

Judgement & Justice

A D&D 5e Hack by [lorefiend](#)



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Overview

Judgement & Justice is a supplemental system for D&D 5e which provides a methodology for running criminal court cases within the context of a Dungeons & Dragons campaign, although it can potentially stand on its own as a framing device for a one shot game or even an entire campaign. It is inspired by, but not an adaptation of, Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trilogy.

In Judgement & Justice, the players take on the roles of a Defense and Prosecution team in a criminal court case, and the Dungeon Master takes on the role of the Judge. (In J&J, there is no jury). J&J can be played by 2-6 players, not including the Dungeon Master/Judge. An even number of non-Judge players is required so that the Defense and Prosecution are evenly matched. (While the Dungeon Master/Judge is absolutely a player of this game, henceforth “player” refers to players who are *not* the Dungeon Master/Judge.)

There are three roles for players to assume within a team: the Veteran, the Rookie, and the Assistant. It's important that each team has the same number of each role; for instance, if you are playing with four players, it is fine for both teams to be composed of a Rookie and an Assistant, a Veteran and an Assistant, or a Rookie and a Veteran. However, the teams cannot differ in the number of players playing each role they contain, and there cannot be more than one of each role on a team: a Defense team of a rookie and a veteran cannot compete against a Prosecution team of a rookie and an assistant, for example.

Any D&D 5e class can fill any role, and the level of the players in J&J does not matter, however, all players should be the same level.

Each role has a special action that only they can take; these actions are referred to as “Aces.” Aces can be used a limited number of times during specific moments in a trial (this is explained further in [“Trial Procedure.”](#))

A case in Judgement & Justice takes place in up to three cycles of two phases: Investigation and Trial. During the Investigation phase, both teams take turns to attempt to gather evidence which can be admitted into the court record and which will prove useful to their case. The Investigation phase ends when both teams have had an equal number of turns and the Dungeon Master determines that prolonging the Investigation will not yield any more interesting Evidence. Play then proceeds to the Trial phase. In the Trial phase, the Prosecution and Defense examine and cross-examine Witnesses, present Evidence, and raise objections before the Judge. The Trial phase ends either when the Judge determines that a stalemate has been reached and that more Investigation is required to resolve the case, or when the Judge announces they are prepared to hand down a verdict.

Roles & Aces

Roles in Judgement & Justice are largely intended to help shape roleplay more so than provide a rigid mechanical structure for characters to fall within. For the most part, players in different roles can take all the same actions, with the exception of Aces. An Ace is a special action that can only be taken during a trial, and once per trial day. Each role has their own unique Ace, although Aces are the same within a given role whether that player is Prosecution or Defense. When a player has yet to expend their Ace, this is referred to as having “an ace up their sleeve”.

Always give thought to the relationships between characters on a team. While their roles probably inform these relationships a great deal, feel free to think outside of the box and make a team dynamic that is unique and memorable.

The Veteran

The Veteran is a character who has seen it all and done it all in the realm of criminal justice. Their role is to provide a stable foundation for their team, and to keep the rules of the game on hand for reference when needed.

A Veteran character is not always much older than a rookie on their team, but they’ve usually been in the business of law for a lot longer. They may have a more jaded or cynical approach to criminal justice than their Rookie, but again, not always. Sometimes, the time that a Veteran has spent plying their trade has only made them more devoted to their core ideal, whether that be defending the innocent or bringing the guilty to justice.

Ace: Respected Authority

When you take the Objection! Action, you automatically succeed on your persuasion check.

The Rookie

The Rookie is a relatively fresh face in the courtroom. They might be bumblingly inexperienced or a quick-witted prodigy. Their role is to boost the team’s morale, keep things moving forward, and to have an encyclopedic knowledge of the court record for this case.

A Rookie is new to being a fully-fledged lawyer, but may not be new to law. While it’s likely that they’re a bright-eyed idealist, it’s also possible they have had personal experiences with criminal justice in their past that puts their relationship to Prosecution or Defense under a different light.

Ace: Flash of Genius

When you take the Hold It! Action, rather than being allowed to ask only one question, you are free to start your own line of questioning and assume the role of your team’s representative.

The Assistant

The Assistant is the broadest role in Judgement & Justice, and can encompass many different types of character--the important thing is the Assistant's devotion to the Defense of the innocent or Prosecution of the guilty. The Assistant's role is to provide an extra set of discerning eyes on every testimony and every piece of evidence, to keep a fresh perspective that leads to new revelations--and, when necessary, to shake up the trial with something unexpected.

