

IF I WERE A LICH, MAN

3 JEWISH GAMES BY
LUCIAN KAHN



ART BY
EZRA ROSE
FOREWORD BY
JAMES MENDEZ HODES



CREDITS

WRITING & GAME DESIGN

Lucian Kahn

ILLUSTRATOR

Ezra Rose

FOREWORD

James Mendez Hodes

SENSITIVITY REVIEW

James Mendez Hodes
TK Johnson

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Madison Pflance

COLLECTED EDITION PROJECT MANAGER

Ricardo Evangelho

PUBLISHED BY

Hit Point Press inc.



HITPOINT
PRESS

IFIWEREALICHMAN.COM | HITPOINTPRESS.COM

If I Were a Lich, Man is copyright © 2023 Hit Point Press Inc., their respective logos, illustrations, and characters distinct likenesses are property of Hit Point Press Inc. in Canada / US and other countries. Original text is copyright © 2023 Lucian Kahn. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this product may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permissions from the copyright holders. 1175 Brookfield Rd. East Ottawa, ON K1V 0C3, Canada. First printing, August 2023. Printed in China.

CONTENTS

GAME PIECES 2

INTRODUCTION 4

Recommended Safety Techniques.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Gratitude.....	7
Collaborator Profiles.....	8

CULTURAL PRIMER 10

IF I WERE A LICH, MAN 12

Summary: A family of Jewish-coded Liches debates about strategies for community survival against the murderous lawful good paladins. Inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons* and the Passover Seder.

Players: 4 ♦ **Time:** 1 hour ♦ **Tone:** Tense; Tragicomedy (think *Fiddler on the Roof* meets *Waiting for Godot*) ♦ **Especially Fun For:** Activist Groups, Debate Clubs, Friendly Game Nights, Families, Hebrew School

SAME BAT TIME, SAME BAT MITZVAH 20

Summary: On the way to Ruthie's Bat Mitzvah, a guest was bitten by a vampire bat and is transforming into a vampire during the formal reception.

Players: 7-13 ♦ **Time:** 1 hour ♦ **Tone:** Goofy

Especially Fun For: Parties, Drama Groups, Hebrew School

GRANDMA'S DRINKING SONG 26

Summary: A singing game about a matriarchal Jewish family of bootleggers during Prohibition. Inspired by my family's true stories.

Players: 4 ♦ **Time:** 2-3 hours ♦ **Tone:** Happy; Melodramatic Musical Comedy ♦ **Especially Fun For:** Friendly Game Nights, Families, Drama Groups

ORC APPENDIX 36

Game Pieces

- 13 X Cards

IF I WERE A LICH, MAN

- 4 Wooden Dreidels
- 4 Lich Cards

SAME BAT TIME, SAME BAT MITZVAH

- 13 Character Cards
- 13 Bat Cards

GRANDMA'S DRINKING SONG

- 10 Scene Cards

X CARDS



4 WOODEN DREIDELS



LICH CARDS



CHARACTER CARDS



LEE

Her ex-boyfriend

Use this personality or invent your own:

- A metalhead with hardcore DJ requests
- Wants to get back together with Ruthie



LEE



RUTHIE

The Bat Mitzvah girl

Use this personality or invent your own:

- A nerdy Hebrew School teacher's pet
- A drama queen in her moment to shine
- A rebellious atheist



RUTHIE

BAT CARDS

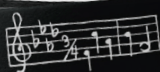
13



61



SCENE CARDS



Scene:
Charity

Location:
The apartment

Present:
Moysh, Bertha, Yetta

Moysh 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:
God's Rules
Location:
The apartment
Present:
Bertha, Harriet, Yetta

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.

RECOMMENDED SAFETY TECHNIQUES

These games should be positive experiences for everyone. However, interactive media runs the risk of entering emotionally or psychologically challenging territory, especially when it's about a marginalized culture and religion. The following techniques can help your group remove unwanted content from your play sessions quickly, so you can get back to having fun.

LINES AND VEILS: Brainstorm and agree on Lines and Veils together at the beginning of the game. “Lines” are things you don’t want to come up at all during the game. For example, if someone at the table states that “stereotypes about Jewish noses” is a line, that topic won’t come up at all during play. “Veils” are things that are okay to have in the game, as long as they aren’t described in detail. For example, if someone wants to veil “parental guilt trips,” then parental guilt trips can occur in the story, but the scene fades to black or fast-forwards through the details.

The Lines and Veils technique was created by Ron Edwards.

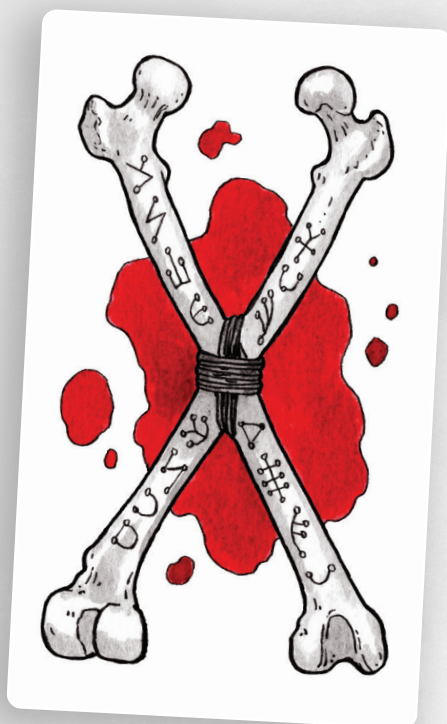
THE X-CARD: Using the X-card in combination with Lines and Veils can help catch unwanted content that nobody thought to mention at the beginning of the game. The X-card is like a pause button. If any player feels the game has veered into unpleasant territory, using the X-card pauses the game immediately. It’s your choice whether you’d prefer to talk about why you used the X-card or simply move on. Rewind back to before the unwanted content, and resume the story with a different approach when everyone is ready.

