which you keep in your hand.

you may swap out any of the face-up cards with the cards in your hand, in order to give yourself an advantage later down the line. (the list of wildcards is contained in the THE FIGHT section.)

deal one card face-down in between you. this is your booking card. neither of you will know who has been booked to win until you're nearing the end of the game.

the remaining cards sit in a separate pile, face down, in between you. whenever you play a card, you draw another one until you run out of cards in that pile so you always have at least three cards in your hand. when the pile is gone, the fight is reaching its conclusion.

## THE MATCH

whichever player has a four in their hand goes first (if neither of you have a four, then it's whoever has the lowest non-wildcard). they place it, face up, in a pile next to the draw pile, and then draw a new card. this is the first advance; tell the other player how you make the first move. the next player must then play a card of equal or higher value (or a wildcard), and they respond with a move of their own. unless specified, you always play cards of equal or higher value, or a wildcard.

any card not listed here functions as normal play and, indeed, "normal" wrestling moves. you can narrate the match as much or as little as you like. a 2 or a 7 may be considered a "deescalation" of sorts, but when you're wrestling with god in a match where neither of you know who's booked to win, it's really anyone's game.

if you have to take the whole pile of cards, you've botched your last move. the audience tells you how they respond— yes, even if god was the one to botch the move, they explain how the audience reacts.

	PLAY ACTION	WRESTLER	GOD (AUDIENCE)
2	resets the pile from the start	a near-fall (you try to pin your opponent but they throw you off after two counts): do you take the moment to rest or throw yourself immediately into the next move?	
3	acts as a blank card — the next player must put a card equal to the card <i>under</i> the 3 (if it's a king, play a king or ace)	you and god find yourselves in a lockup. what do you say to each other?	
7	the next player must play a card with a value of 7 or less to avoid taking the whole pile	you catch your opponent in a hold. how do they shake you loose? how does the audience take it?	
8	acts as a skip turn/ extra play	you land a cheap shot. does it get the reaction you wanted?	the audience is chanting something to try to throw you off. what is it?
10	burns the entire pile, removing it from play entirely	you knock the ref out of the ring for several minutes. how do you press your advantage?	the audience catches wind of how personal the feud here is. how do they react?

## THE FINISH

when you both run out of cards in your hands, you're nearing the conclusion of the match. at this point, you flip the booking card to reveal who's booked to win. if the card is red, the wrestler is the one booked to win. if the card is black, then god is the one booked to win.

once you're out of cards, you play the cards that are on the table in front of you. at this point you can choose to swerve the booking, whether or not you're the one booked to win, by switching one of your cards with the booking card. when you do that, you take the booking card for one of your own, and you break kayfabe. or you can play as normal, working to a booked conclusion.

once you've played the three face-up cards on your pile, you only have the face down cards in front of you. you cannot look at these cards before you've played them, and once they're played you cannot take them back. what does this look like? let's say you're the wrestler, but god is booked to win. if you want, you can play one of those face-down cards to try and swerve the booking; but if you play a second black card, you've botched.

the booking card decides who's booked to win the match, by the rules of wrestling. but the first person who's managed to play all their cards is the one who decides who's more worthy of true victory. (remember, wrestling is scripted, and your injuries are faked, but the feeling of victory or defeat you walk away with after this match are legit). god may finish with no cards in their hand but find they two were evenly matched after all, and consider their opponent worthy in their eyes. decide together what the end of the match looks like, describing your finishing move. if the final card played is a wild card, use its prompt to help you decide.

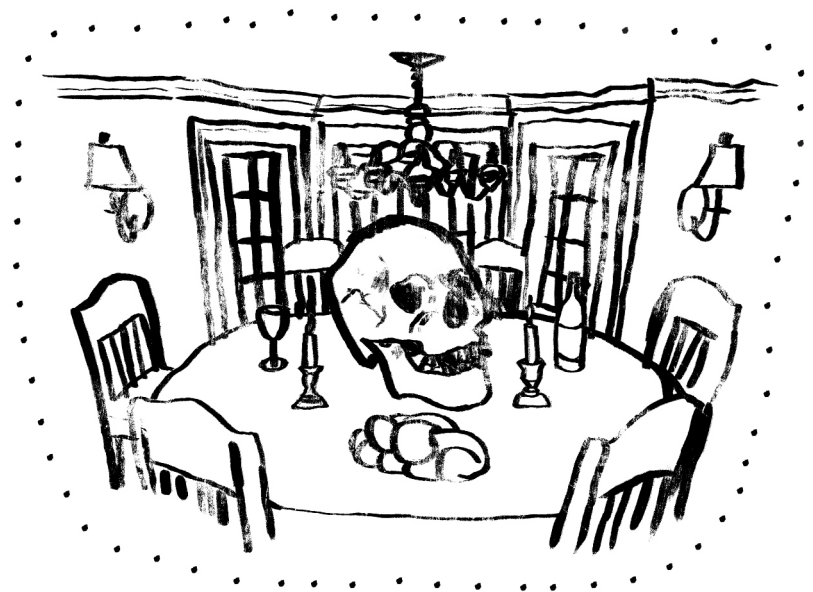
in the rules of shithead, the first person to run out of cards wins, and then their opponent must see if they can play all of their cards and finish with no cards remaining. you can play to that conclusion if you wish. if you can't finish your hand, it was a sloppy closer—even if you won the match. this does not mean it was a disqualification finish. god doesn't just wrestle with anyone, and therefore the match remains honorable throughout.

## DYBBUK CUP

by Marn S.

*Dybbuk, also spelled dibbuk, plural dybbukim, in Jewish folklore, a disembodied human spirit that, because of former sins, wanders restlessly until it finds a haven in the body of a living person.*

— "Dybbuk", *Encyclopedia Britannica*



THE ROTH FAMILY has been haunted for generations by what the family elders believe is an evil spirit bent on destroying their bloodline. Some members of the family have thrown themselves into investigating the curse, hell-bent on breaking it; some are ambivalent or skeptical, and some older members are simply content to pass the buck to their younger relatives. Tonight, the family gathers together for a meal to commemorate the Yahrzeit of Aunt Leah, the last member of the family killed in a strange and uncanny accident.



DYBBUK CUP is a game to be played at a dinner party or festive meal, preferably while eating the meal itself. To play it, you will need 5+ people, a blank place card for each seat at the table, an extra wine glass, a container to draw lots out of, and a number of paper lots equal to the number of players at the table. Leave all lots blank except one. On the last lot, draw a black spot on both sides. Put all lots into the container, and mix vigorously.

Before the meal begins, discuss which members of the Roth family you'll be playing, and what their relationships to one another are. This might include estranged relatives only in town for the dinner, close siblings or cousins, family friends who have been more or less adopted into the family, or something else. Write your name and a short descriptor on the place card at your seat, and face it outwards, so everyone at the table can see it. Throughout the meal, you will all be interacting in-character as the family, making conversation and building on the bonds you decided on during this phase.

Pass the container of lots around the table, letting each player secretly draw one lot. The player who draws the black spot will be the Possessed, the member of the Roth family who an evil spirit has attached itself to. In-character, the Possessed has no idea that they are serving as the vessel for an evil spirit, and must not act to the contrary. The evil spirit is merely piggybacking on their body and consciousness.

Throughout the meal, the Possessed may attempt to secretly pass the black spot to any other Roth family member at the table. The Possessed must act completely in-character while doing this, and must never be seen passing the black spot. The spot may be secretly be passed below the table, through shaking hands, on the bottom of a dish or glass, or any other way you can imagine, as long as it always ends up in the hands of one family member. Once a family member receives the black spot, they become the Possessed, and may choose to try and pass the spot secretly on to someone else.

As the meal begins, fill the extra wine glass with wine or juice, and set it in the middle of the table. This glass is the DYBBUK'S CUP, and the level of the liquid inside symbolizes the closeness of another death in the family. When any member of the Roth family

- leaves the room for any reason
- knocks a dish, glass, or piece of silverware onto the floor
- mentions Aunt Leah or any other dead relative by name
- raises their voice
- denies something to be true
- or refills their own glass of wine

that person must drink a sip from the Dybbuk's Cup. The sip can be as large or as small as that family member judges it should be, as long as some amount of liquid is removed from the cup.

Every time a family member drinks from the Dybbuk's Cup, they may choose to accuse another family member at the table of being the current Possessed. If the accusation is correct, the Possessed must confirm as much, and the game proceeds to endgame. If the accusation is incorrect, nothing happens.

If the Dybbuk's Cup is ever completely emptied, the family member who emptied it is killed in a strange and uncanny accident during the meal. Discuss what the accident is, and how it happens. Do not play the death in-scene if you are uncomfortable doing so, but play the rest of the family's reactions to it. Make the tone as tragic or as darkly comedic as you like.

The game ends when all members of the Roth family but the Possessed have died, when the Possessed is the one to empty the Dybbuk's Cup, or when a family member has made an accurate guess as to who is currently the Possessed.

WHEN ALL MEMBERS OF THE ROTH FAMILY HAVE DIED, the evil spirit has won. Let the Possessed describe how they feel about being the last of their bloodline, and what the evil spirit does with them. If the meal is not yet over, finish it out of character.

WHEN THE POSSESSED EMPTIES THE DYBBUK'S CUP, the Roth family and the evil spirit are at a stalemate. The Possessed may choose two family members who will be killed by the evil spirit alongside them. Describe their deaths, and the aftermath. If the meal is not yet over, draw lots again and continue as the next generation of the family, eating a meal on the anniversary of the deaths from the previous round.

WHEN THE POSSESSED IS DISCOVERED, the Roth family has won. Describe how the family members excise the evil spirit from their midst, and what they do to ensure it never returns. If the meal is not yet over, finish it either in or out of character.

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DYBBUK'S CUP is a horror game by nature, and safety tools are an important part of any good horror game. Before you begin the game, discuss and agree on what content any players may not want to see or hear about during gameplay, and write a list. Display that list in a prominent place throughout the duration of the game.

Encourage the players around the table to break character and speak up if they are in any way uncomfortable. A good rule of thumb for live-action games with horror elements is that if even one player is having a bad time, the game should be put on pause, and the players should have an out-of-game discussion about it. If the discussion ends in the players deciding to stop the game prematurely, there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

# EMET

by Evan Saft

*You are Golem, formed from clay and given life by a commandment  
You are Golem, living with Truth emblazoned on your forehead, and one  
step away from Death  
You are Golem, protectors of the Jewish people  
You are Golem.*

## What You'll Need To Play

- 2 or more players
- Pencils
- Paper

## Establishing The Community

Emet is a GM-less storytelling game. In Emet you will play Golem. As Golem, you are the protectors of a community. But before we know your story, we must first know the story of that community. Answer the questions below, either collaboratively, or in a round.

As you answer the questions, pass around a sheet of paper; this will be the map of your community. As you answer each question, add a new detail to the map.

*Where is your community located?  
How was the community first formed?  
There is a larger society nearby; how are the people of your community  
different from them?  
What is a particular tradition amongst the people of your community?*

## Forming The Golem

This is your community, but you are not necessarily part of it, at least not in the traditional sense. You were not born; you were created. Each player should take a scrap of paper and write the following on it:

אמת

This is *emet*, the Hebrew word for truth. It is inscribed upon your forehead and is a reminder that as Golem, you are beings of truth. It is also a reminder that you are always a moment away from death, for without the aleph, it would read

מת

This is *met*, the Hebrew word for death.

As Golem, you were also created with a commandment: your purpose and method of helping your community.

This commandment was written for you; you did not choose it.

On the paper where you previously inscribed *emet*, write a sentence of command for another Golem. It should contain at the very least a verb, noun, and an adjective or adverb.

Examples include:

*"Protect innocent children"*

*"Tend to the hanging gardens"*

*"Quickly mend the broken"*

*"Sustain the river's purity"*

When you have decided on a sentence and have written it down, pass your paper to another player who has not yet received a commandment.

This is now their commandment.

## PLAYING THE GAME

The story of your golem will take place over 4 or 5 acts, alternating between two phases: A Problem Presents Itself and Time Passes.

### A Problem Presents Itself

As much as you might wish that your community would not face any troubles, this is not the way of things. Your community will face a series of problems, which will escalate as time goes on.

At the start of each Act, choose the problem your community faces. Pick an issue from the Severity list, based on the Act you are in:

In Act 1 pick a problem from the Severity 1 list.

In Act 2 pick a problem from the Severity 1 or 2 list.

In Act 3 pick a problem from the Severity 2 or 3 list.

In Act 4 pick a problem from the Severity 3 or 4 list.

In Act 5 you may only select the Severity 4 problem.

The Act in which you select Severity 4 will be the Final Act.

When you have decided on the issue your community faces, read its description and ask the questions that follow. This will help define the exact nature of the problem posed to your community. Ask any additional questions you need to understand the issue. Once you feel you have an understanding of the issue, ask yourselves *"How do we Golem approach this problem?"*

Play out your answers to this question by describing how you attempt to solve the issue, but know that your Golem can only act in a manner that fulfills their commandment. When acting in line with your commandment, you will always succeed in what you are doing, even if it may not always have the intended effect.

As you play out the scenes, ask each other questions. *How do your actions play out? How does the community react to them? What consequences do they have?* Answer these questions open and honestly.

