

# A Great Miracle Happened Here



Esther Alter

Subaltern Games

@subalterngames

[subalterngames.itch.io/a-great-miracle-happened-here](https://subalterngames.itch.io/a-great-miracle-happened-here)

v1.3

# Introduction

**It is the year 19xx.** The working class of The Empire is brutally oppressed. Out of necessity, there is resistance, protest, and, eventually, Revolution. Due to circumstance and anti-Semitism, the Jewish workers remain isolated. You and your comrades are a secret Jewish rebel unit. Together, you will fight for a better future.

The remainder of the specifics of the setting are up to you to define, save for a few key points:

- This is a game for Jews by a Jewish author. It's essential to the game that it feels Jewish, but don't let that intimidate you, especially if you aren't Jewish or if you feel like you're "not Jewish enough." All who wish to dream of the Revolution are welcome here.
- This game is based on the actual history of the radical Jewish left in Eastern Europe, but it isn't history. It's not necessary nor desirable to adhere to "what actually happened". The same holds true regarding gender and sexuality: If you want to roleplay as an openly queer revolutionary, don't let "historical accuracy" stop you. If you do want to include an actual event, ideology, group, individual, place, and so on, you must first ask everyone else if they agree that it should be included, and provide a brief explanation of what it is if someone doesn't know.
- You can't set this game in Israel or have the ultimate goal of the Revolution be the founding of, or emigration to, the State of Israel. Your goal is socialist emancipation where you presently live, not settler-colonialism in a distant land. As per the title of this game, a great miracle will happen *here...* not *there*.

## Supplies

- 3-6 players. There is no GM in this game, so you must be prepared to act together as comrades.
- Each player needs 3 tokens (such as Chanukah gelt) and 1 dreidel.
- Each player might want to print this PDF so that they can write on their role sheet and take notes.
- The entire game requires approximately 2 hours, divided into four 30-minute rounds ("missions").

## Setup

- Each player needs to select a role and fill out the role sheet. It's generally more fun if there aren't repeats of the same role. Each role has character background choices and some questions. Choose an option, answer the question, and write down the answer.
- After everyone fills out their role sheets, take turns introducing your characters: name, pronouns, role, and background, and anything else you might want to add. If you're playing remotely, you might want to change your displayed name to show your character's name, role, and pronouns.
- Designate one player as the **Shamesh**.<sup>1</sup> The Shamesh needs to print out or otherwise record the page titled **Chronicles**. Use this sheet to keep track of the missions you've selected so far.
- Each player takes 2 tokens. This is their current **Chaim**.<sup>2</sup>
- Each player puts an additional 1 Chai<sup>3</sup> in the **pool**, which everyone takes from or adds to when taking an action. The Shamesh can optionally keep track of how much Chaim is in the pool on the Chronicles page.

---

<sup>1</sup>SHAH-mesh.

<sup>2</sup>CHY-eem with a hard CH as in "Chanukah" and a Y as in "fly". If you can't pronounce the CH, just say HY-eem.

<sup>3</sup>CHY or HY; singular of chaim, rhymes with "fly".

# How to Play

## Missions

Play is divided into four **missions**, one per season of the year. At the start of each mission, one player spins a dreidel and picks one of the options from the corresponding column in the table below.<sup>4</sup> Write the mission on the **Chronicles** page. You can't pick the same mission twice. After the player selects the mission, everyone must provide some context for what the mission is. For example, if you're about to try to assassinate an imperial politician: Who is it? What terrible actions have they done? What's the plan you're going to try to follow? These sorts of questions must be answered collaboratively. If anyone feels uncertain about what they're about to do, keep imagining and re-imagining the mission until you've got something good.

You always have the final say about your own character's life, history, motivations, actions, and so on.

The rules are worded such that player characters don't have to die. You can choose to allow player death anyway, but everyone needs to agree to this before the game begins. And as with other player-centric decisions, it is ultimately up to that player whether their character dies during a mission.

ז	ה	ג	ו
Ambush a convoy of imperial soldiers in the countryside.	Break an important rebel out of jail.	Steal a shipment of supplies.	Convince the rabbi to endorse the rebellion.
Defend a neighborhood from fascist militia.	Help a rebel leader escape certain doom.	Heist a priceless artifact that was taken from a synagogue.	Spread propaganda for a socialist politician.
Assassinate an imperial politician or officer.	Prevent a landlord from exploiting their tenants.	Prevent scabs from entering a factory.	Prove yourselves worthy to a non-Jewish rebel cell.
Sabotage a military railroad.	Infiltrate a police station and gather intelligence.	Smuggle food to striking workers.	Escort a rebel leader to safety.

<sup>4</sup>As with most rules in this game, there's no set order for which player spins the dreidel, so long as it feels fair to everyone.

## Actions

During a mission, each player must take one **action**. Only one player takes an action at a time. You can decide the order in which players take actions however you want, but the game works best when people are spontaneously taking actions one after another.

