

GHOST COURT

WHAT IS THIS?

Ghost Court is a live-action party game about spectral justice in a small claims court. It is perfectly suited for a large group, but you can play with as few as six players.

Play focuses on a few players at a time, as the judge and court officers hear testimony while the rest of the players take turns as plaintiffs and defendants arguing over the petty disputes between the living and the dead.

A typical game takes an hour, but you can keep playing as long as everyone is having a good time.

Ghost Court requires nothing more than the cards and your enthusiasm!

CONTENTS

- The rulebook
- XX cards: TK Role Cards for the court staff (Judge, Clerk, and Bailiff) and TK Case Cards for each case, including a Clerk Card, Plaintiff Card, and Defendant Card

PREPARATION

GRAB SOME PLAYERS

You'll need at least six players, and having more is always better. Fill your courtroom with spectators, eager for justice!

FIND A GOOD SPACE

Arrange the space into a courtroom. There should be a raised desk or large, comfortable chair of to one side for the Judge and another chair or table for the Clerk. Facing these, there should be a pair of chairs or a table for the litigants. The rest of the room is a gallery and should have enough chairs for the rest of the players, plus a few extra — you are likely to draw a crowd.

CHOOSE CASE CARDS

Sort out the cases and choose which ones you want to play, corresponding to the number of players and the amount of time you have. A good estimate is one case per ten minutes of play. You can always add more if you need to.

Set aside the Clerk Cards for each case you've chosen for use by the Clerk.

CHOOSE ROLES

Decide who will initially play the court staff roles (Judge and Clerk and, with a large enough group, Bailiff)

Hand out case cards to everyone who wants to play a litigant. It's OK if some people just want to be spectators.

Gather everyone and have a safety talk (See TK)

ADD SOME PROPS

While you only need the cards to play, a few props—such as a judge's wig, robe, and gavel—add some gravitas. White linen or tobacco cloth shawls are a nice way to differentiate ghosts from the living.

If you have access to audiovisual resources, some dramatic lighting goes a long way, and introducing the game with the soundtrack to a popular eighties television show will put everyone in the right frame of mind. This is all very nice but the game will still be fun without them.

ROLES

In Ghost Court you can play a member of the court staff, someone appearing before the bench as a litigant (a Plaintiff or Defendant), or you can be a spectator in the courtroom there to watch the fireworks. If you rotate roles, you can be all three!

COURT STAFF

The staff of Ghost Court consists of a **Judge**, a **Clerk**, and a **Bailiff**. They can be alive or dead, grumpy or good natured, thoughtful or ridiculous. Playing the court staff is great fun, and your staff will have the spotlight on them throughout the game.

The only required role is Judge, although Clerk should be included in most groups. The Bailiff appears if you have a large (and unruly, and odd-numbered) group. Adjust based on how many players you have—make sure you have pairs of litigants and a Judge, then add court staff.

JUDGE

The Judge hears evidence, asks questions, and delivers a verdict — all in five minutes or less. They are the final word on justice and ghost law.

CLERK

The Clerk manages the court's caseload, calls and instructs litigants, keeps time, and shuts down the long-winded, be they litigants or the Judge. The Clerk is all-powerful.

BAILIFF

The Bailiff manages the courtroom, maintains order, and enforces the Judge's rulings as necessary. A good bailiff can play with the energy of the room, stirring up quiet spectators and silencing them when they get too rowdy.

CHANGING ROLES

The Judge, Clerk, and Bailiff are all attention-grabbing, fun roles. It's good practice to rotate through these, allowing lots of people to introduce new, ridiculous court staff. Depending on the size of your crowd, swapping out court staff every three or four cases is a good ratio.

LITIGANTS

Plaintiffs bring a case before the bench, and Defendants, well, defend themselves. They always appear as a pair to present two sides of the case to the Judge.

Always make sure you have an even number of Litigants—balance Plaintiffs and Defendants in pairs.

Each pair gets a case from the court Clerk — a case has separate cards for Plaintiff and Defendant, each with a shared case number. Some litigants are ghosts; ghosts are marked with an icon on the case card.

SPECTATORS

If you just want to watch, that's fine! It's quite possible that later in the game you can grab a case and be a litigant if you change your mind.

PLAYING THE GAME

INTRODUCTION

What you are about to witness is real. The participants are not actors. They are the living people and ghosts who have already either filed suit or been served a summons to appear in municipal court. Both parties in the suit have agreed to dismiss their court cases and have their disputes settled here, in our forum:

Ghost Court.