This phase ends when you can all answer the question *"Have we done enough to stave off this problem?"* with *"Yes."* When you can answer as such, **Time Passes**.

If you ever feel that your commandment restricts you to inaction, you may remove words from your commandment, up until you feel your commandment allows you to act to solve the problem again.

For example, *"Defend the town peacefully"* could become *"Defend the town"*

The verb of your commandment can only be removed when it is the final word remaining.

If you ever run out of words in your commandment, unbound by the words of your commandment, you may now act in any way you wish to solve the problem that faces your community. However, once the phase ends, erase the aleph from your emet to have it read

מת

as you resign yourself to oblivion.

Any player who has done so may continue to ask and answer questions, but their Golem will forever remain motionless.



## Time Passes

As Golem, time passes differently for you. Ages may go by before you are called to act again. Ask your group two questions

*“How much time has passed?”*

*“Has our community grown, changed, or shrunk?”*

Based on your answers, take the following actions:

If your community grew, add a new feature to the map. You may rewrite your commandments, adding a new word to it

If your community changed, select a feature on the map and make an alteration to it. You may rewrite your commandments, replacing as many words as you wish with synonyms.

If your community shrank, remove a feature from the map. You may rewrite your commandments, removing a word from it. The verb of your commandment can only be removed when it is the final word remaining.

If after a rewrite a commandment is not grammatically correct, you may make the edits necessary to correct it.

For example “*Protect the Innocent*” changed to “*Protect the*” can be corrected to “*Protect*”

After you have made these changes to your map and commandments, **A Problem Presents Itself.**

## PROBLEM LIST

### Severity 1

**Vandalism:** Your community finds itself disrupted by a group of vandals. *What form does their vandalism take? Who are the vandals? Are they known or are their identities hidden?*

**Libel:** A group has taken it upon themselves to tell falsehoods, demonizing your community. *What lies do they spread? How do they spread them? Who is listening to them?*

**Resource strain:** Your community finds itself low on a particular resource. *What is it? How have they been compensating? What has driven this to a breaking point?*

### Severity 2

**Illness:** An unfamiliar disease has entered your community, easily spreading through it. *What are the symptoms? Who does it affect most?*

**Violence:** A person or group has been targeting your community for physical harm. *What harm do they cause? Why have they not been stopped?*

**Food shortage:** Your community, while once prosperous, now finds itself on the brink of starvation. *What caused this? How has your community been dealing with it?*

### Severity 3

**Poverty:** Your community finds itself in economic despair. Far from just one singular resource, they find themselves without access to most necessities and unable to afford them from the outside world. *How did it come to this? Who is taking advantage of the situation?*

**Natural Disaster:** Sometimes the fates are unkind and the world itself turns against you. *What form does this disaster take? Was it sudden, or foreseen? Did your community have any time to prepare?*

**Colonization:** A group more powerful than your community has decided that you are to be subjugated and made to serve. *Who are they? What do they demand of your people? What restrictions do they place upon them?*

### Severity 4

**Extermination:** A larger society has decided that you are to blame for their problems and are determined to wipe out your people. *Who are they? How do they attempt to do so?*

This will always be the final problem.

Ask yourselves the following questions as the scene plays out.

*“Is this enough to stop them?” or “Is this the end?”*

The game ends when you can answer either question with “*Yes*”.

# JEWISH INSPIRATIONS FOR WORLDBUILDING AND ADVENTURING

by Randy Lubin



Jewish history, folklore, religion, and mythology can provide wonderful inspiration that you can incorporate into your roleplaying games. The following are adventure hooks, scenarios, mini-games, and historical background that you can weave into your sessions or incorporate into a new game that you design.

This chapter is far from comprehensive – Jewish culture and tradition is incredibly broad and diverse and we can only explore a small portion of it here. My goal is to give you a sampling from different parts of Jewish traditions and perhaps inspire further research.

This guide is written with the intended audience of Jewish players and game designers, and for games where the protagonists are Jewish. If you are not Jewish, tread carefully and avoid using stereotypes during play.

## European Jews in the Middle Ages

Many storytelling games are set in fantastic versions of Europe in the Middle Ages (roughly 5th-15th century) but they often lack Jewish influence or perspective. If you're running a game or building a world that's inspired by the Middle Ages, here are some significant aspects of the Jewish experience that you may want to include.

Much of Jewish life in that time was shaped by the attitudes and policies of local leaders. In Eastern Europe, the Magdeburg Rights were a series of local laws that granted Jews economic and political rights, leading to mass migration from more antisemitic regions. The Catholic church varied wildly in its treatment of the Jews. Some Popes would issue orders protecting Jews while others would enforce deeply anti-semitic policies.

Local leaders would often use Jews as scapegoats for any number of local problems including natural disasters and the bubonic plague. This would often lead to pogroms and massacres by their neighbors. Such antisemitism could peak with official expulsion of Jews from the land, as happened in England (1290), France (1394), and Spain (1492).

Despite waves of persecution, European Jews were able to benefit from several golden ages throughout the medieval period. Jews flourished in Iberia under the Caliphate of Córdoba and in Poland. In both cases, the regions became hubs of Jewish culture and philosophy.

### *Middle Ages Story Hooks:*

- A local ruler is considering a new set of laws that will cover the Jews in your lands. How do you persuade them to implement favorable laws which will increase safety and avoid antisemitic laws that will lead to persecution?
- You've heard rumors of another Crusade which will pass through your lands on the way to fight some far off enemy. The last time this happened, Crusaders massacred and looted local Jewish communities. How can you work with the local political and religious leaders to keep your community safe?
- The rulers of your land have issued a new edict expelling its Jewish population. How do you help the Jewish community flee across a hostile landscape to settle in new lands?
- Inquisitors are closing in on a community of Crypto-Jews who are practicing Judaism in secret after converting to avoid expulsion. If caught, these Jews might be tortured or burned alive – how do you help them escape their fate?



## Regional Worldbuilding Mini-game

Local attitudes toward Jews changed dramatically throughout the Middle Ages, varying from actively encouraging Jewish settlement to active hostility through massacres and expulsions. If you're running a game with Jewish characters, use this mini-game to determine the status and safety of Jews in different regions of your world.

For each polity (kingdom, city-state, etc), roll a six-sided dice and read the corresponding section on the chart below. Answer the questions tied to that stage.

As your game progresses, consider if the characters' actions might cause a shift from one stage to another. Achieving or preventing a shift might even be the goal of some characters or the focus of play.

1	No significant contact or relationships with Jews	<i>Why haven't Jews migrated here? What about this region might attract Jews in the future?</i>
2	Jews first engage with a new polity through merchant trade and commerce.	<i>Are any Jewish traditions difficult to maintain here? What are the commercial draws that bring Jews here?</i>
3	Local political leaders create laws that are favorable to the Jews in the hopes of boosting the economy; Jews immigrate to the region with hopes of safety and prosperity.	<i>Which local leaders are most supportive of the Jews? Are any opposed to the new laws? What is the hardest thing for Jews to adapt to here?</i>
4	A Golden Age emerges for Jews and their host country. Jewish culture, language, and folklore are influenced by their neighbors.	<i>What local traditions have the biggest impact on Jewish culture here? Which parts of Jewish life flourish most? Philosophy, art, science, community?</i>
5	Leaders scapegoat local Jews, implement antisemitic laws, and encourage pogroms and massacres.	<i>What local troubles have led leaders to scapegoat the Jews? Which locals help the Jews despite the risks?</i>
6	Jews are forced to decide between expulsion or forced conversion. Many flee their homes in search of a better life elsewhere.	<i>How do Jews maintain their traditions in secret? Where do the exiles flee?</i>

## Mythology and Folklore

### *Dybbuk and Ibbur*

Dybbuks and ibburs are both souls of the deceased who come to possess the living but they have very different goals and methods. An ibbur is the soul of someone who was righteous and good while they were alive. They're temporarily possessing a living body, perhaps with consent, with the goal of performing a mitzvah or conducting an important task. With their goal accomplished, they leave the possessed body.

Dybbuks, however, may be malevolent and possess a body to enact revenge or punishment. Like ibburs, they will maintain their possession until they accomplish their goal, or perhaps if exorcised. There were superstitions about what might allow a Dybbuk into one's house; for example: an improperly maintained mezuzah or a resident lacking faith.

### *Dybbuk and Ibbur story hooks:*

- Characters find a spirit possessing a human and must first find out if it is a dybbuk or ibbur, then decide if and how to help.
- The party may be shtetl "ghostbusters" who peacefully resolve dybbuk and ibbur possessions in the region.
- If a character dies, they could come back as a dybbuk or ibbur until the current mission is completed.

### *Scenario: Shtetl Spirits*

A Jewish shtetl is haunted by a Dybbuk and an Ibbur. The community is terrified and if it isn't resolved soon, Christians may interfere. The Dybbuk and Ibbur were both victims of a recent pogrom and have goals that are keeping them tied to the town – they keep switching to new bodies making it hard to pin them down and to know which is which.

### *Key Characters:*

- The Dybbuk is the soul of a Jewish tailor who was often bullied by the local Christians. He was killed while bringing home a menorah. As a dybbuk he is attacking Christians, destroying their property.
- The Ibbur is the soul of a Jewish matchmaker who spent her life helping the community. She won't rest until she finds matches for several eligible bachelors.
- The Rabbi is the community leader but at a loss of how to deal with this situation.
- The Abbot is suspicious of what's happening and suspects the work of sorcerers.

*Goal:* understand what the spirits want and either help them accomplish their goals or banish them before the Abbot intervenes.

## *Golem*

Perhaps the most famous creature of Jewish myth, golems are simple beings that are created from mud by inscribing them with a secret, holy word. In most golem stories, the creatures are created by a rabbi to protect a Jewish community from a threat. In some stories a character gives the golem a vague or incomplete command and comedy or tragedy ensues. Golems can be destroyed by erasing or scratching out the holy word that animates them. For more on golems, check out Emet: You are Golem, elsewhere in this collection.

### *Golem story hooks:*

- The characters are tasked with learning the secret word that will animate a Golem. They might obtain this word from the lost notes of a great scholar or perhaps from a lineage of righteous rabbis who pass the knowledge down from one generation to the next.
- A town has lost control of a golem and it is wrecking the building and threatening the inhabitants – can the players defuse the situation and restore order?
- The characters discover an ancient golem hidden in an attic or cellar after it was no longer needed; how will they deal with such a powerful and dangerous being?
- A group of rabbis have created a hoard of golems and use them to power a small town. They are used to harvest crops, grind flour, build new houses and shops, and provide transport via carried palanquin – all in addition to ensuring the town's security.

### *Scenario: Renegade Golem*

A junior Rabbi created a Golem to protect the local Jews from a pogrom. The Golem was successful but the Rabbi died before he could unmake the creature. The Golem is now rampaging through town and attacking any perceived threats to the Jews.

### *Key characters:*

- The local Baron who is threatening to call in the military and expel the Jews
- The head Rabbi who is desperately searching for the method to deactivate the Golem
- The local Priest who is sympathetic to the local Jews but has pressure from the church to oppress the Jewish community
- The Golem, rampaging through town

*Goal:* resolve this crisis in a way that favors the Jewish community.

## *Leviathan, Behemoth, Ziz*

Jewish mythology features a trio of legendary creatures: Leviathan, a gigantic sea monster of the Mediterranean who eats one whale a day; Behemoth, a desert beast with features of an elephant, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus; and Ziz, a massive bird that can block out the sun and lay eggs whose yolk could drown cities.

These creatures are near invincible and most characters should seek to avoid them at all costs. If they do encounter them, the best tack is likely avoiding their notice and rapidly fleeing to a safer location.

### *Scenario: Mega-Golem, Defender of Cities*

Situation: After generations of absence, Leviathan, Behemoth, and Ziv have returned to terrorize the land. They are tearing apart a nearby city and the only hope is to build a multi-story Golem to fight them off.

### *Key tasks:*

- Discover the secret word that animates the Golem. This knowledge is maintained by a lineage of Rabbis who live out in the desert – how do you find them and get them to help?
- You need a source of clay to create the Mega-Golem but the river is under Leviathan attack. How do you safely gather clay?
- With the Mega-Golem animated, it's time for a showdown with the monsters. How do you tip the scales in the Golem's favor?
- With the three monsters defeated, do you help the city rebuild?

### *Divination & Oneiromancy*

Jewish tradition has mixed things to say about divination. Certain types are prohibited, for example: necromancy, astrology, idol worship, and reading animal entrails. Other types are found throughout the Torah and Talmud, though perhaps none as prevalent as oneiromancy: the practice of dream interpretation.

The Talmud has oneiromantic anecdotes and specific guidance (*see Berakhot 55a–57b*). A key line is “*All dreams follow the mouth*” meaning all divinatory power comes from interpretation, not from a dream itself. Anecdotes make clear that oneiromancy is so vague, you can read any interpretation into any dream. Dreams are described as 1/60th prophecy.

### *Divination story hooks:*

- A local ruler believes deeply in oneiromancy – find a way to interpret those dreams in a way that gains trust or favor.
- An ally interprets a ruler's dream in a strange way; now you must ensure the interpretation comes true they aren't punished.
- Players can share snippets of recent dreams for inspiration.