An Assistant, while not a lawyer, may be an experienced legal assistant or paralegal. However, that's not necessarily true. An assistant could simply be a good friend of one of the team's attorneys, or even a hapless innocent tangled up in the case at hand but determined to bring it to a just conclusion.

Ace: Wild Twist

If your team *failed* to have one or more pieces of Evidence that you found admitted to the Court Record earlier during Investigation, you may choose *one* of those pieces of Evidence. It is now Surprise Evidence, and considered part of the Court Record.

Laws & Their Application

It's obviously impractical to create an entire system of government and expansive legal database for every D&D game, even though it may be really tempting to try. This is why it's advisable to select a template for the laws in your game from a real world legal system. Looking into the laws of a particular country, state, or city when you're not sure (as a Judge) what ruling to make in your game or (as a player) what assumptions to build your case off of can be a very useful thing indeed.

Of course, since D&D is a fantasy game, not every fantasy scenario can be adequately addressed with real-life law. It's not necessarily very useful to look to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling for absolute guidance on if a magical offense is a felony or misdemeanor. Thus, it's important to consider certain basic assumptions *before your game begins* so that all players are on the same page and don't run into unexpected or cumbersome disagreements while building and arguing their cases. The following are a list of questions designed to sketch out the limits of your legal system template as it applies to your game.

- Who is protected under the law? Are civil rights applicable to only humans, or to a myriad of fantasy creatures? Are all sentient species protected by the law in your game? Are goblins? Are robots?
- How does magic factor into the law? Are dangerous magical spells considered deadly weapons/deadly force? How about spells that charm people? Is it illegal to use magic on another against their will? What other uses of magic might be legal/illegal?

Charges

Before your case begins, determine what charges the Defendant faces. Take a page from a real-life lawbook, or create something fun and unique. Remember, sometimes real-world laws can be a useful point of reference for even the silliest of fantasy scenarios. Perhaps the Defendant in your case has been charged with Grand Theft Magic Carpet!

Having charges is important because it gives you a ballpark range for what the Defendant's sentence may be if they're found guilty. This is good to know because it establishes stakes for the trial.

Evidence & the Court Record

A critical component of any game of Judgement & Justice is the Court Record. The Court Record is a collaborative document shared between all players and the Judge. The Court Record contains a series of information entries that fall under two categories: Profiles and Evidence.

Entries in the Court Record should be *concise*--no more than one or two sentences. The idea is that Court Record entries can be read out loud verbatim in a matter of seconds, without taking up too much gameplay time.

Profiles

Profiles provide brief, one-or-two-sentence overviews of the major characters in the case. An example Profile statement is as follows:

Holly Clearwater, age 26. *A supervisor of shipping for the Earl Grey Trading House who claims to have been attacked by her automaton companion at a gala before she shot them with a pistol.*

Profiles are not a place for speculation or guesswork. The only things that may be admitted into a Profile in the Court Record are statements accepted as fact by the Judge *and* the team opposing the one who wishes to have the Profile admitted into the Court Record.

Evidence

Evidence entries in the Court Record provide brief, one-or-two sentence overviews of items containing information relevant to the case. An example Evidence statement is as follows:

Holly's Pistol. *A well-cared-for pistol previously in the possession of Holly Clearwater. Was fired once, but the bullet fired from it has not been found.*

Adding to the Court Record

During Investigation, both the Prosecution and Defense may request Profiles and Evidence be added to the Court Record. The rules for adding Profiles to the Court Record are already described above, under "Profiles." There are two laws that govern whether or not Evidence is admitted into the Court Record, and they are as follows:

The evidence must be 1) **lawfully obtained**, and 2) **relevant to the case at hand**.

One member of the team that wants to add Evidence to the court record rolls persuasion against a DC set by the DM, which determines if it is considered to meet these criteria.

Investigation Procedure

Investigation takes place in a somewhat more free-form manner than a trial, although there is still some regimented structure to keep things moving along quickly. Investigation involves taking Turns. When Turn order begins, the Prosecution always goes first.

Turns

A turn consists of approximately five to ten minutes of gameplay. That gameplay time is spent naming a Location, resolving any Obstacles, choosing to Talk or Roll, and adding any Evidence obtained to the Court Record.