TABLETOP X-CARD: Place one of the “X” cards in the middle of the table. Touch the card to use it, or simply say “X-card.”

LIVE ACTION OR ONLINE VIDEO

X-CARD: Instead of using a card, cross your arms over your chest to make an “X” and say, “X-card.”

The X-card technique was created by John Stavropoulos.



The X-card

Introduction *by Lucian Kahn*

If I Were a Lich, Man is a trilogy of funny Jewish roleplaying games about creative resistance against authoritarianism. The villains in the stories of our oppressors become the heroes in our play.

The gaming style is improvisational and collaborative, with a unique blend of tabletop and live action systems. There are no winners or losers, in the tradition of freeform and drama games. They can all be played at home, in a classroom, in a theatre, or online, and require between one and three hours. They don't need a separate facilitator or game master; everyone can play a character.

Recommended for fans of *What We Do in the Shadows*, *Russian Doll*, and *Young Frankenstein*.

Who Are These Games For?

CULTURE: This trilogy is an offering to Jews, but you don't have to be Jewish to play. Everyone's invited regardless of cultural or religious background. Players from other marginalized communities are especially encouraged to join the fun. Folks from tight-knit immigrant families often find these games very relatable. Familiarity with Jewish culture isn't mandatory but will enrich the experience.

AGE: Teens and up.

ROLEPLAYING EXPERIENCE: Since all the games include freeform roleplay, they will be most fun for players who enjoy improvisational activities such as drama games, live action roleplaying, speech and debate, or just playing pretend.

ATTITUDE: You must have a sense of humor to play. You must want to engage with Jewish culture's ancient tradition of using humor to address serious topics.

The Game Designer's Jewish Background

Hi, I'm the game designer and writer, Lucian Kahn. I grew up in a tight-knit Jewish family, attending Conservative and Reform synagogues at different times throughout my youth. My great-great grandma Taube immigrated with her children to the United States in 1910 from the city of Czernowitz on the Austrian-Romanian border (now Chernivtsi, Ukraine) and settled in The Bronx, New York City. Her husband, Anshul, was an Orthodox rabbi, but he died young. My grandma Ruthie and great aunt Nettie (who told me these stories) grew up in that Bronx apartment along with seven other relatives and a cat for mice. They were all bootleggers during Prohibition, manufacturing illicit booze in a closet that my great grandma Edith called "the funny room." Ruthie married my grandpa Melvin, a constant jokester whose brother Freddy once peed out the window onto the head of a cop.

I'm best known in the game design world for my comedic tabletop roleplaying game and dating sim, *Visigoths vs Mall Goths*. However, in the Jewish world I'm best known as the frontman for the early 2010s all-trans, all-Jewish, klezmer-punk comedy band *Schmekel*. *Schmekel* was written up in the *New York Times* and the *Forward* (formerly the *Jewish Daily Forward*) as an example of Queer Yiddishkeit.

Nothing Here Is Universal

Judaism is very diverse in beliefs, cultures, and practices – but I’m just one person. These games couldn’t possibly represent the experiences of all Jews, and that’s not their purpose. Instead, I’ve created games specific to my own idiosyncratic Jewish perspective, with the hope that their vividness will breathe new life into your imagination.

Why Criminals and Monsters?

Why are the Jewish protagonists of these games criminals and monsters? Is this a *shanda fur die goyim* (an embarrassment in front of the non-Jews)? I’m obviously a Jew who thinks this is a great idea, but as the saying goes, “Three Jews, four opinions.” Anyway, here’s mine: the villain in the story of the oppressor can become the hero in the story of the oppressed.

I’ve positioned us as marginalized underdogs because this trilogy is about creative resistance against authoritarianism. The heroes of roleplaying games are often self-righteous, colonialist jerks on a killing spree. I mean, I love all kinds of RPGs, but I wouldn’t actually want to *be* any of those people! Why would we as Jews want to model ourselves after the *heroes* in stories about the mass-slaughter of “monstrous others” for gold? Don’t Nazis see *us* as monstrous others?

If we look to fantasy stories for clues about defending Jewish communities from fascists, I think we can learn more by identifying with the so-called criminals and monsters. And Jewish folklore agrees. Play these games in the spirit of Judith, Esther, Hershel of Ostropol, and the Golem of Prague!

Why “Phylacteries” and not “Tefillin”?

My commentary on the relationship between Jews and fantasy tropes revolves around the word “phylactery.” *If I Were a Lich, Man* is a commentary on the fact that the entire fantasy genre (beginning with *Dungeons & Dragons*) uses the Greek-derived translation of tefillin (“phylactery”) to refer to the magic vessel containing the soul of a lich. This means that liches are already Jewish-coded villains. So what would happen in our imaginations if we as Jews actually tried identifying with the liches instead of with the murderous paladins who are allegedly the heroes in fantasy stories?

Lich phylacteries aren’t actually tefillin though, even in fantasy stories (last I checked, I don’t store my soul in tefillin, and lich phylacteries have developed into something that looks quite different). However, you’ll see in the game that the “Good Lich” (the counterpart for the “Good Son” in the Passover seder) is interested in “going back” to using actual tefillin.