## Jewish Diaspora for Worldbuilding

Diaspora and migration have been massive patterns across Jewish history. The causes have varied from expulsion and deportation, flights for safety, and seeking opportunity. This has led to Jewish communities spread throughout the world and a flourishing of diverse Jewish subcultures. The following are themes that might be relevant in game settings that involve a diaspora. If you're building a diaspora culture into your game, consider adding some or all elements of all of the following.

*Networks:* when a diaspora is broadly distributed, the local communities can become safe havens for travelers and merchants. The spread of families and communities across multiple regions can enable complex networks of trade as well as a natural hedge against any one place becoming too hostile to remain.

*Specialization:* diaspora communities might end up specializing in certain types of professions. Sometimes this is because specific careers are forbidden to them by law and there might be unmet demand for other jobs due to their neighbors' religious restrictions.

*Assimilation:* local rulers might push for assimilation to increase homogeneity or national identity while the community itself might want to at least partially assimilate in the hope of reducing hostility from their neighbors.

*Persecution:* diaspora communities can be seen as “other” or foreign, even generations after they’ve settled in a new land. They are easy targets for populist rulers to use as scapegoats: cultural differences can be highlighted, they can accuse them of dual loyalties, their wealth can be expropriated, and violence against them can be an outlet for otherwise discontent masses. The work of maintaining a community’s safety and security is never over.

*Homeland:* the result of the above might be a desire for a place where the community is not othered, subjugated, or otherwise vulnerable to an intolerant majority. Depending on the community this might be expressed through yearning or there might be active steps to create or return to a real homeland. Some communities or portions of a community might instead focus their energy on the challenges facing each diaspora community; the Bundist concept of Doikayt is specifically about this. If you're incorporating diaspora communities into your games, how do they wrestle with this tension?

## Character Building Mini-game: A Party From Across the Diaspora

The player characters all come from different regions of the diaspora. Take turns describing how your character's traditions are markedly different from the character of the player to your left. Then take turns describing a tradition your character cherishes that is shared with the character of the player to the right.

## Roll for Community

As the song goes: “*Wherever you go, there’s always someone Jewish.*” In your game, players might come to a new area and look for connections, shelter, or community among people from their shared religion. If it’s interesting for them to have a mixed success, some trade-offs might include:

- The community here is heavily persecuted and has gone underground. How do you find them and win their trust?
- The community here has some traditions that are significantly different from that of the characters. How do these differences manifest and what do the characters miss?
- There is a community here that pretends to share your religion but in fact seeks to convert you to theirs. What tips you off and how do you navigate the situation?

# THE WISE MEN OF CHELM

by Adira Slattery

*"Rabbi... which is better, the sun or the moon?" The Rabbi of Chelm stood in thought for a long moment, smiled, and then replied, "Ah, that's easy. The moon is better. The moon shines at night when we most need a light, but the sun shines in the day when it is already light. Bah, the sun's lazy!"*

Chelm is a town. Chelm is a real place. But we aren't talking about that place. We are talking about the city of fools which shares its name, and is host to many many "Wise Men." You play as one of the aforementioned astute citizens of this lovely shtetl, just trying to get by while the world keeps piling on obstacles in their way.

First, gather a few things.

1. Some other people. Like, at least three total and probably no more than five. Six is a bit much, but you can do it if you'd like. Maybe you could do seven if you get two rocks. That's one of the later steps. To get a rock.
2. Get paper and writing tools with which to make some Townspeople. Or you could type the Townspeople up, I guess. There are instructions on how to do that later. You can peek if you want, but I'm gunna assume you have paper.
3. Maybe get a ten sided die. You don't have to, you can just pick from the Issue Table (it's not a wood table, it's described later) instead of rolling a random problem if you want to, but rolling is fun sometimes too.
4. Get a rock. The rock is for telling punchlines with. You wanna be able to hold the rock in one hand, so it shouldn't be too big, but you also want the rock to be hefty, so it shouldn't be too small. The rock should be big enough that no one will pick it up on accident, but not too small that it will be easy to lift. Make sure everybody likes the feel of the rock in their hands, and place it within reach of the entire group. You probably should be in a circle around the rock. The rock is important.

Then, you play the game. Discover the problems and quandaries that you will have to face together. Rules for that are in a bit and there's an Issue Table you can roll on if you want a random one. Remember the table? I mentioned it in step 3? Yeah, that's the one.

*Everyone in Chelm was aghast; someone had broken into the synagogue and made off with the tzedekah box, full of donations for the poor! The Elders gathered, and deliberated, and found a unanimous decision! A new box would be installed, but nailed up on the ceiling so that no thief could ever reach it.*

*But Rivka (You know, the butcher's wife? Yes, her! Such a good head on Rivka) heard about the decision, and she thought it was no good. "Elders, while it is true that the box will be safe from thieves up so high on the ceiling," she yelled, "it will also be out of reach of the charitable!"*

*So the Elders held a hurried meeting, and again they found a unanimous decision! A tall and sturdy ladder was placed next to the tzedakah box so that the charitable might easily climb and reach it.*





## MAKING A TOWNSPERSON

Okay, so you got your paper or whatever. You'll need a few things, and you can determine them in any order, but make sure you do all of them.

You need a Name. Pick one like Didia or Shlomo or Lazar or Rivka or Benjamin or Goldie. Also, write down your character's pronouns.

You need a Position. No one in Chelm is just "Gad" they are "Gad, The Shoemaker" or "Gad, The Cook." Here's some example positions, but you can also write your own:

*The Butcher, The Baker, The Farmer, The Rabbi, The Dreamer, The Wagon Driver, The Shepherd's Wife, The Matchmaker, The Scholar, The Klezmer, The Scribe.*

You need an Ideal. Each Ideal has two parts to it and your character believes both parts. These opposing pairs represent that duality inherent in so much of life. Sometimes this means they only say one part out loud, but you don't need to figure that out now. Some Ideals are below, or if you're feeling brave you can write one of your own. Make sure to write the whole Ideal, not just half.

- HaShem Will Provide VS You Must Do It Yourself
- Legacy Is All We Have Left VS Live In The Now
- Question Everything VS Listen More Than Talk
- Welcome The Stranger VS The Outside Wishes Us Harm
- Marry For Tradition VS Marry For Love
- Study And Books VS Hard Work And Sweat
- The Elders Know What Is Best VS Stand Up To Authority
- Family Is More Important Than All VS One Must Always Think First Of Themselves
- Money Always Matters VS Be Content With Your Lot

Take a piece of paper and make a little tent, placing it in front of you. Write your name, pronouns, and position facing out to the group and write your ideal on the backside of the folded paper.

Once everyone has written up their character tent, go around and introduce yourselves.

## PLAYING THE GAME

This game is played in rounds, with each person taking turns around in a circle. That player Brings an Issue, Embellishes with a neighbor or two, then everyone else Responds around the circle, there is some sighing, and then someone Takes The Rock and delivers a punchline. That ends the round, and the next person begins.

Start with whoever brought the rock.

To **Bring an Issue**, do the following:

1. Roll or Choose one of the entries on the Issue Table (remember the Table?), or come up with your own Issue. Issues are either problems to solve or quandaries to ponder. Whatever it is, Issues need a solution.
2. When creating your own Issue, start small. Say one or two sentences or clauses that summarizes the Issue plainly; you have plenty of time to go into detail later.
3. You are encouraged to bring up grievances previously established but make sure when you do so that it is a distinct Issue from the one the group discussed.

To **Embellish**, do the following:

1. Elaborate on the Issue freely by telling a story to the rest of the group about it. Bring up previous Issues if possible, connecting them together. Include other characters too!
2. When including other characters, start by looking to your neighbors sitting on either side of you. These are your character's literal neighbors in town. Don't play their character for them, but you might state something like "Yonatan's wife keeps bugging me about this fence!" or "And Sisel isn't making it any better, it seems like she likes it!" After you have said this prompt, look pointedly at that player and invite them in to help embellish the issue. Leave them room to contradict what you just established about them and argue only in a silly fashion.
3. You might also introduce a character not being played by someone at the table, such as The Rabbi, The Meddlesome Rooster, or The Cossack Sergeant. Avoid giving these people names, and just refer to them by their Positions.
4. Refrain from embellishing for more than a minute or three. If you feel like someone is taking too long, you can interject by saying "Bah, get on with it!" to remind them to keep moving in the game.



To **Respond**, do the following:

1. Begin by sharing an obvious, and perhaps reasonable, solution. This should be a way to completely solve the Issue, hopefully simply and with little mess. Something like “To fix your pig problem, just give them more food.”
2. Then, immediately discount that obvious solution. Feel free to include more information, and the more ridiculous the reason you can’t do this solution the better. Such as, “But where will the food come from? The pig can’t get a job to pay for more food!”
3. Don’t forget to build on the previous speaker, and treat everything they established as a reason the Issue could not be easily solved as factual and reasonable.

To **Sigh**, do the following:

1. Once everyone else has had a turn to respond and it has come around the circle back to you, exclaim in an exasperated tone: “Yes, but I know all of that!”
2. Then, everyone in the group should begin hemming and hawing. Make exaggerated thinking noises and begin working on a solution to the issue which will create a satisfying punchline. Remember everything previously established, and don’t contradict any of it. Once you have your punchline settled, you may Take the Rock immediately. First come, first served.

To **Take the Rock**, do the following:

1. Pick up the rock.
2. Deliver your punchline solution holding the rock. Gesture with it for emphasis if you’d like.
3. Put the rock back.
4. Then, everyone may keep taking the rock and delivering punchlines if they have more ideas and it seems like you all want to. Limit it to only a few punchlines though, and most Issues will only have one punchline told.
5. Once this is over, the next player around the circle introduces a new issue.

### Following the Logic

Don’t forget that everything you are doing makes sense, as you are an entire town of fools. Refrain from contradicting madcap chains of thought or impractical concerns brought to the group by another player. Embrace the irrationality, and look at the world sideways for a time. Make silly jumps and take inspiration from the real twists and turns of the Chelm jokes. They are constantly building, never slowing down, and never looking back.

*When the Angels of the Lord where going about their duties distributing souls for all of the people of the earth, they had bags for a bunch of different souls so that they would not get mixed up. They had noble souls, bookish souls, loyal souls, wicked souls; a bag for each type. One day, an Angel had a bag of foolish souls that they were to distribute amongst the villages, but a stray gust of wind hit her wings and the souls all fell to the ground. The Angel was aghast, and went down to the earth to check that everything was okay.*

*And that’s how an Angel walked into the town of Chelm, shrugged, and left.*

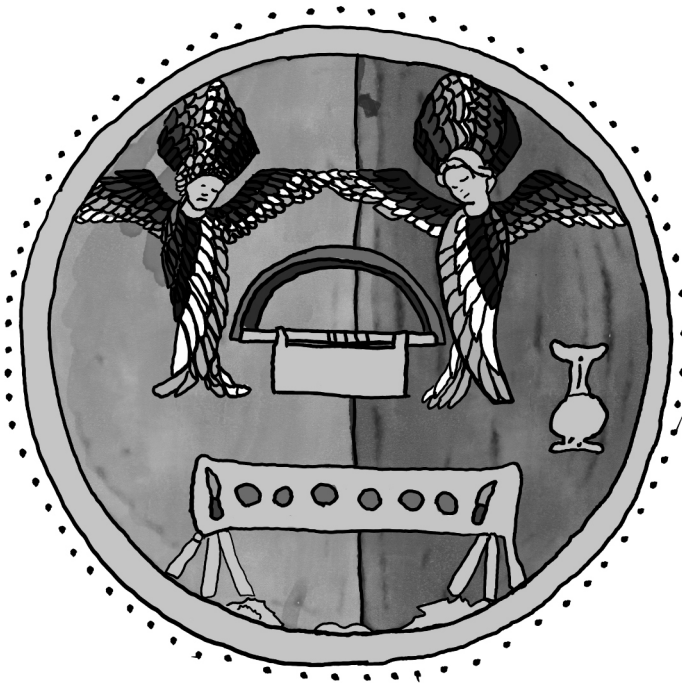
### THE ISSUE TABLE

Remember the table I talked about earlier? Well, here’s a group of example problems and quandaries for use in the game. Roll on them if you like, choose from them, or just take them as inspiration.

- 1 My neighbor’s rooster wakes me up each morning!
- 2 My gardening tools are missing! How can I trim my bushes without my gardening tools?
- 3 I need to make sure I use my milk before it spoils. How do I remember?
- 4 How do you know if what you are saying is gossip or truth?
- 5 My daughter wants to marry for the neighbor boy! How do I stop them?
- 6 How do I get rid of a ghost? My mother-in-law is haunting us!
- 7 My brother wants to stay over! Where will he sleep?
- 8 I love my wife, but I hate her favorite goat. How do I get rid of it without her finding out it was me?
- 9 How do you know if you are happy?
- 10 Why do we travel so far to the river and wells for water? Can’t we make this easier?