If circumstances prevent you from participating in an action (for example, you are in jail or wounded), you can ask someone to take an action to help you out.

When it's your turn to take an action, first spin your dreidel and gain or lose Chaim accordingly. You can never have less than 0 Chaim.

ש	ה	ג	ה
Put 1 Chai into the pool (unless you have 0 Chai).	Take half of the Chaim in the pool (rounded up).	Take all of the Chaim in the pool.	No change.

Then, pick an action from your role sheet that you have enough Chaim for. Then, do the action.

Some actions ask you questions in italics. For these, answer the questions and then incorporate those answers into how you do your action.

Some actions have additional instructions in italics. Do these once your action is done. If the instructions are to *Spin the dreidel again*, spin the dreidel, gain or lose Chaim (see above), and then end your action.

Dramatize your action! For example, if your action is to *smite a foe*, describe how you do it, and why, who this foe is (Someone you know? Someone who has been threatening your unit?), and so on. Your action should always further or hinder the progress of the mission. The game works best if your action builds off of a previous action or mission. For example, if someone gets thrown into prison, the most compelling thing you could do might be to use an action to try and bust them out.

When it's not your turn to take an action, ask the player current doing an action questions to help them tighten up the narrative they're building.

You can roleplay as antagonists and other non-player characters as needed. However, these should always be secondary characters and shouldn't occupy more time than the actual player characters.

## Ending the mission

After everyone has taken an action, take some time to wrap up the plot. This should be freeform and everyone can participate at once—no one takes actions, gains or loses Chaim, etc. Likewise, this isn't a time for bold moves or heroism (that's what actions are for). When you all feel like the mission is done, it's done.

It's possible to fail a mission, or for a mission to only partially succeed. Don't feel like you have to use this final phase of the mission to make it succeed when it doesn't make sense to do so. Failed missions are often the most interesting for the overall story you're creating.

## Ending the game

After four missions, the Revolution ends. As a group, imagine the post-Revolution. What hopes were realized or shattered? What does this new society look like? Remember: Your rebel group played but a small role in the overall Revolution, and its outcome doesn't necessarily match yours. For example, even if your group failed every mission, the Revolution might still succeed. If you find it easier to imagine a pessimistic outcome of the Revolution, challenge yourself to dream of hope instead.

Next, taking turns, describe what happens to your character. Do you all stay together? Do you play a pivotal role in this new society? Do you fade into obscurity? Are you proud of what you did?

After everyone has taken a turn, the game ends.

# Role: The Turncoat

*Once, you were a soldier of the Imperial Army. Now, you fight alongside the rebels.*

---

Name *Lev, Chaya, Shmuel, Dobra, Yozsef, Malka, Sara*

---

Pronouns

## Choose why you left:

- You participated in an atrocity and repented. (*What was it?*)
- A fellow soldier or officer wants to kill you. (*Why?*)
- You were convinced by someone you love and trust. (*Who was it? What did they say or do?*)

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	A soldier from your former legion recognizes you and alerts their officer. <i>Spin the dreidel again.</i>
1	Do something dangerous (maybe self-harming) in order to prove your loyalty to the rebellion.
2	Seduce or coerce a soldier from your former legion to get what you want. <i>Put 1 Chai into the pool.</i>
3+	Apply your military expertise to deceive or surprise the enemy. <i>Put all of your Chaim into the pool.</i>

# Role: The Zealot

*You serve a mighty and wrathful God. Your heart is ablaze with the certainty of your cause.*

---

Name *Sholem, Raisel, Bronka, Baruch, Golde, Yankel*

---

Pronouns

## Choose what hardened your heart:

- You received a vision. (*What did it tell you?*)
- You witnessed something that convinced you that compromise is impossible. (*What was it?*)
- You were raised in a secluded cult. (*What great taboo or ritual did they observe?*)

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	Smite a “heretical” rebel warrior or non-combatant. <i>Spin the dreidel again.</i>
1	Do something contrary to the mission objective out of religious technicality.
2	Do something heroic but suffer a terrible wound in the process.
3+	Incite a riot. <i>Put all of your Chaim into the pool.</i>

# Role: The Meddler

*You know all the gossip and dirty little secrets in town, and you wield them like a sword.*

---

Name *Yentl, Ephraim, Shlomo, Feygele, Yetta, Alter*

---

Pronouns

## Choose two secrets that you know:

- A highly popular *tzaddik*<sup>5</sup> is actually a fraud. (*What “miracles” do they perform?*)
- A dangerous fascist in town is unfaithful to their spouse. (*Who are they sleeping with?*)
- A factory owner owes an organized crime syndicate a lot of money.
- A prominent non-Jewish revolutionary hates Jews.
- A member of your rebel cell has counter-revolutionary beliefs or behaviors. (*If you choose this secret, pick a player. They must consent to this secret and they must choose what is counter-revolutionary about them.*)

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	Run your mouth without thinking to the wrong person. <i>Spin the dreidel again.</i>
1	Befriend or fall in love with someone that you shouldn't.
2	Get the right people in the right room at the right time. ( <i>Who are they? What do they agree to do?</i> ) <i>Put 1 Chai into the pool.</i>
3+	Reveal one of your secrets to get exactly what you want. <i>Put half of your Chai (rounded up) into the pool.</i> <i>After you reveal the secret, you can't reveal it again.</i>

---

<sup>5</sup>*TSAH-deck*: A holy person or miracle worker.