Gratitude

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

I owe much of my comedic style to a couple of Melvins: my grandpa and Mel Brooks.

If I Were a Lich, *Man* was influenced by Dr. Bruce Lincoln's 2008 course *Liminal Beings: Vampires and Others* at the University of Chicago Divinity School, and by James Mendez Hodes' article series *Orcs*, *Britons*, *And the Martial Race Myth*.

Same Bat Time, *Same Bat Mitzvah* was influenced by the song *Werewolf Bar Mitzvah* (Donald Glover and Tracy Morgan).

Grandma's Drinking Song was influenced by the roleplaying games *Deranged* (Maria and Jeppe Bergmann Hamming), *Bluebeard's Bride* (Whitney "Strix" Beltrán, Marissa Kelly, and Sarah Doombringer), *Swords Without Master* (Epidiah Ravachol), and *O Shining Star!* (Brendan Day).

My thoughts on this collection as a whole were informed by the play *Indecent* (Paula Vogel). All three games were influenced by the Aftselakhis Spectacle Committee's annual surrealist Purimshpil in Brooklyn, New York, sponsored by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ).

SUPPORT

Many people playtested these games and/or gave helpful feedback, including a surprising number of rabbis. I would especially like to thank:

Sharang Biswas, Banana Chan, Rachel Grant Meyer, Jonaya Kemper, Jeyn Levison, Ezra Rose, Jeeyon Shim, Dylan Weinberger, and Max Zev

I am grateful to Ricardo at Hit Point Press for believing in this project, and to the gaming organizations and publications that helped me develop these games:

Big Bad Con

Doikayt: A Jewish TTRPG Anthology

Double Exposure

The Gauntlet's Codex Zine

Indie Game Developer Network

Finally, enormous thanks to the older generations in my family for their stories and humor, especially my mom and Aunt Linda, and in memory of Grandpa Mel, Grandma Ruthie, Great Aunt Nettie, Great Uncle Morty, Uncle Earl, and everyone from before my time.

Collaborator Profiles



LUCIAN KAHN

Projects: Visigoths vs. Mall Goths, Dead Friend: A Game of Necromancy

Website: necromancy.itch.io

Bio: Great-great grandson of Jewish bootleggers. An annoyance to fascists and fuddy-duddies. An award-winning game designer. A trans, gay bisexual, outside the binary/nonbinary binary. A surrealist and jokester. Despite ever worsening conditions in the USA, does not bake his enemies into matzoh. Too weird to represent any of his communities.



EZRA ROSE

Projects: Cambridge University Press, PM Press, AK Press, Power & Magic Press, Buried Without Ceremony, & Glowing Roots Press

Social: @sheydgarden

Website: ezra-rose.com

Bio: Queer & trans Jewish illustrator, zinester & multi-disciplinary creator living on a small farm with their chosen family. Descended from rabbis on one side, witches & pirates on the other. Endlessly inspired by monsters, magic, & mysticism. Horror culture nerd, casual rural goth, big fan of afternoon naps. Building an army of miniature golems.



JAMES MENDEZ HODES

Projects: Avatar Legends RPG,
Magic: the Gathering, Jackbox Party Packs

Social: @LulaVampiro

Website: jamesmendezhodes.com

Bio: James Mendez Hodes is a writer, game designer, and cultural consultant whom you might know from the Avatar Legends RPG, Magic: the Gathering, or the Jackbox Party Packs. His dad used to say he was related to Bernard Malamud, but Mendez has never actually substantiated that claim. Mendez likes to joke that because he's Jewish and Filipino, he cleans up after himself. If any of you laughed at that joke or retell it, you're automatically canceled. Even you, Lucian.



Cultural Primer *by James Mendez Hodes*

On behalf of Jews everywhere in the world, we would like to welcome you to *If I Were a Lich, Man*. However, it is important to remember that we do not represent Jews everywhere in the world, and neither does any Jew. We are vast and contain multitudes.

Are Non-Jews Allowed To ...

You can safely assume that if you can purchase a game in which you play as a demographic to which you do not belong in real life, the authors of the game want you to play as that demographic. You do not need to ask their permission on social media. However, there's a certain etiquette to it. It's hard to figure out sometimes, because as the existence of these games implies, Jews love self-deprecating humor and jokes that lampshade unkind things other people say about us; and some Jews are more cautious than others about telling Gentiles (non-Jews) the jokes we tell each other.

It's okay for you to role-play, discuss, and laugh about Jewish things which are a) part of the Jewish experience and b) also present in non-Jews' experience: overbearing parents, children who won't listen, conflicts between family responsibilities and personal goals, stressful holiday gatherings. However, non-Jews should stay away from topics of large-scale historical trauma like pogroms, hate crime epidemics, and of course Stalin, Hitler, and the Holocaust. Also avoid affecting Jewish-associated accents unless they're your accent in real life, or making a big deal about money when the game hasn't specifically suggested that you do so.

Liches

These games are full of intentional allegories between fantasy beings and real-world groups. Not all games do this intentionally (or admit to themselves or others they do this intentionally), but this game does. In *IIWaL,M*, liches allegorically represent Jews, but it's up to you whether Judaism actually exists in your fictional setting.



What Mitzvah?