# TALMUD

by Zev Prael



**Author's Note:** *The topic of this game has been a common experience of the whole diaspora: ordinary people's often fraught travels through uncertain lands. In order to be Jewish in form as well as content, I chose to present the game in simplified Talmudic dialectic.*

*In simulation of a talmudic text, this game is written with four voices: three named and one nameless. A series of terse 'rulings' record how Elka, Berl and Gilda agree and disagree about a number of points of how the game is played. The nameless voice tries to reach, through Talmudic back-and-forth, an authoritative way to interpret these rulings. However, each of the named voices represents an alternative way to play that may diverge more or less from whatever conclusion is reached.*

*Players should learn through the game together and try to follow its debate. You'll probably find points confused or unsatisfactorily addressed; therefore, wide margins are provided. In them, you may add your own interpretation, house rules, unanswered questions or plain disagreements with the text.*

*This game might be transmitted in the names of Elka, Berl and Gilda, but it belongs to the whole Jewish people.*

**RULING:** *Each increase that comes from the seasons has no decrease. But each increase that does not come from the seasons has a decrease. How so? One who raises 1 to 8 must lower another to 4. One who raises 1 to 10 must lower the others to 4. These are Elka's words. But the others say: one who raises one to 12 must lower two others to 4.*

**LEARNING:** *What are these words speaking about? Say that it is speaking of a traveler who makes use of an animal or tool, as in the rule, "Swiftness is six for an ox-cart, eight for a donkey and twelve for a horse. Elka says: ten for a horse, twelve for a carriage. Strength is six for a donkey or walking-stick, eight for a horse and twelve for an ox-cart. Boldness is six for a cloak or horse, eight for an ox-cart and twelve for a drunkard or donkey. Elka says: six for a walking-stick or a horse, eight for a cloak or a carriage, ten for a drunkard or a donkey, and twelve for an ox-cart. Sharpness is four for a drunkard, six for a horse, eight for a dog and twelve for a dog or a hawk. Elka says: ten for a hawk, twelve for a dog."*

*What about one whose swiftness is 8 and rides an ox-cart, who would call this an increase. Furthermore, even for one whose swiftness is 4, where is the decrease? Rather, say that an increase that does not come from the seasons is one chosen before the journey begins. It happened once at Gilda's table that a traveler who had made many journeys set out again and wished to take an increase but Gilda forbade it. What was her reason? Say that it was like the rule, "Until the season is hard to them, a traveler gains nothing."*

*But who has ever heard of a traveler of many journeys to whom the seasons have not been hard? Rather, say that the rule forbids a traveler to increase in swiftness until swiftness has been hard and the traveler wished to increase in swiftness. But who has ever heard of a traveler of many journeys who has never been tired, and the rule says, "All rolls are hard when one is tired."*

*Rather say that the rule forbids a traveler to increase in swiftness until swiftness has been hard this season, to increase in boldness until boldness has been hard, to increase in strength until strength has been hard, to increase in sharpness until sharpness has been hard in the last season. If so, this rule is certainly speaking about an increase that comes from the seasons, so say that either the traveler had already increased for that season or he wished to take an increase that does not come from the seasons. In that case, what was her reasoning? Gilda must rule that an increase that does not come from the seasons can only be taken before a traveler has taken even a*

single journey, and that afterwards any increases must come from the seasons.

Another matter. If one says that Elka's words refer to strength, why would they prefer a donkey to a horse? And if one says that Elka's words refer to boldness, why would they prefer an ox-cart to a donkey? Rather, say that because of this it is said that in every place of boldness or strength, they would roll surety.

**RULING:** *A waker whose roll beats the depth of their condition rises without it from that moment. A discontented traveler cannot rise from their illness or their hurt. These are Gilda's words. A tired traveler cannot rise from anything. An upset traveler cannot rise from illness and an ill traveler cannot rise from hurt. Elka says: a hungry traveler cannot rise from upset.*

**LEARNING:** Is our ruling like the one who ruled, "The waking roll, how is it done? One's boldness and strength against one for every roll since last they woke and one more for every failed roll." Who says this ruling? Say that it is not Gilda, since it is ruled, "One for every pass and two for every failure; less than this, and be tired to that depth. But Gilda says, that is the depth of a new condition and your next roll is hard." But does Gilda differ about the beginning or just the end?

Rather, say that it is not Elka, because it is said that in every place of boldness or strength, they would roll surety. But suppose Elka would simply roll two of the same dice for surety. That may be, but if the ruling had been like them, it would not have said 'boldness and strength' but 'surety and surety,' so that rule is not like Elka.

**RULING:** *When you roll, remove the highest number and keep the second-highest. These are Beryl's words. But the others say: remove the lowest number and keep the second-lowest.*

**LEARNING:** For what case does Beryl differ? Suppose that he spoke of a case of three dice. But if he were speaking of a case of three dice, what is the difference between Beryl and the others? Rather say that he is speaking of a case of four dice. That is all well and good for the others, who sometimes roll four dice, but does Beryl ever roll four dice? After all, we have the rule: "Beryl would never roll more than three dice. If Gilda would roll four dice, all would be numbered. Elka would sometimes roll four numbered dice and sometimes three numbered and one spotted. All agree: if one rolls three numbered dice, the smallest match. Elka says: that is if one's condition is poor. But if one's

*condition is good, the largest match."*

Rather, say that he spoke of a case where two dice were rolled. But it is impossible that he would say such a thing about a case of two dice, because the entire world knows that of two dice, the higher roll is used. For we have the rule: "A fresh traveler, how do they roll? They roll a spotted die and add it to the lowest result. But Beryl says: to whichever result is chosen." If Beryl would remove the higher of the numbered dice, it would always be the case that he would add the spotted die to the lower! Rather, the entire world agrees that of two dice, the higher is used. For three dice, whether one is spotted or one is numbered, Beryl is no different than the others. But the others sometimes roll four dice, and they do not do so Beryl's way.

Returning to the body, how can we account for Gilda's four dice? Say that she means a traveler who is in poor condition and has failed their waking roll, as in our ruling: "One for every pass and two for every failure; less than this, and be tired to that depth. Gilda says, and your next roll is hard." What is the meaning of "and your next roll is hard"? Do we not have the rule, "All rolls are hard when one is tired."? But does Gilda play by this ruling? For we have the rule, "Gilda says: it is hard for a downcast traveler to be bold or forceful, hard for a hurt traveler to be swift or forceful, hard for an ill traveler to be sharp or swift, and hard for an upset traveler to be bold or sharp." and where does she say "tired"? Suppose we take it thus: one who is downcast and wakes poorly becomes ill, one who is hurt becomes upset, to fulfill the ruling "All rolls are hard when one is tired." Then isn't a traveler who goes to sleep fresh and wakes poorly difficult for Gilda? If we said that they become downcast, if their next roll is to be sharp or swift how is it hard for them? Rather for such a case Gilda would roll three dice because they had just woken poorly. And if their roll were instead to be bold or forceful, Gilda would have them roll four dice, as in our ruling.

Returning to the body, what is the meaning of Elka's words, "if one's condition is good, the largest match"? Does Elka agree with Gilda that one who wakes poorly rolls another numbered die? Even for Gilda, one who wakes poorly is not in good condition. Rather, it is said that at Elka's table a fresh traveler had lost her flint and tinder, and Elka called for three numbered and one spotted. But in this situation, do we know that the largest matched? After all, we have the rule, "Who is fresh? One who wakes well and has nothing to arise from, on the next roll they make. But Elka says, one who wakes with a six or higher, even if they have yet to rise from their condition." Perhaps

the fresh traveler was still in poor condition, so would Elka have called for a third die to match the higher or to match the lower? Let it stand.

Another matter. The spotted die that a fresh traveler rolls, what is it? We have the rule, *"A traveler who had no condition and rested well, their next roll is fresh. On a fresh roll, they roll another six-sider and add it to the higher die. Elka says, their every roll is fresh until they fail a roll."* It is said that once a traveler at Elka's table went to sleep fresh, passed his waking roll, and yet was not fresh the next day. There is no difficulty here: recall the end of the earlier rule, *"one who wakes with a six or higher, even if they have yet to rise from their condition."* The one who wakes with a six or higher is fresh, no matter whether the waking roll was passed or failed.

**RULING:** *Two hungry travelers who eat: both arise from their discontent, both arise from their illness or one arises from their discontent and one arises from their illness, so long as no one who has not risen from their discontent rises from their illness.*

**LEARNING:** Who says this ruling? It is not Elka, because of the rule, *"It is hard to be sure when one is hungry or hurt, swift when one is ill or hurt, or sharp when one is upset. These are Elka's words."* One who is hungry is not ill or upset, so how could they rise from it? Rather state the end of the rule, *"It is hard to be sure when one is hungry or hurt, swift when one is ill or hurt, or sharp when one is upset. These are Elka's words. But Berl says: it is hard to be strong or swift when one is hurt, bold when one is ill or sharp when one is upset,"* and say that our ruling is like Beryl. But where does Beryl mention hunger?

One might as well say that our ruling is like Gilda, since in the ruling, *"Gilda says: it is hard for a downcast traveler to be bold or forceful, hard for a hurt traveler to be swift or forceful, hard for an ill traveler to be sharp or swift, and hard for an upset traveler to be bold or sharp,"* she also does not mention hunger. Say that our ruling is like Beryl or that it is like Gilda, whatever you say, for our ruling one who is hungry falls ill and is discontented. After eating once, they are no longer discontented. After eating a second time, they are no longer ill.

It is said that at Beryl's table, there was a traveler who was upset and ill, and Beryl did not let them rise from their illness until they had risen from their discontent. But isn't that obvious? Does the story come to teach us that the ruling is like Beryl? Perhaps it only comes to teach us that even one who is simply ill, then became upset may not rise from their

illness until they first rise from their discontent.

Another matter. What is discontent? Say that our ruling is like Gilda, who says, *"A discontented traveler cannot rise from their illness or their hurt. These are Gilda's words,"* because where do the others speak of discontent? But does Gilda speak of discontent? In the rule, *"Gilda says: it is hard for a downcast traveler to be bold or forceful, hard for a hurt traveler to be swift or forceful, hard for an ill traveler to be sharp or swift, and hard for an upset traveler to be bold or sharp."* Rather, we can only say that neither illness nor hurt is discontent, since, *"A discontented traveler cannot rise from their illness or their hurt."* For the others, it is clear that discontent is a part of hunger, but for Elka who says that hunger is a condition in its own right, is hunger considered discontent? Rather, say that for Elka it is not important whether hunger is discontent, because it is not Elka who says our ruling.

**RULING:** *Every day, whoever slept makes a waking roll, whoever walks makes a footing roll. Berl says: whoever rides makes an animal roll, and it is their footing roll. But the others say: one traveler makes an animal roll for all riders.*

**LEARNING:** What is the meaning of Beryl's disagreement? For Beryl, one whose swiftness is worse than their animal, rolls the animal's swiftness. However for the others, the donkeys roll their strength and swiftness, the ox-carts roll theirs and the horses roll theirs. One traveler rides a donkey, one rides a horse. Is there a difference between Beryl and the others? Say that for Beryl, whoever exceeds their animal rolls their own swiftness. But do the other others disagree on that point? After all, our ruling says *"one traveler makes an animal roll for all riders,"* and not 'the animals roll for themselves.'

Rather, say that for Beryl the one who makes an animal roll for the animals has made a roll for others, as the rule says, *"Whoever rolls for the party does not do so again until someone else has. These are Elka's words, but the others say: whoever guides does not make camp, whoever makes camp does not cook, and whoever cooks does not guide."* However, does Beryl say anything about 'making a roll for others'? Rather, for Beryl it is simply as the end of the rule says, *"whoever guides does not make camp, whoever makes camp does not cook, and whoever cooks does not guide."* Besides guiding, camping and cooking, for Beryl there are no restrictions.

Another matter. Everything that is done outside, whether it is footing, camping or guiding is done against the weather, as in



the rule, *"Rolling against the weather, how is it done? For footing, one's sharpness and swiftiness against two plus one for heat, for cold, for rain, for snow, for thunder, for wind. For camping, one's sharpness and strength and for guiding one's sharpness and boldness. Beryl says: a twelve for fair weather, an eight for rain, a six for rain in the driving wind or a four for ice and snow in the driving wind, rolled with one's swiftiness for footing, one's strength for camping or one's sharpness for guiding."* What is the meaning of Beryl's words? Explain them by saying that the rule, *"Two, plus one for every difficult element; this much or less, is a misadventure. By day, things are lost, progress is slow or conditions worsen. By night, supplies are ruined or an encounter is had,"* is according to Beryl.

But does Beryl disagree about the end of the rule only, or also the beginning? Say instead that the rule, *"On a good road, a group makes twice their lowest highest roll. On a bad road, twice their highest lowest roll."* is like Beryl, for it tells the result of a footing roll where no difficulty is involved. But what are we to make of Beryl's guiding rolls or camping rolls? Say that there Beryl does not disagree about the beginning of the rule. Why were they therefore mentioned alongside his footing roll, where he does disagree about the beginning? Rather, say that Beryl must disagree about the beginning in every respect and about the end only with respect to which dice are rolled.