Imagine a crowded and understaffed small claims court. Now imagine it filled with ghosts and the people who are suing them. Once everyone is ready to play, here's how you do it.

Welcome everyone and read the introduction above, to put everyone in the right mood. Aim for a convivial but attentive atmosphere. Encourage unruly comments and reactions from the gallery but aim to keep the pace brisk — a case every 5-10 minutes.

The Clerk calls a case from the docket. The two litigants approach the bench, guided by the Bailiff if you have one.

Each side has **one minute** to plead their case, carefully monitored by the Clerk.

The Judge can ask questions for **three minutes**, and then rules on the matter.

Next case! Is it time to rotate the court staff? Are there recent arrivals in the gallery who need to be assigned a case?

The game ends when the last case is heard, you run out of time or maximum fun has been achieved.

SAFETY

Even in a social game to be played among friends, it's good to be very intentional about player safety. Have a discussion before you play so that everyone is clear about expectations and options. Make sure to cover these points:

BE GENEROUS

Approach play with the expectation of love and trust. Help others have fun, and don't do things that interfere with that.

BE COOL

Ghost Court is timeless, so leave your topical jokes on the front steps. Your "Ghost Lives Matter" quip isn't helping anyone have fun.

SET BOUNDARIES

Agree on boundaries. There's no reason for anyone to touch anyone playing Ghost Court, so "zero physical contact" is a good start.

For in-game content, use film ratings as a starting point. Start with a mild rating ("PG") and then seek consensus on more mature ratings if you are among adults, or good friends, or both. Stick to what you all agree to.

TAKE A BREAK

You may leave the play area at any time, for any reason, with or without explanation. You can also come back if you like!

BE SAFE

The word "cut" stops all play. Ask everyone to repeat this so it is clear. Say "cut" if there is obvious danger, physical or otherwise.

SPEAK UP

Speak up if you want or need something. No game is more important than your comfort and safety.

OPTIONS

MULTIPLE ROLES

Unless you have a lot of participants, there's nothing wrong with giving each player two or three cases, pairing them in different ways for maximum involvement. This is a great way to play, as people get to play multiple characters in front of the Judge.

CUT-THROAT GHOST COURT

If you have a small group—eight or less—you can play a competitive variant of Ghost Court. First, select an odd number of cases to handle. Permanently assign the litigants into Plaintiff and Defendant teams as lawyers, and have them choose one of their own to plead each case before the Judge. Keep track of which side wins more cases. The winners must bring snacks and beer next time. This variant isn't much fun with a very large group, and you can't rotate roles.

ADD A JURY

If you have a huge group and more players than you have time to handle cases for, add a jury composed of garrulous audience members. The jury's job is to decide for the Plaintiff or Defendant. The jury gets **one additional minute** to deliberate and, per Ghost Court protocol, majority rules. The Judge then pronounces sentence. For this variant, a "jury foreman" to keep everyone on task is recommended.

CREDITS

Designed by Jason Morningstar

Art by Richard Sala

Layout by Brennen Reece

Edited and Developed by Steve Segedy

Additional Editing by Autumn Winters

Project Management by Alex Roberts



MORE INFORMATION

www.bullypulpitgames.com/games/ghost-court

www.kickstarter.com/projects/bullypulpitgames/ghost-court

GHOST COURT

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

BAILIFF

Oyez, oyez, oyez. Ghost Court is now in session, the Honorable Judge Bloodgood presiding.

JUDGE, WHO IS A GHOST

Thank you, Bailiff. The rest of you be advised I do not truck with nonsense in my courtroom; any outbursts and this magnificent specimen [Indicated BAILIFF] will eject you so fast your head will spin. All right, on to business.

CLERK

[Reads card for Case #11]

Calling case number eleven, Connell v. Wicker.

JUDGE

What's this about, Clerk?

CLERK

Your Honor, a ghost claims to own a piece of property a homeowner discovered beneath their kitchen floor. Connell, Wicker, please approach the bench.

[With the assistance of the BAILIFF, the two players with Case #11 come up. CONNELL'S player, the plaintiff, puts on a ghost robe. Both have skimmed over their cards while they waited to be called and now review them.]

JUDGE

You are Connell?

CONNELL, WHO IS A GHOST

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE

[To CLERK] The plaintiff in this case?

CLERK

The very same, your honor. [CLERK glances at their clock and starts timing]

JUDGE

And a ghost. Well, let's hear it. What seems to be the problem?