A b'net mitzvah (gender-neutral), bar mitzvah (masculine), or bat mitzvah (feminine) is a Jewish social and religious coming-of-age ritual which occurs around when a young Jew turns thirteen. It requires extensive, often tedious classes with a rabbi in preparation, culminating in a ceremony at the temple or synagogue where the celebrant declaims a Hebrew passage from the Torah and then delivers a speech about its meaning. Their friends and family, Jewish and Gentile alike, attend the ceremony, sometimes bringing gifts or making donations to a charity of the kid's choice. The kid's parents usually throw a big party afterwards with music, dancing (mixed or otherwise depending on denomination), games, food, booze for the adults, and much awkward teenage flirting. If the family is wealthy, the b'net mitzvah can be an extravagant affair resembling a wedding, but the one in this game is far more modest.

What's the party like, though? The most important thing to keep in mind is that the bat mitzvah party is thrown by adults for children, and the party atmosphere is one at which both children and adults are present (although it's ostensibly about the teenagers). Adults might compliment the celebrant on how good their Hebrew pronunciation or their d'rash (homily) were, regardless of the actual quality of the foregoing.

If you've been to a b'net mitzvah in real life, you might bring in a few details from your real-life experience, or from similar teenage parties and coming-of-age customs. However, let's avoid discussing money, expense, or comparing how lavish this bat mitzvah is to the Cohen b'net mitzvah; those subjects absolutely come up at real ones, but it's easy to trip and fall into Jewish money stereotypes that way. Another topic that is not likely to come up is G-d. It's not offensive to talk about G-d or religion at the bat mitzvah party, but at this point in the weekend there's been so much religion already that everyone is tired of thinking about it, G-d included.

What About Orcs?

Please see the Orc Appendix on page 36.

IF I
WERE A
LICH, MAN



If I Were a Lich, Man

Players: 4 ♦ **Time:** 1 hour ♦ **Tone:** Tense; Tragicomedy (think *Fiddler on the Roof* meets *Waiting for Godot*) ♦ **Especially Fun For:** Friendly Game Nights, Families, Activist Meetings, Hebrew School

Introduction

If I Were a Lich, Man is a fantasy roleplaying game about Lich resistance against lawful good paladins. The main action is a family debate about strategies for community survival, inspired by *Dungeons & Dragons* and the Passover Seder. The game is both a commentary on traditional fantasy tropes, and an allegory for Jewish resistance against antisemitism, fascism, and white supremacy in the United States. (And it *isn't* about conflict in the Middle East.) The paladins, who are heroes in games like *Dungeons & Dragons*, here represent the present-day horrors of white nationalism, Christian hegemony, and the danger of the US government to its marginalized inhabitants.

This game is both a comedy and deadly serious. In many Jewish families, humor is a tool for navigating difficult conversations, enduring trauma, and building courage. Play with love in your heart.

Facilitator's Information

If I Were a Lich, Man does not require a separate game master or facilitator; the host can also be a player.



Lich Card

PLAYING IN PERSON

You will need:

- A table and chairs
- A notepad
- A timer
- A dreidel
- The Lich cards
- Lich phylacteries: 4 clear shot-glasses, filled with water dyed with 4 different colors of food coloring, lightly covered in plastic wrap
- An empty bowl in a corner of the room, in case someone makes the extreme decision to pour out a phylactery

PLAYING ONLINE

You can play *If I Were a Lich, Man* online using the following adjustments.

All players will need:

- Voice and text chat software, such as Zoom or Discord
- A way to take notes
- A timer
- A dreidel or virtual dreidel spinner (search for “spin a dreidel” on Google to use their in-browser tool, or try Digital Dreidel by ZebraFox Games)

Don't use physical objects for phylacteries; imagine them instead.



DOING ACTIONS

For an online game, you will alternate between speaking your character's dialogue and narrating their actions. Agree together on a hand signal to indicate that players are speaking out-of-character (a common signal is holding a closed fist against your forehead). Use this signal to narrate what you're doing. (For example: hold your closed fist against your forehead and say, "I grab Gantz's phylactery and wave it around as a threat." Then remove your fist and return to speaking in-character.)

We strongly recommend closing all unrelated social media and chat windows while playing, to heighten and maintain the mood.

CONTENT NOTE

This game uses traditional Jewish objects and ritual formulas for unconventional purposes. This game contains themes of antisemitism, racism, structural oppression, and genocide.

SCENARIO

To begin, each player reads one paragraph aloud to the group:

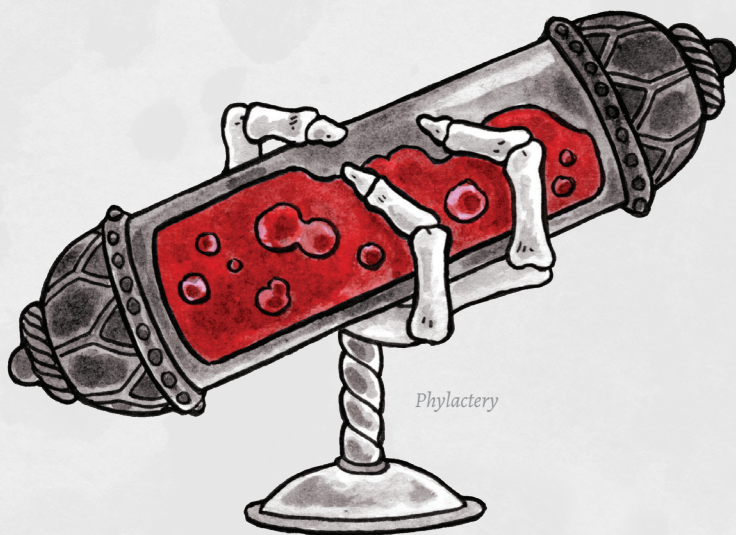
If I Were a Lich, Man is about a community meeting of Liches. The meeting's agenda has two points: the fate of our phylacteries and our daily struggle against the lawful good paladins.