## THE ACCOUNTS OF GETZEL SHLOMO

by JR Goldberg

*Many years ago, in a village too small to name, there was a beggar named Getzel Shlomo. He had a son, Chaim Shmuel. Throughout the village, Shlomo would beg every day, only resting on the Sabbath. If given charity, he would express his thanks with a small and simple prayer. If denied, he would express thanks the exact same way. The village came to regard him as somewhat of a local oddity, a harmless if somewhat sad and poor member of their community.*

*As the years passed, Getzel's son Chaim left the village, working and learning as he could, eventually marrying and settling elsewhere. Shlomo continued to toil into his old age. One day, Shlomo approached the local sexton and rabbi and informed them that he was nearing his death. "I have tried to live as simply and unobtrusively as possible," he said, and brought them plain cloth for his burial shroud and a barrel of fresh water for the purifying ceremonies.*

*"My only request," Shlomo continued, "Is to be buried in a new row in the poorest part of the cemetery, and that this basket be buried with me".*

*Getzel Shlomo passed peacefully, praying silently and beautifully. As the warden, sexton, and rabbi prepared his body, their curiosity got the better of them. The village elders looked in Getzel Shlomo's basket and found not the idle ramblings of a madman or the whims of a simpleton, but the earnest notes and accounts of all he had given charity to over the years. The villagers too proud to beg, the villagers in dire but private need had all been fed or clothed at some time by Getzel Shlomo. He asked for nothing in return except to be buried at the start of a new row, in the poorest part of the cemetery.*





### To Play

*The Accounts of Getzel Shlomo* recreates the funeral of a secretly pious man. You may play with two or more players. More is better. One player will play the role of Chaim Shmuel, returning to eulogize his father. The remaining players are villagers, there to gossip after hearing the oddities surrounding the death of Shlomo.

*The Accounts of Getzel Shlomo* is from the oral tradition surrounding the followers of the Jewish mystic Baal Shem Tov. It was first published by Nissan Mindel in a book of collected tales for children.

### Set Up

Read the italicized story aloud for all the players. You will need pieces of scrap paper, a small basket to keep them in, and a shuffled deck of standard playing cards. Each player should take as many or as few pieces of scrap paper as they'd like, and write upon it a name of someone within the village of Getzel Shlomo.

### Game Play

Each round begins with a villager drawing a name out of the basket. They read the name aloud. The other villagers will add in their voices, explaining who they are (or were), what they did in the village, what they are like. Villagers may take turns sharing moments they had with the person in question.

Once each villager has had an opportunity to tell a simple story about the person, Chaim Shmuel flips a card from the deck. Each number is a simple prompt that pertaining to why the person needed charity:

A	G-d	8	Celebrations or Birth
2	Animals or Cleanliness	9	Sexuality or Pregnancy
3	Fathers or Sons	10	Laws or Health
4	Mothers or Daughters	J	Dreams or Ancestors
5	Ritual or Piety	Q	Society or Nature
6	Work or Creation	K	Faith or Mercy
7	Rest or the Sabbath		

Chaim speaks, explaining the reasoning behind the charity. How did his father find out the need for action? How did the person react? Did they act differently to you and your family after, or did they keep up appearances? Were they differently to you publicly and privately? Did you ever see them extend the same sort of kindness to others later? Tell a story of that moment in the village's private history, a moment not even the rabbis knew of.

Continue until there are no more names to read.

### Ending the Game

Once all the names are read, Chaim may speak one final time, explaining to the village his father's private, secret life, letting them know about the true man in their midst for their entire lives. Share moments he told you his reasoning, the things that drove him to toil in secret, helping others who only occasionally helped him.

As the funeral ends, each villager leaves, stating as they go one lesson from Getzel Shlomo, this secretly holy man. Pledge to think of this lesson every day for a year, and on the days marking the anniversary of his death. If you are playing with 10 or more adults, you may offer up the Mourner's Kaddish.

# THE CANTOR'S SON IS AN ORPHAN NOW AND WE MUST STEAL HIM LEMONS

by JR Goldberg

## Content Warning

This RPG contains references to the death of a parent. As you play, if you are faced with answering a question or roleplaying in a way that makes you uncomfortable, you may always select another prompt. The game was tested with the X card as a safety tool, but any safety tool that the players agree upon can be used.

## The Game

*The Cantor's Son Is an Orphan Now and We Must Steal Him Lemons* is an RPG for two or more players meant to be played over the course of a single evening. It is loosely based upon characters from the Shalom Alechem stories that were collected as Motl, The Cantor's Son. Early in these stories, Motl's father passes, and despite his mother's continued presence, the village repeatedly and loudly refers to him as an orphan, much to his family's consternation.

## Requirements

To play this game, you will need a standard deck of playing cards, a handful of beads of two colors, and an opaque bag that the player can easily reach inside.

## Set Up

Separate the different colored beads or tokens you have into two piles on the table. They should be indistinguishable by touch, but clearly different by sight. Take two beads of one color (let's just call them blue to make this easier) for each player and place them into the opaque bag. Take one bead of the other color (red for this example) and place it in the same bag. So, if you are playing a six player game, the bag should contain 12 blue beads and one red bead. Keep the rest of the beads easily accessible.

Take the deck of cards and remove the nines, tens, aces and face cards. Set the rest of the cards aside, they are not needed for play. Shuffle these 24 cards and place them face down on the table.

## Concept

Not much happens in the small village in Russia that you have grown up in. You go to Yeshiva, you play with your friends, you try and make your family proud. At the very least, you try to not make them upset.

Sadly, your friend Motl's father has died of illness. His mother is hysterical with grief. His brother is forever scheming ways to make money without work. You have all been tasked with helping to teach Motl, who cannot yet read scripture, the Kaddish.

Instead, you have decided to cheer him up. You have hatched a plan to sneak into the yard of the Doctor and steal a lemon from his wife's prized lemon tree. It is sure to make Motl forget his troubles, if only for a moment. You must not be caught, for the Doctor's wife is notorious for her ill-temper and your mother has recently warned you to bring no further shame to your family's name during this trying time for the village.

Unfortunately, your plan is ill conceived and it will most likely fail.

## Character Creation

Before you begin play, each player should come up with a character. Go around the table and introduce yourself to the other players. You should tell the other players the following things:

- Your character's name
- Their pronouns
- Their age
- One thing they do better than any other child in the village

If you are so inclined, each player can write this information down and place it in front of themselves so that all other players can reference it throughout the course of the game.

Lastly, decide if your character is a Schlemiel or a Schlimazel. While defining these characteristics can be difficult to put into words, a well-known anecdote is this: The Schlemiel is someone who spills their soup while the Schlimazel is the person upon whom the soup lands.

Over the course of play, you will be often tasked with describing your accidents, follies, and failures. It is important to remember your lot in life as you do this. Will you be the person left holding the bag, or will you be the one who dropped it to begin with?

Beyond the characters that the players create, Motl, the Cantor's Son, is also present. While your scheme is meant to cheer him up, it is up to the players to decide how best to interact with him. You may take him along in an effort to lift his spirits or you may leave him behind in order to hopefully surprise him with a wondrous gift.

## Game Play

The youngest player always goes first. Start by drawing a card from the shuffled deck. Read the prompt aloud to the rest of the table. After doing so, the active player can answer any or all of the various points within the prompt. After they have finished, all other players at the rest of the table have an opportunity to add to what the active player has said. Please note that the other players should use this time to help bolster and clarify the original response, not contradict or discourage.

When everyone has had an opportunity to respond to the prompt, the active player reaches into the token bag and chooses a token without looking. If the player chooses one of the blue beads, they describe their portion of the plan. If they want, they can incorporate some of the information from any of the previous prompts to help specify their actions.

If a red token is chosen, that player is found out by the Doctor's Wife, the owner of the lemon tree and the meanest person in the entire village. Describe how you were caught, and the aftermath.

If you are caught, you are no longer part of the caper, and cannot take tokens out of the bag or participate in the plan. Your voice, however, still matters. You are encouraged to continue to answer prompts, add to others, and draw a card from the deck when it is your turn.

After the token has been revealed and the action has been fully described, look at the card chosen at the beginning of the turn. If it is a red suit, add another red token to the bag. Return the token chosen to the bag as well. The bag should never have fewer than one red token and the number of blue tokens determined by the number of players at the beginning of the game.

## Sample Turn

*Rivka flips over a card: The Jack of Diamonds. She starts to describe her father's estranged brother, who made his fortune in America and writes a few times a year but never seems to send any money, despite always talking about how successful he has been. Zvi, Rivka's cousin, chimes in and talks about how he overheard his parents talking once about how the brothers were never close, but had a big falling out one year. Soon after that was when they split the family and went to America.*

*Rivka then pulls out a token: she's lucky, it was blue. She describes sneaking over to her uncle's old house, which still isn't occupied. Through the back window, she has a clear view of the lemon tree and the Doctor's backyard. The coast looks clear, and she tells the rest of the kids it's safe to go on with the plan.*

*Rivka puts her blue token back in the bag and adds one more red token because she drew a red card. Now it's Zvi's turn.*



## Ending the Game

The game ends when one of two things happens: Either all the children have been caught (each player has drawn a red token from the bag) or all the prompts have been drawn.

If every child is caught attempting to steal lemons, the group must describe the aftermath. Was Motl told about the plan ahead of time? Will he be crestfallen? How do all of your parents and teachers react? Take the time to ruminate on the world you've created and the bonds you've described. How do they change due to your behavior?

If you are able to go through all the prompts with at least one player not being caught, you win! Motl is given a lemon. Bask in your success and a job well done. Talk about how the experience changed all of you, how it made you grow closer as friends.

When you've finished discussing your successes and failures, the game is over. Step out of your characters, check in with your fellow players, and thank them for an enjoyable experience.

## Card Prompts

### *Spades*

9 - Who was the last stranger to come to town? What was their purpose? How long did they stay?

10 - What is your town known for? Who comes for it?

J - What are the rumors surrounding the Rabbi? From whom did you hear them?

Q - What do you love most about the town? What do you most want to change?

K - Talk about a time you went to the neighboring villages. What was different about them? What memory stands out the most?

A - Who were the last people to move away? Why did they say they were leaving? What was the real reason? Who lives in their home now?

### *Hearts*

9 - Who is your best friend in the village? How long have you known them? Are you their best friend?

10 - Which of the other children did you recently have a fight with? What happened? Is it resolved? Will it ever be?

J - What is a secret that only you and one other in the village know? Which of your friends are affected by it? How badly do you want to tell?

Q - Who do you spend the most time with at school? Who do you spend the most time with when the rest of your school friends aren't around?

K - Who talked you into this plan? How hard were you to convince? Is there part of the plan you wish you'd spoken up about? Why didn't you?

A - What is the last lie you told your friends?

### *Diamonds*

9 - Your mother is always crying. What does she cry about?

10 - Your brother always has a plan to help your family. What was the last one he came up with? How did it fail?

J - Tell us about your wealthy relatives. Where do they live? Why don't you see them anymore?

Q - What is the gift your father brought you that you will always remember? Where did he get it? Why did he give it to you?

K - What is your family's business? Do you want to follow in their footsteps? Do they want you to? Talk about the responsibilities you already have and the times you've failed in them.

A - If you are caught, who in your family will be the most upset? Think of a time you've been caught before. What happened? Does it give you pause today?

### *Clubs*

9 - What is the rumor your friends told you about the Doctor's wife? What is the rumor you overheard the adults saying?

10 - Talk about the time the Doctor's wife was kind to you when no one else was around.

J - Talk about what you saw the Doctor's wife do when she thought no one was watching.

Q - What happened the last time the Doctor's wife caught someone trying to steal from her garden? What did she do? What did the other adults do?

K - What are your memories of the Doctor's wedding?

A - If the Doctor's wife catches you stealing lemons, what do you fear she will do to you? What's the worst thing she could do to you? What have you heard she's done to the other children?

# GRANDMA'S DRINKING SONG

by Lucian Kahn



Grandma's Drinking Song is a role-playing, verse-writing, song-singing game for 4 players about a matriarchal family of bootleggers during Prohibition. The place is New York City; the time is 1930. Alcohol is currently illegal in the United States, but many immigrants sell it to feed their families during the Great Depression. Your characters are struggling Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who laugh, sing, flirt, and break the law. Strong feelings overflow as you argue, drink, and sing the song that you create together. The tone is melodramatic screwball comedy.

## Facilitator's Information

Grandma's Drinking Song does not require a separate game master or facilitator; the host can also be a player.

This game alternates between phases of roleplaying scenes and writing song lyrics together. You will need the following:

- 1 onion (the onion of soliloquy)
- scene cards, cut into squares, arranged in a central pile
- a pen and paper for each player
- beverages for all, alcoholic or non-alcoholic as players prefer
- a rhyming dictionary, such as [rhymezone.com](http://rhymezone.com) (optional)

## Warm-Up Activities

*Before assigning characters and explaining the rules, complete all 4 warm-up activities in order. These activities will help teach the game's systems through immersion.*

### #1: Giving the Onion

Pour drinks for everyone. Randomly count off 1, 2, 3, 4. Person 1, hold the onion; you're the audience. People 2, 3 and 4 will act in a brief scene.

Scene: Person 2 has cooked potatoes...again. Person 3 loves potatoes. Person 4 hates potatoes.

As you improvise this scene, Person 4 becomes angry about the situation. As soon as Person 4 seems really angry, Person 1 gives them the onion. When this happens, everyone else becomes silent as Person 4 delivers a rant about hating potatoes. Signal the end of this rant by taking a drink. In response, everyone else takes a drink.

### #2: Singing Together

To get comfortable singing together, everybody sings the following words to the tune of "Happy Birthday."

*Family fun never stops, / Grandma brewed us some schnapps, / Getting wasted on Friday, / Stay away from the cops!*

### #3: Changing Emotions

During the game, drinking and singing will cause characters' emotions to change. Practice changing emotions. Taking turns, each person says the following line with a happy emotion: *"I'll take two bottles of your five-dollar whiskey, Mrs. Rosen!"*

Do it again, but this time resentful. Now depressed. Now flirtatious.