Locations

During a turn, the team whose turn it is names a Location. This Location need not be from a predetermined list, it can be any nearby and reasonable Location they like, whether or not it is mentioned in the Court Record. Once they name a Location, there are two possible outcomes: the team travels to that Location (or stays at that Location, in the event they're already there), or there is an Obstacle. Obstacles typically arise when a team wishes to go somewhere to which access may be restricted, such as a crime scene being actively investigated, or someone's private property. The only way around an Obstacle is to make a skill check. For example, if access to a crime scene is being restricted by a guard, a member of the team could roll to persuade the guard to let them in, or to deceive the guard into believing they have clearance to access the scene. Alternatively, if a building the team wishes to access is locked, a member of the team can roll to pick that lock. The team can *only roll once* to surmount an Obstacle per turn, if they fail to meet the Dungeon-Master-determined DC for that roll, they must choose a different Location and try again later, if they wish.

There is no requirement to visit a Location only once--any team can return to any Location as many times as they wish over the course of the Investigation. The NPCs present at a given location, as well as the Evidence to be found there, may change over time. However, the Obstacles making a location inaccessible may change also. A Location that was once inaccessible may no longer be so, and vice versa.

Talk or Roll

Once the team has arrived at a Location, they can choose to Talk or Roll at that Location.

If they choose to Talk, they may talk to an NPC who is currently at that Location in an attempt to gain more information about the case. Note that information stated by an NPC during the Investigation phase can *not* be added to the Court Record as evidence, as the NPC is not testifying under oath before a court of law. However, a profile can be made for that NPC in the Court Record, if the team wishes, which allows the Prosecution to call them as a Witness later. Note that it may be impossible to Talk at certain Locations during certain times. If an NPC is not present, the team must choose to Roll instead, or choose a different Location.

If the team chooses to Roll, they may have one character make one skill check of their choosing in an attempt to turn up Evidence. Examples of Rolls include an investigation check on a room's floor to search for a trap door or a bloodstain, or a persuasion check on a previously Talked-to NPC in an attempt to convince them to hand over a clue they found.

If the player character fails to meet the DC for the check, the team has expended their one Roll for the turn, and can try again with another Roll at this Location on their next Turn, or simply move on.

If they succeed at the check, a piece of Evidence may be uncovered. For example, if a character was rolling an investigation check to look under all the furniture in a room for something hidden beneath, and they met the DC with their roll, they would find anything hidden beneath the furniture. In the event that nothing was hidden there, they will receive definitive confirmation from the Dungeon Master that there is nothing to find in that spot.

Updating the Court Record

As a team concludes their Turn, if they Talked to anyone or found Evidence during that Turn, they may add a Profile or Evidence entry to the Court Record. The team works together to compose a one-or-two-sentence summary of what they discovered to comprise the Profile or Evidence statement, and if the Judge (Dungeon Master) accepts it as lawfully obtained and factual, they may add that statement to the Court Record.

Sometimes Evidence uncovered will bring to light new truths related to an earlier entry in the Court Record. In these scenarios, the team may request an update to an earlier Court Record entry. If the Judge agrees that the new information is factual and does indeed warrant an update to the Court Record, the team may provide their proposed replacement entry. Upon receiving the approval of the Judge, this updated entry replaces the prior one in the Court Record.

After all necessary changes to the Court Record are made at the end of a turn, play passes to the next team.

The Investigation phase ends when both teams have had an equal number of turns and the Dungeon Master determines that prolonging the Investigation will not yield any more interesting or relevant Profiles or Evidence.

Trial Procedure

Finally, it's arrived: the day of the trial. What happens now?

Trials are divided into three parts: Opening Statements, Witness Testimony, during which a player can take Actions, and Verdict.

Opening Statements

Both the Prosecution and Defense have the chance to make opening statements at the beginning of the trial. These can be rehearsed or improvised, but the important part is that they're descriptive, concise, and impactful. An opening statement describes the parties in the case, explains the basic facts for the benefit of the Judge, frames the evidence in a way that is favorable to the team's theory of the case, and outlines what the team expects to prove.

While a good opening statement frames your team's stance favorably, it shouldn't argue the facts of the case or ask for any assumptions on the part of the Judge.

Each team chooses one representative from among them to deliver their opening statement.

The Prosecution always goes first. The Defense may choose not to make an opening statement so that they do not lock themselves into one theory for acquittal.