Liches are already Jewish-coded villains. Liches' phylacteries (spooky artifacts containing our souls and preserving our undead existence) are based on Jews' phylacteries (also known as *tefillin*: small boxes containing scripture, traditionally wrapped around our arms and heads during prayer). Today, we identify with Liches, we fear and resist our oppressors, and like Jews throughout history, we debate our rituals.

This game uses traditional Jewish objects and ritual formulas for unconventional purposes. The four characters are The Good Lich, The Wicked Lich, The Simple Lich, and The Lich Who Doesn't Know How To Ask a Question. These archetypes are inspired by the "four sons" of the Passover Seder. Traditionally, the Passover Seder invites critical engagement about its procedures and values, and so do these archetypes of Liches. (Is the "Good Lich" actually good? And so on.)

This game also uses a Hanukkah dreidel, which is from a completely unrelated holiday. We can only assume that just as fantasy writers have forgotten the Jewish origin of phylacteries, these Liches have forgotten many important details of their Jewish heritage.





DESTRUCTION OF PHYLACTERIES

One player reads the following section aloud to the group:

If I Were a Lich, Man rarely involves the destruction of phylacteries during the community meeting, because almost all Liches believe this to be fatal...but it could happen!

If you decide to destroy a phylactery, wait until the timer has less than 5 minutes remaining – this must be the dramatic climax.

In the extreme case that your phylactery is destroyed (by you or another player), decide in the moment whether this kills you, weakens you, strengthens you, transforms you, devastates you, thrills you, or does nothing at all.

SETTING

One player reads the following section aloud to the group:

We Liches live in the Northern Boneyard. We are undead, skeletal, and feared. In cities to the west live paladins, law-abiding human heroes. The paladins are constantly trying to kill us. To the east and south sprawls the impassable sea.



GANTZ (Gimel)
"The Good Lich"



Opinion on Phylacteries: We should not be using these crude soul-prisons, but the true phylacteries of our ancestors, the prayer boxes containing holy texts that we once wrapped around our arms and foreheads. When we return to the traditions of old, our God will look favorably upon us and protect us from the paladins.

Opinion on the Paladin Threat: We must raise an army of Liches to destroy the paladin cities. Until every paladin is vanquished, no Lich can rest in peace!



SHTEL (Shin)
"The Wicked Lich"



Opinion on Phylacteries: An object cannot contain a soul, so phylacteries are mere superstition. We should simply pour them out and rid ourselves of pointless magical thinking.

Opinion on the Paladin Threat: The paladins wouldn't keep trying to kill us if we didn't keep skulking around gravestones muttering about mystic knowledge. We should try to become more like the paladins so they won't fear us anymore. Let's offer them control of the Northern Boneyard as a peace offering and prove our worth to them as minions.

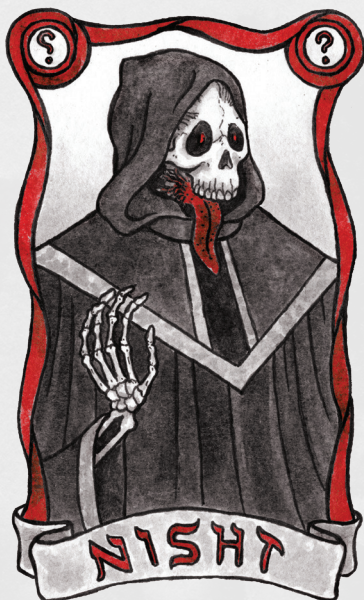


HALB (Hay)
"The Simple Lich"



Opinion on Phylacteries: Why don't we just drink the phylacteries to get our souls back?

Opinion on the Paladin Threat: Let's try to find some other monsters to ask for help. The paladins hate them too!



NISHT (Nun)
*"The Lich Who Doesn't Know
 How To Ask a Question"*



Opinion on Phylacteries: Get your bony hands off my phylactery! I don't want to lose my soul!

Opinion on the Paladin Threat: Paladins are scary! Sometimes they even...die!

Special Trait: Nisht can't ask questions. Doesn't know how.

Characters:

One player reads the following section aloud to the group:

The four of you are siblings. You love each other very much.

Choose characters now from the four options. Read your character card to understand the basics of your character. Your character card contains your name, your Hebrew letter, your archetype, and your opinions on two topics: phylacteries and the paladin threat. You may share this information with other players.

If you're playing online, change your display name to your character's name.



Playing the Game

All players should take a few minutes to read the rest of the game's instructions, either together or separately. This is a good time to ask questions and make sure everyone understands how to play. While playing, you may wish to pause between sections to review the instructions for the next section.

When everyone is ready, the game begins.

CHARACTER BACKSTORY

Before the debate, each Lich beginning with Gantz spins the dreidel. The Hebrew letter it lands on represents one of the other Liches, indicated on their character card next to their name. (If it lands on your own letter, spin again.) Briefly describe a fond memory of an experience with this sibling at home in the Northern Boneyard. This will help you begin the game feeling like a family.

Every character will describe a memory, but may or may not be the subject of another Lich's memory.

MEETING AGENDA

During the meeting, all Liches typically sit at the table with their phylacteries in front of them, though they may stand or move around for dramatic effect. Tampering with or destroying phylacteries is fully within the bounds of the game.