#### #4: Potatoes Again?

Put all 3 workshops together. Repeat the potatoes scene again. Same as last time: when Person 4 becomes angry, Person 1 hands them the onion, Person 4 rants about hating potatoes, then takes a drink, and everyone drinks. New actions: after drinking, everybody sings the Grandma's Schnapps Birthday Song. Then continue the potatoes scene, but each person now has a different emotion. Finally, Person 1 ends the scene by shouting the Yiddish insult, "*May you grow with your head in the ground like an onion!*"

That's: give onion, rant, drink, sing, continue scene with new emotions, "*May you grow with your head in the ground like an onion!*"

Now count off again so that everyone has a different role. Repeat the above activity in your new role.

#### Scenario Setting

Assign each player a main character to play throughout the game:

- Bertha: the booze boss - a pushy and lewd old woman
- Her 3 teenage grandchildren:
- Harriet: the eldest - reckless and flirtatious
  - Yetta: the middle - ambitious and moody
  - Marvin: the youngest - awkward, impulsive, and secretly gay

Explain that players will also step in to play smaller characters as the need arises.

#### Overview of Play

The game unfolds through a series of scenes with 3 actors and 1 audience member each. The scenes have been summarized for you on the cards, but feel free to add, modify, or embellish plot points as the drama develops in real time. After all, who remembers what really happened?

Each scene card describes the plot outline of a scene for the actors to improvise together. The card also lists the characters present in the scene. Sometimes a non-family side-character is listed in a scene; any available player may assume this role. The player who isn't an actor in the scene is the audience member.

#### Example Scene

- *Everyone writes 2 new lines of the song and sings them together.*
- *Bertha draws 2 scenes from the pile, reads them both silently, then chooses "Secretly Married." She puts the other scene back in the pile and reads the details of "Secretly Married" aloud.*
- *Bertha, Harriet, and Yetta are actors in the scene, so Marvin is the audience member.*
- *Bertha becomes very angry with Harriet, so Marvin gives her the onion.*
- *Harriet and Yetta fall silent. Bertha delivers a passionate soliloquy about her feelings, then takes a drink.*
- *Everybody else takes a drink too.*
- *Everyone sings the drinking song.*
- *When the scene continues, everyone's emotions have changed. Bertha and Harriet tell jokes, and Yetta laughs.*
- *Marvin shouts, "May you grow with your head in the ground like an onion!" to end the scene.*

#### Scene Cheat Sheet

*Before Each Scene:*

- Write 2 lines of the song together.
- The next player chooses a scene. (Draw 2 scenes, pick 1 & read it aloud, put the other back in the pile.)

*Actor Moves:*

If you get the onion:

- Soliloquy (ranting your feelings alone)
- Take a drink & everybody drinks with you
- Everybody sings the drinking song

Everybody's emotion changes & the scene continues.

*Audience Moves:*

- When a character seems very emotional, give that actor the onion to invite a soliloquy.
- To end the scene: "*May you grow with your head in the ground like an onion!*"
-

## Game Structure & Detailed Walkthrough

### *Before Choosing Each Scene:*

Together as a foursome, write 2 new lines of the family drinking song and sing this verse together. The song will grow longer as you play more scenes. Allow the events and themes from previous scenes to inspire your lyrics.

### *Choosing Scenes:*

Bertha chooses the first scene, then the decision moves clockwise around the table. Draw 2 scenes randomly from the pile, then choose your favorite and read it aloud, putting the other scene back in the pile to use later. Don't worry about playing the scenes in chronological order; they will skip around in time like old memories. Don't discuss the scenes as a group before playing them; simply choose and begin.

### *Playing a Scene:*

Scene members:

- Roleplay to develop the drama.
- If the audience hands you the onion, everyone else in the scene must fall silent while your character delivers an overwrought soliloquy (an emotional rant).
- In the soliloquy, express your thoughts and feelings with reckless abandon.
- Signal the end of the soliloquy by taking a drink.
- When you drink, everybody drinks! And sings! Everyone must now take a drink and sing the entire family drinking song.
- Grandma's whiskey is mysterious and strong. Drinking it changes everyone's emotions - for good or for ill.
- Now every character is in a different mood than before the soliloquy. Continue the scene. Over-act emotions to emphasize the contrast from your character's previous mood.
- The onion is out of play until the next scene.

Audience:

- Once per scene, when you believe a character is experiencing a strong emotion in response to another character, hand them the onion to initiate a soliloquy.
- Embrace the power of the onion and give it readily. Don't worry about being right or wrong about the player's intended emotion for the character. It's your subjective experience as the audience, which is as unreliable as hundred-year-old memories.
- End the scene by shouting the Yiddish insult, "May you grow with your head in the ground like an onion!"

Continue playing scenes until there are none left.

## Songwriting

Throughout the game, you will gradually create a family drinking song together. Choose easy, medium, or orthodox mode for your collective songwriting.

**Easy Mode:** Fill in the blanks.

Fill in the blanks in the following lyrics as you progress through the scenes, singing them to the tune of the supplied song.

Option 1: "Row Row Row Your Boaf"

(Scene 1) *Grandma's drunk again, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Someone \_\_\_\_\_, glad it wasn't \_\_\_\_\_!*

(Scene 2) *Stay away from cops, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Everybody \_\_\_\_\_, what a \_\_\_\_\_!*

(Scene 3) *Communists are \_\_\_\_\_, that's why \_\_\_\_\_,  
Call the rabbi on the phone, \_\_\_\_\_!*

(Scene 4) \_\_\_\_\_, rolling on the \_\_\_\_\_, Tell  
your sister what you think, \_\_\_\_\_!

(Scenes 5-8: *Continue in this pattern to create your own lyrics!*)

Option 2: "Dayenu"

(Scene 1) *Grandma's drinking, grandma's \_\_\_\_\_ing, grandma's  
\_\_\_\_\_ing, and never \_\_\_\_\_, meshuggeh!*

(Scene 2) *Harriet's \_\_\_\_\_ing, Yetta's \_\_\_\_\_ing, Marvin's  
\_\_\_\_\_ing, why don't they \_\_\_\_\_?*

(Scene 3) *Communists are in the \_\_\_\_\_, in the \_\_\_\_\_ and in  
the \_\_\_\_\_, Cops are hiding in the \_\_\_\_\_, oy oy vay!*

(Scene 4) *Hide the barley in the \_\_\_\_\_, hide the liquor in the  
\_\_\_\_\_, hide the \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_, oy oy vay!*

(Scenes 5-8: *Continue in this pattern to create your own lyrics!*)

**Medium Mode:** Write New Lyrics to any Existing Song

You may write new lyrics to a song everyone in the group knows. Once you've settled on a song, play a recording and hum along so everyone can get the hang of the tune.

**Orthodox Mode:** Write A Song from Scratch

Discuss the following as a group:

- Does the song rhyme? If so, what is the rhyme scheme?
- What's the mood of the song? Jolly? Gloomy? Heroic? Bawdy?

## Closing

After playing all 10 scenes, players narrate epilogues for their characters. Then the game ends. *L'chayim!*

## **SCENE CARDS** (cut into squares)

### **Scene:** God's Rules

*Location:* The apartment

*Present:* Bertha, Harriet, Yetta

Yetta wants to take a "legitimate" job at the textile factory to help get the family out of poverty. The job is 6 days a week, including Shabbos, the Jewish day of rest. Bertha forbids her from working on Saturday for religious reasons. Harriet thinks Yetta is half-right, and that the family should start peddling booze on Shabbos at secret Friday night bars.

### **Scene:** Charity

*Location:* The apartment

*Present:* Marvin, Bertha, Yetta

Marvin asks Bertha if he can borrow money under the pretext of some dire trouble. Then he tells Yetta he's planning to give it all to the Communist Party. Yetta threatens to tell Bertha.

### **Scene:** Grandmother Tongue

*Location:* The apartment

*Present:* Bertha, Marvin, Harriet

Marvin tries to convince Bertha that she needs to learn English. Bertha accuses Marvin of betraying his Jewish roots and beginning to forget Yiddish by attending American school. Harriet tries to reassure everyone that if Bertha doesn't learn English, she can take care of the family without Bertha's help.

### **Scene:** Baby Rum

*Location:* The neighborhood

*Present:* Harriet, Marvin, A Neighborhood Boy

Harriet forces Marvin to join her in pushing two baby carriages around the neighborhood on their walk. Every few apartments, Harriet stops, pulls a brown paper bag out from the bottom of a baby carriage, and runs upstairs with it. Marvin doesn't understand that the baby carriage is a cover for booze delivery. While Harriet is upstairs, a neighborhood boy teases him for acting girly.

### **Scene:** Secretly Married

*Location:* The apartment

*Present:* Bertha, Harriet, Yetta

Yetta tattles to Bertha that Harriet has eloped with a man she met at a YMCA dance. Harriet insists that because a rabbi performed the ceremony, she has not eloped, but merely gotten secretly married.

### **Scene:** Kosher Wine

*Location:* The apartment

*Present:* Bertha, Harriet, A Cop

A cop approaches the apartment to arrest Bertha. Bertha pretends she is sick in bed and sends Harriet to the door in a cute dress. Harriet asks the cop why her darling grandma is in trouble for making kosher wine. The cop retorts that there's no barley in wine. Harriet bats her eyelashes and swears it is part of her grandma's special wine recipe, which she needs for religious purposes as the wife of a cantor.

### **Scene:** The Invitation

*Location:* The beauty parlor

*Present:* Bertha, Marvin, A Drag Queen Hairdresser

Marvin has accompanied Bertha to the beauty parlor and is reading a book. Bertha's hairdresser invites her to a drag ball. She thinks it would be improper to attend without a male escort, so she tries to convince Marvin to come along.

### **Scene:** From the Sky

*Location:* The apartment

*Present:* Marvin, Bertha, A Cop

There is only one bathroom in the apartment building, all the way down on the ground floor. Marvin becomes impatient and urinates out the window. It lands on a cop! The cop recognizes Marvin from the family's numerous arrests, enters the building, and knocks on the door. Bertha answers it.

### **Scene:** A Communist Meeting

*Location:* A neighbor's apartment

*Present:* Harriet, Yetta, A Young Communist Neighbor

Harriet tricks Yetta into attending a communist meeting in a neighbor's living room. The communist lectures them about workers' solidarity. Yetta's attitude: "I don't want to be a communist! I want to be a capitalist!" Harriet's attitude: "If you want to be a capitalist, first you have to be a communist!"

### **Scene:** Imported

*Location:* The pond in Central Park

*Present:* Marvin, Yetta, A Customer

Marvin and Yetta are carrying boxes of liquor to Central Park and lowering them into the pond with a rope. This smudges the labels and makes the boxes look like they've come over on a boat from overseas. Imported! So they can charge more! A customer arrives and sees through the scam.

# LUNCH RUSH

by Nora Katz

Welcome to the deli. In **LUNCH RUSH: A GESHPAK RPG**, players take on the roles of employees in a noisy, crowded, and far from Zagat-rated Jewish delicatessen. They're destined for greatness, as long as they don't run out of burekas. And who are our unlikely heroes? Perhaps we meet the baker, blessed with strong forearms and unfettered access to the deli's top-secret rye bread recipe. Or the host, with the right to refuse service to anyone. Perhaps the deli's owner, saddled with their family's business and with dreams of making it in literally any other career, makes an appearance. Only the most fearless player can be the Delimaster (DM), who runs the game and hurls egg salad shortages and cranky customers into the players' paths.

Today is like any other day—customers will arrive and make unreasonable demands, and you'll have to cater to their needs (which are sometimes literal catering needs). But why is today different from all other days? The rabbi's cousin is coming in to review the deli for their semi-successful food blog. You have no idea what this person looks like, but there's no way you can disappoint Rabbi Feinberg so close to the High Holidays. If your service falls short for this anonymous customer, it might spell the end for the deli.

Faced with customers with specific dietary restrictions, personality quirks, checkered pasts, and unreasonable demands, the deli's hardworking staff must sling reubens and black and white cookies before time runs out—and the deli's dark secret is exposed. Can you leave the deli? Nonsense. There is no outside. There is only deli.

## Atmospheric recommendations:

The first playtest of this game involved hearty helpings of chocolate chip ice cream and dill pickle potato chips. Consider similar snacks when organizing a session of **LUNCH RUSH**. It's a game about food, after all. You should also play Michael Winograd's album *Kosher Style* in the background. It's perfect.

## A message for the DM:

This game lends itself to being totally invented on the spot, in its particular moment, around a kitchen table. But it's also totally wonderful to develop an elaborate narrative and universe in advance. Prep a campaign or run this on the fly. Jew do you.

## 1. BUILD THE DELI

Consider the physicality of your deli. Its unique smells and sounds, its design and architecture, the way the afternoon sun glints off of the cash register. Consider the deli's atmosphere, its vibe, its aura of welcoming or warning. Consider the deli's customer base, made up of neighborhood regulars or a constant stream of new characters. Come up with a physical description of the place and its people. Whose pictures are on the walls? What's today's special? If the deli is not for itself, who is for it? And being for its own self, what is it? And if not deli, when?