# Role: The Swindler

*You need money? Weapons? Medicine? Well, you've come to the right comrade!*

---

Name *David, Moshe, Hinda, Zlata, Wulf, Lazer, Izrael*

---

Pronouns

## Choose a knack:

- Burglary
- Scam artistry
- Impersonation
- Seduction

## Choose a fault:

- Your most recent scheme fell apart and now you're penniless. (*What was the scheme?*)
- You owe a crime boss or an aristocrat something. (*What is it?*)
- You stole from the synagogue and have been branded a heretic. (*What did you steal?*)
- You're not nearly as clever as you think you are.

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	Sabotage the mission. ( <i>How do you do it? What forces you to do it?</i> ) <i>Take all of the Chaim from the pool.</i>
1	Steal something for the rebels but get captured. ( <i>Are you tortured? Do you reveal any secrets?</i> )
2	Help your comrades break into a building. <i>Put 1 Chai into the pool.</i>
3+	Steal a weapons cache from local soldiers or police. <i>Put all of your Chaim into the pool.</i>

# Role: The Orator

*Your task is to inspire the workers of this city to free themselves.*

---

Name *Estera, Henryk, Emmanuel, Rosa, Bela*

---

Pronouns

## Choose a belief:

- The Revolution will only succeed when the *Moshiach*<sup>6</sup> returns.
- The Revolution will only succeed via violent uprising.
- The Revolution will only succeed if it has strong leadership.
- The Revolution will only succeed if we smash gender normativity.

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	Imperial police raid your apartment and arrest you and your family. <i>Spin the dreidel again.</i>
1	Do something shrewd and extremely unpopular. ( <i>What do you do? Ally with an enemy? Decry a hero? Something else?</i> )
2	Disseminate propaganda and inspire new warriors. <i>Put 1 Chai into the pool.</i>
3+	Call for a workers strike. The current mission immediately succeeds. <i>Put all of your Chaim into the pool.</i>

---

<sup>6</sup>*mob-SHEE-ach*: The Messiah.

# Role: The Tough

*You're built like an ox and can endure hardships that few others can.*

---

Name *Hersch, Ber, Perle, Rivka, Aharon, Chava*

---

Pronouns

## Choose how you are strong:

- You can do manual labor from dawn to dusk.
- You're a fearsome brawler.
- You can inflict suffering without being emotionally shaken.
- You're impossible to bribe or blackmail.

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	Act before thinking and put a comrade in harm's way. <i>(Another player must volunteer to be this comrade. If no one volunteers, it's you.)</i> <i>Spin the dreidel again.</i>
1	Protect a comrade but receive a horrible wound in the process.
2	Shrug off a seemingly mortal blow. <i>Put 1 Chai into the pool.</i>
3+	Smite a foe. <i>Put half of your Chaim (rounded up) Chai into the pool.</i>

# Role: The Engineer

*Your thoughts are of electricity, gears, oil, and combustion.*

---

Name *Victor, Leah, Yitzhak, Syma, Rive, Gitl*

---

Pronouns

## Choose a specialty:

- Radios
- Revolvers
- Automobiles
- Explosives
- Costumes

## Actions:

Chaim	Action
0	Build your specialty machine but cause an accident that <i>either</i> alerts the police <i>or</i> wounds you. <i>Spin the dreidel again.</i>
1	Build your specialty machine and use it; it works but has a glaring flaw. ( <i>What is the problem?</i> )
2	Spend time carefully building your specialty machine. ( <i>How do you gather the parts? How do you hide your activities?</i> )
3+	Use your specialty machine; it works flawlessly. <i>You must have already built your machine (see above).</i> <i>Put all of your Chaim into the pool.</i>



# Study

*A Great Miracle Happened Here* is dedicated to Vivian, who passed away a few days before I began writing this. May her memory be a blessing.

The cover image is from [this blog](#). It was originally a Bundist political poster.

My other work can be found at [subalterngames.com](http://subalterngames.com). Follow me on Twitter at [@subalterngames](https://twitter.com/subalterngames).

## Books

- [Revolutionary Yiddishland: A History of Jewish Radicalism](#)
- [Of Moses and Marx: Folk Ideology and Folk History in the Jewish Labor Movement](#)
- [A Rainbow Thread: An Anthology of Queer Jewish Texts from the First Century to 1969](#)

## Music

- [Daniel Kahn & the Painted Bird](#)
- [Geoff Berner](#)
- [The Debaucherauntes](#)

## Games

- [Dream Apart: Jewish Fantasy of the Shtetl](#)
- [Doikayt: A Jewish TTRPG Anthology](#)