The meeting's agenda is to debate two questions:

1. Should we continue using phylacteries?
2. How can we stop the paladins from killing us?

Due to time constraints, only one of these questions will be voted on and adopted as policy.

THE DEBATE

To begin the meeting, Gantz spins the dreidel to determine which Lich will provide the opening remarks. After the dreidel lands and Gantz announces the opening speaker, Shtel begins a 30-minute timer, and the debate commences. (For playing online, each player may want to set a timer for personal reference, but Shtel's is the official timer.) The debate itself is freeform improvisation.

During the debate, Nisht takes notes on the main proposed strategies, to help narrow down the options later. At any time, Halb may propose ending the meeting early and proceeding to a vote, but doing so requires unanimous consent. When the timer rings, all debate stops immediately. No matter how fiercely you debate, remember that you're a family and you love each other.

VOTING

Halb spins the dreidel to determine who gets to decide which question will be voted on: the use of phylacteries or the paladin threat. The other matter is discarded for "a future meeting."

Nisht consolidates the main proposed strategies for the selected issue into 2 or 3 options. The other Liches may not interfere with this, even if Nisht messes up the details.

Everyone votes, with no abstentions. In the case of a tie, Nisht is the tie-breaker.

EPILOGUE

Out of character, discuss one last question: do you think the community of Liches survives, and if so, at what cost?



Same Bat Time, Same Bat Mitzvah

Players: 7-13 ♦ **Time:** 1 hour ♦ **Tone:** Goofy

Especially Fun For: Parties, Drama Groups, Hebrew School

Introduction

On the way to Ruthie's Bat Mitzvah, a guest was bitten by a vampire bat and is transforming into a vampire during the formal reception.

Same Bat Time, Same Bat Mitzvah is a short live-action roleplaying game that works great as a warm-up or icebreaker.

WHAT'S A BAT MITZVAH PARTY?

A Bat Mitzvah is a religious coming-of-age ceremony that Jewish girls perform when they turn thirteen. It's usually followed by a big party containing a sometimes-awkward mix of friends and extended family (like a wedding reception with lots of young teens). This game is about that awkward party, but with vampires.

HOW DO VAMPIRES WORK?

Garlic? Sunlight? Immortality? Stakes through the heart? What's the deal with vampires in this game?

Same Bat Time, Same Bat Mitzvah doesn't have detailed vampire lore. This is an absurd scenario and you can improvise these details in the moment.

Facilitator's Information

Same Bat Time, Same Bat Mitzvah is easier to play with a non-player facilitator, especially online. However, a savvy multitasker can both facilitate and play a character. The facilitator cannot play as Ruthie or begin the game as a vampire. In an online game, the facilitator will know who's starting the game as a vampire, but their character will not.

PLAYING IN-PERSON

You will need:

- A timer
- Klezmer music and a way to play it (try searching on a streaming music app for "klezmer" with your laptop or phone)
- The 13 Character cards
- The Bat cards (6-12 black cards and 1 red card)
- 13 candles and a way to light them (optional – you can mime this)



Character Card



PLAYING ONLINE

You can play *Same Bat Time, Same Bat Mitzvah* online using the following adjustments.

All players will need:

- Voice and text chat software that allows users to create separate chatrooms and send private messages, such as Discord or Slack
- Make five chatrooms available to everyone, called Dancefloor, Family Table, Buffet, Photo Zone, and Out of Character. Out of Character is the default room where players can talk about the game's instructions or take a break. The other rooms represent locations at the Bat Mitzvah party.
- A free online random name picker, such as wheelofnames.com or namepicker.net.

CONTENT NOTE

This game contains references to teen romance.

Playing the Game

WHO'S THE VAMPIRE?

Shuffle 6-12 black Bat cards and 1 red Bat card, giving each player a random card. The cards remain secret to everyone but the receiver. Whoever gets red has received vampire bat blood.



PLAYING ONLINE

Enter the characters' names into the online name picker. Send a private message to the "winner" informing them that they have received vampire bat blood.



Characters

Choose characters from the following list. Everyone should have their Character card visible, showing the character's name and relationship to Ruthie. Someone must play Ruthie, but all other characters are optional.

Ruthie's family are Reform Jews and allow guests of any gender to dance together.



RUTHIE, the Bat Mitzvah girl

Use this personality or invent your own:

- A nerdy Hebrew School teacher's pet
- A drama queen in her moment to shine
- A rebellious atheist

LEE, her ex-boyfriend

Use this personality or invent your own:

- A metalhead with hardcore DJ requests
- Wants to get back together with Ruthie

TATIANA, her ex-girlfriend

Use this personality or invent your own:

- An orchestra nerd with classical DJ requests
- Wants to get back together with Ruthie

BRITNEY, a popular girl

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Snobby and petty
- Loves to gossip about all the other guests

AGNES, an unpopular girl

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Awkward but outgoing
- Obsessed with the supernatural

RIVER, her crush

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Would rather be surfing
- Aloof; too cool for this Bat Mitzvah

PEARL, her grandma (mother's mother)

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Meddles in everyone's personal lives
- Worried for everyone's health

MORTIMER,

her grandpa (mother's father)

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Makes corny puns
- Tries to do magic tricks (badly)

SEYMOUR OR ETHEL, the rabbi

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Tries to sign everybody up for Jewish activity groups
- Complains about a million minor ailments

CAROL, mom

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Overwhelmingly proud of Ruthie and can't stop crying
- Resentful of Bruce and having a mid-life crisis

DAVID, dad

Use this personality or invent your own:

- Interior decorator obsessed with the venue's décor
- Resentful of Chad and having a mid-life crisis

CHAD, mom's new husband

Use this personality or invent your own:

- A handsome finance bro
- Has never been to a Bat Mitzvah and has no idea what's going on

BRUCE, dad's new husband

Use this personality or invent your own:

- A chef; gushing about and/or critiquing the hors d'oeuvres
- Resentful of Carol



Scenes

SCENE 1: Candle-Lighting Ceremony (about 20 minutes)

Ruthie invites characters 1 by 1 to light a candle and tell a brief anecdote about their relationship with Ruthie and this synagogue community. Ruthie lights the final candle with a heartfelt speech. The vampire begins to show signs of change but is not yet discovered.