## 2. INHABIT THE DELI

### Core Statistics

When creating a character, each player should assign one of the following numbers to each statistic (each number may be used only once): **+2, +1, +1, +0, -1**. Characters are interesting because of their flaws. Why is your character audacious but without street smarts? Why is your character a weak genius who has lost hope?

- *Chutzpah*/Audacity
- *Tsuris*/Desperation
- *Gezunt*/Fortitude
- *Yidishe kop*/Cleverness
- *Bupkis*/Nothing at all. Invent a statistic specifically relevant to your character's backstory and insist it applies to every situation; the DM will decide.

Once per session, a player may use a mazel (luck) point and add +1 to a roll that relates to the expertise that comes from their position at the deli.

### Choose a Position

Your position in the deli impacts your **skills**, your **mazel point access**, and your **abilities** when it comes to shimmying (that's explained later). You have some decisions to make: why have you chosen to enter the fast-paced world of Jewish delis? What experiences and expertise do you bring to your position? What sordid secrets from your past may haunt you during the lunch rush? What connects you to your fellow deli workers? What's your favorite kind of sandwich?

### Butcher

*Special Skills:* Knife skills, *Stat boost:* +1 gezunt

*Mazel Point requirement:* when meat is on the line.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Lead a revolution; Invent a recipe; Have a sandwich.

### Counter worker

*Special Skills:* Veins run with mayonnaise instead of blood

*Stat boost:* +1 bupkis

*Mazel Point:* when anything must be spooned into a container

*Shimmy Bonus:* Run away; Incite violence; Have a sandwich.

### Waiter

*Special Skills:* Apron filled with straws, *Stat boost:* +1 chutzpah

*Mazel Point requirement:* when the tips are terrible.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Scan the crowd; Rain on a parade; Marry a doctor.

### Chef

*Special Skills:* Unlimited access to the steam table

*Stat boost:* +1 tsuris

*Mazel Point requirement:* when someone dares to question the menu.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Viral marketing; Incite violence; Invent a recipe.

### Baker

*Special Skills:* Keeper of the deli's secret rye bread recipe

*Stat boost:* +1 gezunt

*Mazel Point requirement:* when yeast is involved.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Lead a revolution; Invent a recipe; Have a seance.

### Host

*Special Skills:* Right to refuse service to anyone

*Stat boost:* +1 chutzpah

*Mazel Point requirement:* when a new customer is involved.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Scan the crowd; Marry a doctor; Have a seance.

### Owner

*Special Skills:* Naming rights to the deli, *Stat boost:* +1 Yidishe kop

*Mazel Point requirement:* when insurance may need to be called.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Scan the crowd; Viral marketing; Run away.

### Busboy

*Special Skills:* Always mere inches away from a dirty plate

*Stat boost:* +1 bupkis

*Mazel Point requirement:* when you're short-staffed.

*Shimmy Bonus:* Lead a revolution; Run away; Incite violence.

## 3. LIVE THE DELI

### Shimmies

Shimmies are moves you make when you need to extricate yourself from a situation or escalate one. When you attempt something gutsy, **roll 3d6 and add the appropriate modifiers**. Certain workers may be more likely to succeed at certain shimmies. On a 14 or above, the result is GREAT. On a 9 to 13, the result is MIDDLING and can be considered a partial success with some complications. On a 3 to 8, the result is GARBAGE, and has a dire consequence along the lines of the one outlined for each shimmy. A natural *chai* (18) means something uniquely awesome happens. Everyone should play fast and loose with their interpretations of the shimmies and their descriptions. Take advantage of the vagueness and relish the specifics.

**Rain on a parade** (*Chutzpah*/Audacity): Break into song as a distraction tactic. Player must actually do their best rendition of a song from the Jewish musical theatre canon.

GREAT: The threat is lessened by your dulcet tones.

MIDDLING: The threat is lessened, but the two Broadway producers enjoying bagels in the corner stand up and demand a full refund.

GARBAGE: Other customers demand to be included in this singing session, and the dining room becomes absolutely overrun with Zero Mostel impersonators.

**Lead a revolution** (*Chutzpah*/Audacity): Roll to use your experience with Yiddish labor organizing to begin transforming this capitalist deli into a socialist dining collective.

GREAT: The people are on your side! Your charm and grasp of Marxist principles helps you begin organizing the workers and patrons into a united front.

MIDDLING: You make some headway, but capitalism maintains a strong hold.

GARBAGE: A band of neo-liberals walks in the front door demanding that the deli's owner needs to pay lower taxes.

**Scan the crowd** (*Tsuris*/Desperation): Roll to seek allies in the deli. Do you know anyone here you can help you with this?

GREAT: There they are! Your friend from way back when! Describe them and how they can help you.

MIDDLING: There they are! Your friend from way back when! The DM will describe them and what they might offer.

GARBAGE: There they are! That person you went to elementary school with, forgot about, and then ignored at your sister's baby shower. They're out for blood and they are NOT going to leave a tip.



**Viral marketing** (*Tsuris*/Desperation): Develop a plan to get the word out and roll to see if it succeeds.

GREAT: #Success! Thousands flock to the deli to taste its world-renowned delicacies and enjoy its retro charms.

MIDDLING: Sure, more people start coming, but the buzz quickly fades and you're right back to where you started.

GARBAGE: You attract attention, alright—from a real estate developer who loves the building and wants to turn it into condos.

**Run away** (*Gezunt*/Fortitude): Roll to run into another room of the deli and hide there until the smoke clears.

GREAT: You rush into a room of your choice and barricade the door. They can't get you now.

MIDDLING: You rush into a room of the DM's choice, but the thing you were escaping follows you. They know you're in there. It's only a matter of time.

GARBAGE: You run, but trip on a barrel of pickles. Now the situation is escalated by the fact that you tried to run and the fact that there is brine all over the floor.

**Incite violence** (*Gezunt*/Fortitude): Roll to punch, stab, shoot, kick, chop, break a seltzer bottle over someone's head, or commit any other violent act. You can also roll to convince someone else to lash out.

GREAT: Violence occurs and the tide turns in your favor!

MIDDLING: You get a few jabs in, but you're injured in the process.

GARBAGE: You make a move, but are on the receiving end of much worse violence. War is not the answer; you should have known this.

**Invent a recipe** (*Yidishe Kop*/Cleverness): Egg salad emergency? Kugel kaput? Roll to use your delicatessen expertise to add a dish to the menu.

GREAT: The recipe is incredible—and a huge seller.

MIDDLING: I mean, it's okay, but nothing to write home about.

GARBAGE: Abject failure. Reconsider your career path.

**Marry a doctor** (*Yidishe Kop*/Cleverness): Roll to save someone from injury or illness using some combination of Tylenol, hastily applied gauze, matzah ball soup, or marrying a doctor.

GREAT: You complete your objective and the subject is temporarily able to function.

MIDDLING: You do what you wanted, but it's all you can do. You're on the brink of causing injury to others.

GARBAGE: You fail to save your patient and take some collateral damage in the process.

**Have a sandwich** (*Bupkis*/Nothing): Roll to fuel yourself with deli food until you've lulled yourself into a false sense of security.

GREAT: You enjoy the sandwich of your choice and enjoy 3 short minutes of peace and quiet.

MIDDLING: You get that sandwich, but the problem escalates in the time it takes you to chew those last few bites of pastrami.

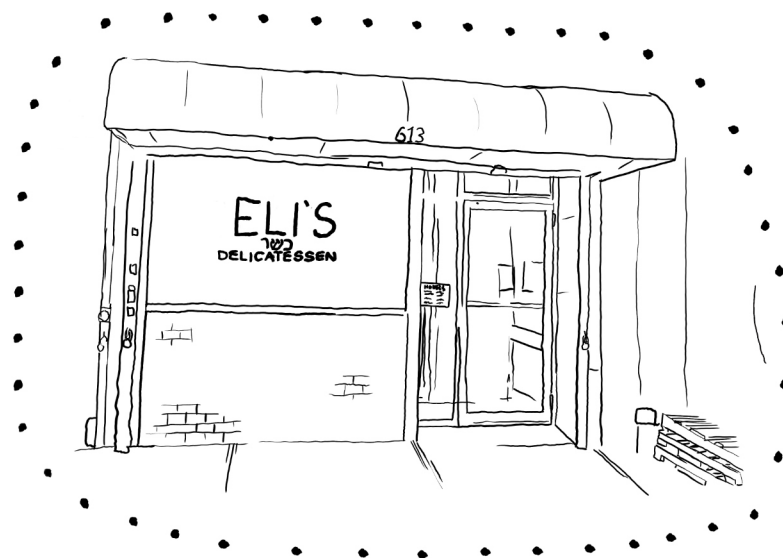
GARBAGE: The deli has run out of the one thing you wanted on that sandwich. Tell the DM what's missing; it's gone for the rest of the day.

**Have a séance** (*Bupkis*/Nothing): Perhaps the spirits of those who frequented this deli when it was founded can guide its present proprietors. Roll to seek help from beyond the grave.

GREAT: The founder of this delicatessen returns with words of encouragement and guidance.

MIDDLING: The deli's founder returns with a grave warning.

GARBAGE: You release a malevolent golem into the spice drawer and suffer from a paprika-based haunting until next Yom Kippur.



#### 4. MASTER THE DELI

Oy! We can't have just one day without a problem? The following tables and rules are meant to help the DM throw obstacles in the players' paths. The DM controls the universe; the players attempt to control the deli.

##### Random NPC Generator

New customers enter the deli with alarming frequency—six of them will enter the deli during the session. The DM may borrow this table and roll 1d10 3 times to build each NPC. Roll 1d6 to determine which NPC in the rotation is secretly the rabbi's cousin.

	Your newest customer is...	with...	who wants...
1	very old	a dog in a stroller	to learn about catering options for their child's wedding.
2	a vegan	a group of 12 friends on the way	three dozen everything bagels with scallion cream cheese.
3	a harried college student	a head cold	to be seated immediately.
4	an unaccompanied three-year-old	a fanny pack filled with mints	a catering-size order of pasta salad.
5	lactose intolerant	a checkered past	to know where the beef was raised.
6	gluten-free	a body bag	to help unionize the staff.
7	a hardcore goy	a sandwich from a competing deli	to learn how to use the deli slicer.
8	a stray cat	\$90 in nickels	the deli's top secret rye bread recipe.
9	actively participating in a performance art piece	a tote bag overflowing with zines	to reenact the Katz's Delicatessen scene from When Harry Met Sally.
10	a sentient (and very wise) bowl of egg salad	their son, who they are trying to set up with their waiter	to duel with the host, whose family is in an ancient feud with theirs.

#### Shortages

Shortages are very common in the fast-paced world of the Jewish deli lunch rush. Roll 1d20 after every NPC introduction to see what's missing. If something is already missing, roll again. The DM is encouraged to introduce NPCs who want the items that are gone more than anything in the world. DM, build a kashrut option if that's your style.

1: Everything bagels	11: Lox
2: Matzah ball soup	12: Tongue
3: Cream cheese	13: Kugel
4: Egg salad	14: Blintzes
5: Spicy brown mustard	15: Corned beef
6: Pastrami	16: Cel-Ray
7: Cole slaw	17: Pickles
8: Black and white cookies	18: Borscht
9: Knishes	19: Chopped liver
10: Dr. Brown's Black Cherry Wishniak	20: The deli slicer

#### The Deli's Dark Secret

There had to be one, didn't there? DM, roll 1d10 or invent your own.

- 1: There is a portal to an alternate dimension in the basement.
- 2: The owner's family has been funneling potato salad to the mob since the early '70s.
- 3: The bagel oven has been on fire this whole time.
- 4: Mrs. Rosenblatt's will is hidden in the drywall of the men's bathroom; it contains the key to finding her vast corned beef fortune, which has been missing since 1936.
- 5: The French fries aren't homemade.
- 6: Isaac Bashevis Singer once ate a meal at this deli and described the kasha as "merely passable." The owner's family has kept this review under wraps for the better part of a century.
- 7: A former waiter was killed in a tragic seltzer explosion and now haunts the dining room, seeking revenge.
- 8: The previous host was bribing the health inspector in exchange for good ratings. The health inspector is coming tomorrow, and the current host has to make some hard choices.
- 9: Soy lent green is people, and so is the coleslaw.
- 10: This whole thing is actually the play within a play of a community theatre production of Hamlet.

# CHRISTMAS DAY

by Eli Seitz

## Introduction

It's Christmas Day in New York City and the bustling metropolis appears to be almost deserted. There are grates over storefronts and the F train only rumbles by once an hour but in a small Cantonese restaurant in Manhattan, the Cohen clan descends for a once a year event.

Christmas Day is a freeform larp about family and identity. The larp follows the members of the Cohen family on Christmas Day, with the central scene occurring at a Chinese restaurant (following the Chinese food and a movie tradition). The players will choose from a variety of different family members, each with their own intersectional identities complete with recent life events, agendas, and concealed feelings.

## For the Facilitator

*Christmas Day* relies on a Facilitator to set up the game, call the meal transitions, and remind the table of the safety mechanics. If you choose to facilitate you will still play a family member but you will have a few extra responsibilities. To start, the Facilitator should familiarize themselves with the rules and the flow of play before the group meets, so that they are prepared to explain the game to the players.

Start the game by reading the rest of the rules to the players.