Witness Testimony

In J&J, Witnesses may only be called to the stand by one party: the Prosecution. After a Witness delivers their testimony, it is the job of the Defense to poke holes in that testimony using Evidence. Teams chose a new representative at the beginning of every testimony.

Examination

The prosecution may call as a Witness any NPC whose profile is in the Court Record. When a Witness is called to the stand, a representative from the Prosecution asks them to state their name and occupation. That representative then asks the Witness a series of questions, and the Witness replies. The Prosecution's goal is to get the Witness to paint a picture that shows the Defendant in a guilty light, but questions that are *too* leading may be objected to. Questions and answers must remain on-topic. When the Witness has answered all the prosecution's questions, the Prosecution hands them over to the Defense with the words "Your Witness."

Cross-Examination

When it is the Defense's turn to Cross-Examine, a representative from the Defense team may ask their own questions of the Witness, further clarifying the truth. Their goal is to expose any lies or contradictions in the Witness's testimony. They carry out their own line of questioning until the Witness is tangled up in a web of their own making, and at this critical moment when a vulnerability is exposed, they take Action.

Actions

Hold It!

When it is their team's turn, any player on the Prosecution or Defense can call to "Hold It!", at which point they may pause the current representative of their team's line of questioning to ask a question of their own. They may ask one, and only one question at this time, before the current representative of their team returns to their line of questioning.

Objection!

At any point during the Examination or Cross-Examination of a Witness, the opposing party may Object. When a player Objects, they are saying that the opposing team has done something improper. Generally, Objections are made to one of two different behaviors:

Leading questions are objectionable. A leading question assumes facts not in evidence: For example, an exchange with an Objection to assumption of facts not in evidence might be as follows:

- **Prosecution:** Who did you see accompanying Mx. Bucket at this party?
- **Witness:** Well, there was Captain Arossa, a man in a wheelchair, two young girls, the automaton companion, and a sea elf.
- **Prosecution:** How did the sea elf come across to you?
- **Witness:** Um... Quiet, but polite and composed.
- **Prosecution:** And how about when he cast Blindness/Deafness on Supervisor Clearwater during the fight, how did he seem then?
- **Defense:** OBJECTION! Assumes facts not in evidence.

This exchange is objectionable because there is no Evidence that the sea elf cast Blindness/Deafness on Supervisor Clearwater, and it's improper of the Prosecution to question the witness *assuming* that's true.

Irrelevant questions are objectionable. Read the exchange above one more time: the Prosecution's third question is objectionable on two counts. It's not only a leading question, it's irrelevant--at this point in the trial, there's no reason to believe that whether or not the sea elf cast Blindness/Deafness on the supervisor is relevant to proving the client's (Mx. Bucket's) innocence or guilt in this court case.

All Objections must be accompanied by a persuasion roll against a DC set by the DM. This roll determines if the Objection is overruled or sustained by the Judge. When an Objection is overruled, that means the Judge disagrees that the behavior was objectionable, and the Objection is dismissed. When an Objection is sustained, the Judge agrees that the behavior was Objectionable, and thus the witness does not have to answer the objectionable question.

Take That!

On their team's turn, a member of the prosecution or defense may choose to take the Take That! Action and present Evidence. Usually, the team who will be presenting Evidence on their turn is the Defense, as it is the only way for them to prove a contradiction in the Witness's testimony. However, when the Defense has taken the Take That! Action, the Prosecution can *counter* with Evidence themselves. See the exchange below as an example:

- **Defense:** TAKE THAT! Witness, your statement contradicts this evidence! You said that Mx. Bucket's injury to Holly Clearwater was intended to take her out of the fight. This medical report, however, says right here that she barely sustained any damage! She was hardly hurt at all!
- **Prosecution:** OBJECTION! That may be so, but this alchemical analysis shows that the poison from Mx. Bucket's scorpion telson contains a paralytic agent. It's clear that the defendant's intent was to paralyze her with the poison so that she would let go of them, allowing them to carry out their crime to its completion!

Aces

At any point during Witness Testimony, any player can choose to play the Ace up their sleeve. However, each player can play an Ace *only once* per day of trial.

Verdict

A verdict is reached after the Prosecution rests their case, or before that time if the Judge determines that all relevant arguments have been made and all relevant evidence has been presented.

Congratulations! You've made it to the end of your trial. We hope you're satisfied with the verdict--but if not, hey, you can always make an appeal!