PLAYING ONLINE

In Scene 1, all players remain in the Dancefloor chatroom for the Candle-Lighting Ceremony. At any time, players may send each other private messages to “whisper.”

SCENE 2: Dance Party (exactly 30 minutes)

Set a timer for 30 minutes. Play klezmer music. Dance, chat, and mingle. The vampire chooses a guest to bite and transform by whispering in their ear, “Mazel tov, today you are a vampire.”

Each vampire may bite 1 guest. Guests transform at any pace they wish.

Play continues until one of the following happens:

- The timer runs out
- Everyone is a vampire and everyone knows
- A non-vampire somehow puts a stop to this *mishigas**
(be creative and decide as a group if this has occurred)

**mishigas* (Yiddish): nonsense

PLAYING ONLINE

In Scene 2, players may move freely between all chatrooms to visit different areas of the party and talk to other guests there. At any time, players may send each other private messages to “whisper.”

CONCLUSION (OPTIONAL)

After playing, you may want to do a short de-role activity to get back out of character. For example, go around in a circle and say one way you’re similar to your character in real life and one way you’re different.



Bat Card



Grandma's Drinking Song

Players: 4 ♦ **Time:** 2-3 hours ♦ **Tone:** Happy; Melodramatic Musical Comedy

Especially Fun For: Friendly Game Nights, Families, Drama Groups

Introduction

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.

Grandma's Drinking Song was inspired by Lucian Kahn's own matriarchal bootlegging family. He encourages you to join him in exploring the memories of this period as unreliable narrators.

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.

PLAYING IN PERSON

You will need:

- A table and chairs
- 1 onion (the onion of soliloquy)
- The 10 Scene cards, arranged in a central pile
- A pen and paper for each player to copy the family drinking song
- Beverages for all, alcoholic or non-alcoholic as players prefer
- A rhyming dictionary, such as rhymezone.com (optional)

We strongly recommend closing all unrelated social media and chat windows while playing, to heighten and maintain the mood.

CONTENT NOTE

This game contains themes of alcohol use, law enforcement, flirtation to avoid arrest, fear of coming out as gay, gender shaming, financial difficulties, and challenges for new immigrants.



PLAYING ONLINE

You can play *Grandma's Drinking Song* online using the following adjustments.

All players will need:

- Voice and text chat software, such as Zoom or Discord
- Document collaboration software, such as Google Docs. Use a shared document to write the family drinking song together.
- Assign one player to draw scene cards for everyone and read them aloud.
- Pour your own drinks.
- To “give the onion,” say, “I give the onion to [character's name].” (For example, “I give the onion to Bertha.”) For maximum fun, each player can keep a real onion near the computer and hold it up to the webcam when giving or receiving it.
- Follow all other instructions as written.

Warm-Up Activities

Before assigning characters and explaining the rules, complete all 4 warm-up activities in order. These activities 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 are now the audience. People 2, 3, and 4 will be actors 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 should become angry about the potato situation. As soon as Person 4 seems really angry, Person 1 should give them the onion. When Person 4 receives the onion, everyone else becomes silent, and Person 4 delivers a rant about hating potatoes. Signal the end of this rant by taking a drink. In response, everyone else also 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!"

Now 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 1, 2, 3, 4 again so that everybody has a different role. Repeat the above workshop in your new role.

SCENARIO SETTING

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

1. Bertha: the booze boss - a pushy and lewd old woman

Her 3 teenage grandchildren:

2. Harriet: the eldest - reckless and flirtatious
3. Yetta: the middle - ambitious and moody
4. Moysh: the youngest - awkward, impulsive, and secretly gay

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



The Scenes

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: Moysh, Bertha, Yetta

Moysh 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, Moysh, Harriet

Moysh tries to convince Bertha that she needs to learn English. Bertha accuses Moysh 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, Moysh, A Neighborhood Boy

Harriet forces Moysh 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. Moysh 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, Moysh, A Drag Queen Hairdresser

Moysh 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 Moysh to come along.

Scene: From the Sky

Location: The apartment

Present: Moysh, Bertha, A Cop

There is only one bathroom in the apartment building, all the way down on the ground floor. Moysh becomes impatient and urinates out the window. It lands on a cop! The cop recognizes Moysh 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 livingroom. 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: Moysh, Yetta, A Customer

Moysh 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.

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 Moysh is the audience member.
- Bertha seems to have become very angry with Harriet, so the audience member gives Bertha 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.
- Moysh shouts, “May you grow with your head in the ground like an onion!” to end the scene.