Hello, I will be the facilitator for our game on Christmas Day. As the Facilitator, I will walk us through the setup and help clarify any questions and while we are playing I will also help with pacing to make sure we are all on the same page. Let us take turns reading, beginning with the introduction.

*Throughout the text there will be italicized text that offers tips for the Facilitator. This text does not have to be read or summarized to the players. For example: it is a good idea to stop after each subsection and make sure everyone is on the same page.*

## Safety Discussion

*Christmas Day* includes some serious topics but at the end of the meal, it's still about a family that loves one another. It is important not to ignore or invalidate the issues faced by family members while also remembering that humor and laughter are important coping tools. Before beginning, discuss with the group any specific content you want to see or not see in your game and what peoples' comfort levels and boundaries are in respect to family drama.

Keep this conversation in mind during play, as family drama has the potential to hit close to home for many. During play, make use of tabletop specific safety tools to ensure that everyone at the table is able to enjoy the game. Recommended tools include Script Change by Brie Beau Sheldon ([briebeau.com/scriptchange](http://briebeau.com/scriptchange)) as well as the OK check in.

The "Ok Check In" is a method for asking a player about their own personal safety during the game. To initiate a check make the OK sign (pointer finger and thumb together forming a circle) at another player. The player then has three options to respond:

- thumbs up: I am good and play can continue,
- horizontal thumb or flat hand: I don't know how I feel and we need to stop and discuss how to proceed.
- thumbs down: I do not feel safe and play must stop immediately.

## Jewish culture

There is a saying, "two Jews, three opinions". Culturally and religiously, Jews have traditionally embraced the practice of asking provocative questions and debating them furiously. This is the spirit that drives Christmas Day. Jewish characters will not accept a deflection as the final answer; instead they will prod and poke until the truth, if there even is one, emerges.

A note on the American Jewish winter holiday experience: Christmas is insidious; it inserts itself into almost every aspect of life for much of December. Going grocery shopping means having to listen to Christmas carols, many public spaces are covered in Christmas decorations, and even the federal vacation days are tied specifically to the holiday. To the characters you will embody in Christmas Day, and for many non-Christians throughout the United States, all of the public displays are reminders that you are different. Feel free to play into this, especially if it is not an experience you have in your daily life. This can act a bonding topic: criticizing over the top Christmas tree, laughing at misguided attempts to turn Hanukkah into an important capitalist event, etc

Other assorted relevant Jewish topics:

- At the age of 13, many Jewish youth have a B'nei Mitzvah. This ceremony represents adulthood in the faith and requires a good deal of studying on the teen's part, typically accompanied by a big party.
- Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, is a minor Jewish holiday in the winter. Because of its frequent proximity and occasional overlap to Christmas it typically gets built up as a bigger deal than it actually is religiously. At its core, Hanukkah is about lighting candles in a menorah and saying prayers.
- The High Holy Days refer to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They typically occur in the fall and are the most important holidays of the year. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and offers a time of reflection, while on Yom Kippur Jews fast and offer forgiveness to those who have wronged them the previous year.
- Interfaith marriages have become much more common in the past fifty years but can remain a source of contention, especially in the eyes of the older generation.
- The process of converting to Judaism is a long ordeal consisting of a class taken over months and possibly purification rituals. Judaism does not have a culture of proselytizing, so the only people converting are those who have made the choice for themselves and committed to the lengthy process.
- Each family member brings varied experiences and interacts with Judaism differently depending on their current circumstances. While playing, think about how your character interacts with Jewish culture and how their life has been different because they are not part of the Christian majority.

## Characters

Each of the character archetypes has a core Jewish identity piece that they are struggling to resolve. Additionally, each character has a recent impactful event, concealed struggle that is eating away at them, and an attitude they are projecting to the family. Incorporate these extra details as you see fit with care and sensitivity in order to craft a more complete character.

*Feel free to adapt the event, concealed emotion, and projected attitude as you see fit. You can even create your own if you would like to change up the scenario. It is recommended to keep the family dynamics as written so that no characters become too isolated or disconnected from the rest of the family.*

Take turns reading through the characters and choose one that speaks to you. Do not worry about delving into their backstory or persona as the next workshop will help you develop your character and their connections with the other players.

## The Grandparent

Their Judaism is more cultural than religious. They do not currently belong to a Jewish community but want their children/grandchildren to know about the culture they came from. They want to create memories and have a menorah in their bag because the family was not able to light candles earlier in December during the actual nights of Hanukkah.

- Event: Just finished a large project or just reached a major anniversary
- Concealed: Feeling isolated or a loss in their community
- Projecting: Gossipy or nurturing

### Family Dynamics

- Appeal to the children: This is your chance to learn everything you can about the grandchild and college student's lives.
- Convince the parents: You have opinions and as an elder of the family you will make them known and have them followed.
- Project onto the betrothed: The fiancé(e) offers the perfect opportunity to mold a family early on.

## The Grandkid (age 7-8)

They are young and are having a hard time fully understanding why they can't celebrate Christmas like the rest of their friends. The holidays are a catalyst to questioning why they are different. They need help sorting through the situation. They are always asking the question "why?" trying to understand.

- Event: Cast as a lead in the school play or joined a sports team
- Concealed: Failed a test and haven't told their parents or had a fight with a friend
- Projecting: Precocious or disruptive

### Family Dynamics

- Question the parents and fiancé: All of the non grandparent adults are fair game for questioning
- Listen to the grandparent: The grandparent is always nice to you so play nice with them
- College Student: There is a wide age gap between you and your sibling, but they are very cool and should pay attention to you.

### **The Betrothed**

They are in a serious relationship and are making marriage plans. They have a strong and loving relationship, but their fiancé is not Jewish and they have yet to have any serious conversations about religion post-marriage. There are many unanswered questions on the table, from holidays to kids, and this meal is a chance for them to talk it all over with their family.

- Event: Paid the deposit on a venue or promoted at work
- Concealed: Money is tight for the wedding or there may be layoffs at their job
- Projecting: False confidence or nervous

#### **Family Dynamics**

- Confer with the parents: The parents know about what it is like to be engaged and have valuable advice
- Investigate the grandchild and college student: Talking with the younger generation can bring valuable insight even if they don't realize it themselves.
- Ignore the grandparent: While the grandparent may have some good points you know they have an agenda.

### **The Parent**

They grew up going to services on Saturday and had a Bar/Bat Mitzvah. They want their children to form a similar close bond to Judaism. They are the main organizing force behind the meal and have a definite agenda and clear idea of how the family dynamic should play out. They are a driving force, getting into it with everyone at the table.

- Event: Layoffs at their job or just joined the board of a non profit
- Concealed: Unhappy at their job or feeling trapped
- Projecting: Anxious or controlling

#### **Family Dynamics**

- Control the grandchild and college kid: The children need to behave and not upset the status quo by causing drama.
- Establish boundaries with the grandparent: You love them and there is reason behind their points but some boundaries must be set.
- Inform the fiancé: This is your chance to let them know it really is. Don't hold back.
- Work with the Parent: They are your rock and you know that you can always rely on them.

### **The Second Parent (optional)**

They have always been a peacemaker, trying to balance everyone's needs operating as a bit of a counterbalance to the stronger views of their partner. They see themselves as a secular Jew and prior to marriage did not observe many holidays. They want to help the other family members, but if the spotlight is turned towards them what they need is to know that their family has their back.

- Event: One of their parents (not in attendance) recently remarried or had an injury
- Concealed: Thinking on going back to school or accepted a job
- Projecting: People-pleaser or protective

#### **Family Dynamics**

- Let the kid be a kid: Children should enjoy their youth when they don't have many responsibilities.
- Get the college kid to open up: They are almost a regular adult now and you want to know more about their life.
- Appease the grandparent: It's easier to let them have their way.
- Question the fiancé: Marriage takes a lot of work and you need to find out if they are ready for it.
- Reign in the Parent: You know that with family, your spouse can get confrontational so you need to make sure they don't go too far.

### **The College Kid (optional)**

They just started college and are home for winter break. They haven't made any Jewish friends so far. They didn't attend High Holy Days services because there was no easy transportation and felt awkward explaining it to their new friends. They want to talk with someone older to help process feelings of disconnect and adapting to a new space.

- Event: Broke up with their high school sweetheart or had a significant new experience at college
- Concealed: Struggling with grades or finding a social scene
- Projecting: Excited about college or quiet and reserved

#### **Family Dynamics**

- Ignore the grandkid: Your younger sibling is so annoying! Better to just ignore them.
- Connect with the fiancé: Here is someone older but not directly related to your family. This is the cool person to try to connect with.
- Question the grandparent: They think they know best just because they're older. What do they really know about your situation?
- Get advice from the parent: Maybe they know a little something, but better not be too eager.
- Ignore the parent: They're so invasive, asking a million questions.



### **Relationship Workshop** *(about 10 minutes)*

This is not a game about a dysfunctional family but even healthy, loving relationships are tested by arguments and disagreements. After everyone has selected a character, take turns having a one-on-one scene with another family member if there is an odd number of players someone will be in two scenes.

These one-on-one scenes show snapshots of the characters' interactions in the past. Use this warm-up offers the chance to get a feel for your character and learn about the other family members before launching into the dinner. Ideas for scenes include: birthday phone calls, previous family vacations, routine dinner conversations, and others...

No need to create drama; just work on building the family dynamics.

### **Structure of play**

Before starting play, we will review the structure of the scene so that it can flow appropriately and ensure that everyone is familiar with the transitions. The meal has five acts: Openings, Appetizers, Entrees, Desserts, and Epilogues. These acts track the flow of the game and help the players know when to escalate drama and when to work towards resolution. For each of the transitions between acts there is a signal phrase given by the Facilitator.

- Openings - Short paragraph below.
- Appetizer act - "Appetizers are served"
- Entree act - "Entrees are served"
- Dessert act - "Dessert is served"
- Epilogues - "The check is right here when you are ready"

Each act aligns with the courses of a meal and the Chinese takeout should be brought out to the table in accordance with the stage of the game. Take your time to play and enjoy each others' company and the food. The drama will emerge as the meal goes on and characters' struggles come to light.

At each meal transition between the courses players may trade spots around the table. Just ask permission and move to a new chair. Players can use this to change the dynamic of the conversation and explore all of your familial bonds to their fullest potential.

### **Opening Scene** *(about 5 minutes)*

To set the scene, characters take turns delivering a soliloquy describing their week leading up to Christmas Day. Were they working, stressed out, on vacation, dreading seeing relatives, or excited for the trip downtown? After delivering the introductory vignette, have a seat at the table and wait for everyone to arrive and deliver their soliloquy).

### **Appetizers** *(about 10 minutes)*

The finger food is out, so use the opportunity to make pleasant conversation with the family members sitting next to you. Catch up and figure out what is going on in their lives. Use this time to flesh out the nooks and crannies of your character while edging toward your central conflicts.

Progress to the next stage when the designated Facilitator announces: "Entrees are served."

### **Entrees** *(about 20 minutes)*

Time to get into the meat or tofu of things. Start to get your problems and feelings out on the table. Feel free to talk big, put your emotions out there, and not be subtle, while remaining true to your persona.

Progress to the next stage when the designated Facilitator announces: "Dessert is served."

### **Dessert** *(about 10 minutes)*

The meal is drawing to a close, so it is time for some sweetness. There is no need to resolve any of the issues at stake for each of the characters. All that you can ask of each other is work on them a little and strive to reach the light.

Progress to the next stage when the designated Facilitator announces: "The check is right here, when you are ready."

### **Epilogue** *(about 5 minutes)*

One at a time, get up from the table and deliver a short epilogue using the prompt, "After the holidays...". Once everyone has stood up, adjourn for a short rest before the debrief.

*Calling the meal transitions requires reading the table and monitoring where the players are at in their conversations. The timings included in each course are only recommendations, and you can move ahead as fast or as slow as needed. For example, maybe your group has found their family dynamic very quickly, so there is no need to spend 10 minutes on the Appetizer Act. But later in play once the issues below the surface emerge the players need more time. Use your best judgment and don't be afraid to check in with your players.*

### Begin play

When players are ready begin play with the opening entrance monologues and play through to the epilogues. After playing, it is recommended to debrief with the group.

### Debrief

Debriefs are completely optional but highly recommended as they allow players a chance to separate themselves from their character and reflect on the experience.

1. Take a break after epilogues to stand up, stretch, take a bio break, get some water, and let thoughts percolate in your brain.
2. When you come back, take some time to talk about play in the third person.
3. Discuss the family dynamic you created at the table.
4. Discuss what you struggled with while playing.
5. Lastly, go around the table and share a part of your character you want to take with you and a part of your character that you want to leave behind.



*Doikayt* is an anthology of tabletop roleplaying games by Jewish game designers about the ways we see our Judaism.

Judaism is built on a community with a shared tradition of dialogue and storytelling, so the idea to create games in conversation with Jewish history, culture, faith, and identity fits right in.

Inside, you will find 12 works chronicling many different aspects of Jewish life: conversations and wrestling matches with God, dinners with dybbuks and dinners at Chinese restaurants on Christmas, tales of golems, Motl, the cantor's son, and the wise men of Chelm, delis, speakeasies, and synagogues.

Whether you are an RPG pro or you've never rolled a die before before, and whether you're a rabbi or a gentile, you will find something in *Doikayt* to read, play, and maybe you'll even learn something along the way.