CONNELL

[Paraphrasing their card, giving it all the sympathetic drama they can muster] Your Honor, my name is Lobelia Connell. I am deceased. What happened is this - this person [Indicates WICKER] remodeled my kitchen...

WICKER, WHO IS NOT A GHOST

My kitchen.

JUDGE

Enough of that, Defendant, you'll get your turn in a moment. Connell, this used to be your house?

CONNELL

Yes, Your Honor, and I've been haunting it ever since ... ever since ...

JUDGE

I understand, since your ... transition to a ghostly existence. Please continue. [To WICKER] And not a peep out of you.

CONNELL

So they remodeled the kitchen and discovered, hidden under the floorboards, my emerald necklace.

[WICKER starts to speak and the JUDGE gives them a threatening look.]

It's a beautiful necklace. I was wearing it when I was murdered. I've been looking for it. All I want is my necklace back, Your Honor. It's only fair.

[WICKER rolls their eyes.]

JUDGE

Well, we'll see what we can do. Do you have anything to add?

CONNELL

No, Your Honor. Or, rather, yes - [Laying it on thick] I'd add that that necklace is my only connection to happy times, to a life I once had among friends and family, before ... before ... I'm sorry, it's all so very sad. Thank you.

JUDGE

Thank you. All right, defendant. Wicker, is it?

WICKER

FINally.

JUDGE

Now's your chance, Wicker. Let's hear it.

WICKER

Great, I don't actually have a sad, emotional story for you. My name is Gary Wicker, I bought the place, I own it, if somebody back in olden times squirreled away a jar of gold coins in the wall, it would be mine, right?

JUDGE

Just tell me what happened.

WICKER

Like the ghost said, I was remodeling my kitchen and found a necklace.

CONNELL

My necklace!

WICKER

[Pauses a moment] Not going to reprimand them? No? OK, I see how it is, they can talk over me but I can't correct their factual inaccuracies. Funny how that works.

JUDGE

You're about to see how it works if you don't get on with your story.

WICKER

Sorry, Your Honor. Anyway, there's no documentation on this necklace, no way to know who used to own it, or if that even matters since it was in my house, which I own. Not calling anybody a liar but who knows? It's an old piece of jewelry is all and I'm not giving it up.

[CLERK waves at JUDGE and points at the clock.]

JUDGE

We'll see about that. Have you anything to add?

WICKER

It's not like a ghost can even wear a necklace.

JUDGE

I'd advise you to watch your tone in my courtroom, defendant.

WICKER

Sorry, it's just ...

JUDGE

I've heard enough out of you! I get the distinct impression you aren't fond of ghosts, which is of course your right, but I won't tolerate your condescension in my courtroom. Keep your prejudice in check or face the consequences. Now, Connell, can you prove the necklace is yours?

[CONNELL'S player thinks for a moment and decides to improvise a little.]

CONNELL

I believe I can, Your Honor. My grand daughter has a Daguerreotype portrait of me wearing it, which I am sure she'd be happy to enter into evidence.

JUDGE

I see, I see. Clerk, will you contact the plaintiff's descendent and arrange for the court to get a copy of that Daguerreotype? A snapshot will do.

WICKER

Really?

CLERK

Sure thing, Your Honor.

JUDGE

And will that satisfy you, defendant, as to the original ownership of said necklace?

WICKER

I guess?

JUDGE

Yes or no, you rascal!

WICKER

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Good, then I think I've got a solution. As you say, Wicker, the necklace is indeed your property.

WICKER

Thanks, Your Honor! I knew you'd...

JUDGE

... But! It's your property in the same way the fireplace is your property - it's part of the house. You can enjoy it, wear it if you like, but it stays with the house in perpetuity, on display. Do you understand?

WICKER

That's unfair!

JUDGE

[Bangs the gavel angrily] You better watch yourself, or I'll cite your anti-ghost rhetoric and general bad attitude for contempt! I'll ask again, do you understand?

WICKER

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Thought so. All right with you, Connell?

CONNELL

I'll be able to look at it?

JUDGE

Of course. On display in a place of honor. Right, Wicker?

WICKER

Yes, Your Honor. I'll put it in a big glass case in my kitchen.

JUDGE

Excellent, I think we're done here, chalk this one up for the plaintiff but really everybody wins. [JUDGE bangs the gavel] Bailiff, will you escort these citizens back to their seats? What's next on the docket?

[BAILIFF escorts CONNELL and WICKER'S players back to their seats and collects their cards.]

**MORE INFORMATION**

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