SCENE CHEAT SHEET

Before Each Scene:

1. Write 2 lines of the song together.
2. 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:

1. Soliloquy (ranting your feelings alone)
2. Take a drink & everybody drinks with you
3. Everybody sings the drinking song
4. 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:

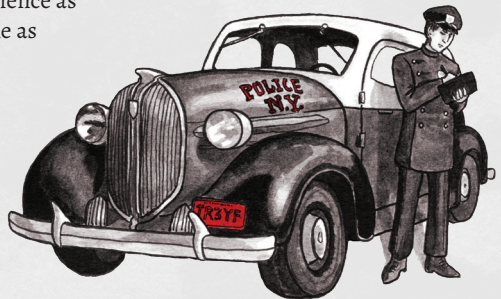
Scene members:

- 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).
- During 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 whether you're right or wrong about the player's intended emotion for that character. This is about 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 the family drinking song together. Choose easy mode, medium mode, 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 Boat"

(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"

Chorus:

(Scene 1) Grandma's drinking, grandma's _____ing, grandma's _____ing,
and never _____, *meshuggeh!*

(Scene 2) Harriet's _____ing, Yetta's _____ing, Moysh's _____ing,
why don't they _____?

Verses:

(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 is the mood of the song? Jolly? Melancholy? Heroic? Bawdy?

CLOSING

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



Scene Card

Orc Appendix

What About Orcs?

by *Lucian Kahn*

Jewish art should be anti-racist. In earlier drafts of the game *If I Were a Lich, Man*, I attempted to include an anti-racist allegory about orcs. However, during a late round of sensitivity reviews for the present collection, T.K. Johnson noticed a second possible interpretation of the narrative: the opposite, a racist allegory about orcs. (This is why you do sensitivity reviews!) We agreed that it would be too difficult to make the anti-racist message unambiguous in such a short game.

In the first place, my orcish idea came partially from the historical writings of my friend James Mendez Hodes, a Jew of color and cultural consultant on this project. However, T.K. Johnson pointed out correctly that many players wouldn't get around to reading Mendez's disc-orcs on the topic. Since I'm not Asian, Black, or Indigenous, the anti-racist orc metaphor wasn't quite landing reliably coming from me as the "voice" of the game, especially because the final game's audience had turned out much larger (and so less politically predictable) than just the indie-game-design weirdos who had played the prototype. So, I edited the orc allegory out.

However, I stand by the spirit of my initial critique of racism within Jewish communities. In the Jewish tradition of extended textual commentary, here are Mendez's thoughts on orcs in the game from before I edited them out.

Liches and Orcs

by *James Mendez Hodes*

This scenario also features another group, in a state of tension with the liches: orcs.

Orcs as we know them from speculative media originated in the work of British fantasist and academic JRR Tolkien, who thought of them (as per his Letter #210) as looking like caricatures of Asian people, and often described them in his books using uglified versions of phenotypic traits real-life Asians have. Later works riffing on Tolkien sometimes change their own orcs' cultural and visual signifiers. Sometimes they have African or Indigenous traits, sometimes they have European traits, and sometimes they have almost no culture at all save stupidity and violence. Sometimes orcs are portrayed as aspirational and heroic in a still-stereotypical way, like *Warcraft*'s "noble savage" orcs. Other times they're comedic, like *Warhammer* 40,000 orcs who exemplify class stereotypes more than racial stereotypes. Often, a powerful monster or magician like a lich enslaves, coerces, or willingly recruits orcs as minions, ordering them into battle to kill and die *en masse*.

In this game, orcs represent no specific ethnic group. Instead, they are here to represent the complicated relationship Jews sometimes have with other marginalized ethnicities. The structures of white supremacy and religious intolerance frequently engineer or abet situations where Jews are forced into opposition against another subaltern group, such as Palestinians in the Middle East, or Black Americans in New York City.

These oppressive structures encourage Jews to see whites or Christians as potential allies, and that other group as economic and social rivals, leading to discrimination and violence. This process works out poorly for both subaltern groups, keeping them at each other's throats instead of allying against the bad guys in power. You can imagine how awkward this situation is for Jews of color, or Jews from interfaith families, for example. For more information on this topic, there is no more eloquent, heartbreaking, and perennially relevant explanation than James Baldwin's 1967 article "Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White."

It is up to you whether the orcs in your game have the cultural or religious traits of a real-world group, a combination of traits from several different groups, traits from a familiar fantasy setting such as Middle-earth or the Forgotten Realms, supernatural powers, or no predefined traits at all. Try not to base your orcs on racial stereotypes, though the liches themselves may believe stereotypes about orcs.

The final arbiter of these decisions is the player of the single lich among the four who has orcish ancestry. The only predefined rule is this: that lich's ancestry is always the result of a loving and consensual (if not necessarily permanent) union between an orc and some other orc, or an orc and some other species, or whatever.

After the game, when you debrief, talk about how the choices you made about orcs made your characters feel, and how they made you feel out of character. Which choices made it easier or harder to empathize with orcs? Which qualities made them seem more or less human? Which of the ideas you held about orcs came from the orcs themselves, and which came from the paladins instead? If you were to design a game in which orcs rather than liches were protagonists, how would you characterize them?





HITPOINT
PRESS

IFIWEREALICHMAN.COM | HITPOINTPRESS.COM

If I Were a Lich, Man is copyright © 2023 Hit Point Press Inc., their respective logos, illustrations, and characters distinct likenesses are property of Hit Point Press Inc. in Canada / US and other countries. Original text is copyright © 2023 Lucian Kahn. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this product may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permissions from the copyright holders. 1175 Brookfield Rd. East Ottawa, ON K1V 0C3, Canada. Printed in China.