

The Name of God

Deeper Edition

This new version of the original *The Name of God* game was made possible thanks to the support of all my amazing Patreons @ [_www.patreon.com/unPlayableGames_](https://www.patreon.com/unPlayableGames)

Thank you **SO MUCH!**



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INDEX

Going deeper...	2
The Setting	2
Character Creation	3
The Play Together Talk	3
Play Structure	4
The Search and the Ritual	4
Opening a Scene	5
Playing a Scene	6
Of Space and Time	6
The Straight Path	6
Taking Action	7
What Difficult Means	7
What Perilous Means	7
What Both Means	7
Realism & Balance	8
Death and Nastiness	9
Ritual Actions	10
How to Perform a Ritual Action	10
Example	10
Chanting the Mantra	11
The Cost and Reward of Ritual Actions	12
Transcendence	13
The End	13

Going deeper...

The original rules for ***The Name of God*** were written with very specific and very stringent space limitations. It's kickstarted version expanded them with evocative artwork and a host of new Fetishes, but was still under the same spatial constraints due to the card format. This document is a rewriting of the game rules with (finally!) no space limitations and with a few years of feedback from players all around the world. I listened to them and gave a deeper look at how the game works, using all the text necessary to explain it clearly.

This booklet does not include any Fetish cards, which are needed to play the game.

The original setup required the presence of 3 to 4 players. Player feedbacks have shown that the game can work just fine for **only two players**, with little to no modification. It will also be running faster and smoother than with a full table of people, although each player will need to be a bit more (pro)active and invested. This new rewrite will acknowledge this, making two players the new default.

The Setting

You are **God**.
Well, you are **a** God.
Actually, you are a **small** God.
You forgot your true name and are stuck among mortals, without power, wealth or even a roof over your head. You are an **outcast** in a big modern city. But not all is lost...

This short text is the cornerstone for the game's setting and tone. Let's try to unpack it.

The game is set in the **real world**.

Magic and the supernatural don't exist. People don't believe in monsters and legends, and even the most spiritual and faithful individuals will fight violently against the notion that anything mystical could actually take place in real life. That would be crazy, right?

The game is set in a **big metropolis**.

This is important to reinforce the first point. The story will not take place in some backwater village, among superstitious people, in isolation from the trappings of modern society. Also, there is a lot of people around you. They lead normal lives, they have dreams and fears, friends and families, jobs, cars, mortgages, connections. No one is truly alone, although they might feel so when life gets tough.

Your character, your Fetish, is in contrast with both these assumptions.

You **know** that you are a God, but you have nothing to show for it: no powers, no magic, nothing. You **just know**, and that's all you've got. And all the things those other people have? **You don't have them**: no money, no property, no fixed domicile, no meaningful job.

There is only **one clear way** to reverse your luck, elevate yourself, and get out of this miserable and unjust condition...

Character Creation

Each participant to the game will play their own unique protagonist character, their own **homeless outcast in search for the memory of their divine name**.

Each such character embodies one idea or symbol, called a **Fetish**.

Every player needs to pick one Fetish among the available ones, **no doubles allowed**. This Fetish is a minimal template that guides play by posing questions and describing unique **ritual actions**. The right Fetish for a player is the one whose name, art, questions and ritual actions somehow pick that player's curiosity, interest and imagination ... or pose the biggest mystery. No idea how such a Fetish would play out in your hands? Run with it and see what happens in active play!

Once a Fetish has been selected, their player must answer its **questions**. These appear in the form of instructions that the player needs to follow: *say this, say that, say this other thing*. There are no right or wrong answers; the whole point of the game is to find or create **meaning** out of nothing. That's what Gods do, right?

When in doubt or stuck, **ask your fellow players** for suggestions and inspiration! They are supposed to like or at least be interested in your Fetish and their story anyway, so they might as well lend a hand and get involved.

The Play Together Talk

Character creation is the moment when all players will start talking about the upcoming game and the characters that will be involved in it. The cities they will dwell. The answers they will fashion.

This is the moment when all players need to more or less **be on the same page**, or start talking about the rules in place to get there. *The Name of God* is a minimalist game where it makes no sense to build a big structure to handle this aspect of the play experience, but here's a few important hints:

- your ideas have value, but so do the ideas of other players ... **be open!**
- the game can get pretty dark or touch emotional themes ... **have a care** for your fellow players!

The Fetish questions are just a **starting point**, a way to spark the players' imagination and get the ball rolling. Revisiting the same questions in different moments of the game is part of the fun and can yield interesting new results.

At any time during play, and including character creation, players should feel free to **ask further questions** and clarifications about someone else's character. The Fetish is meant to be evocative and help shape an initial impression of a character, but many more details could be added. Players are encouraged to **be curious** and ask more info about anything that picks their interest.

Play Structure

The game is structured in **turns**. Every turn the players cooperate to open a **scene**, play through whatever events might happen, and then close it, ending the turn. This goes on until all Fetishes in play meet some kind of end to their story, as explained later.

Each turn players will switch roles: one will be the **Seeker** while the others will be **Eyes**. When a Fetish **dies** their search is over: their player may not be the Seeker anymore and will continue the game as an Eye.

The game ends when no player can take the role of Seeker, when all Fetishes have met their death.

The Search and the Ritual

The core of the game, the final goal of every Fetish, is to gather the scattered fragments of their divine name and, thanks to this knowledge, **become a God again**. The only way to achieve this, is to perform successfully **three Ritual acts**.

Each Fetish card presents two possible acts that count as **ritual**. Their wording, just like the questions, is purposefully vague and ambiguous. Each player will have to **decide on their own** if something that their character is doing has ritual meaning or not. The Fetish description is there to be **evocative** and **thought provoking**, offering a metaphor that the player has to make sense of.

Opening a Scene

One Fetish must be selected to start the game. They will be the first Seeker. After that, the game continues in **clockwise** order, turn by turn, scene after scene, passing the role of Seeker around the table over and over until the game ends.

The Seeker player opens the new scene by **describing** in their own words the location where their Fetish finds themselves, keeping to these rules:

- they are in a **modern metropolis**
- they are in a place of **urban decay** at the borders of society
- **no** other Fetishes can be present

Now the Eyes have to add the following details. These are mandatory, no exceptions:

- there are **mortals** (aka **normal people**) present - describe how they look and what they do
- there is something **slightly bizarre**, something **inexplicably off** - describe what it is and why it feels off
- the situation is **dangerous** for someone **here and now** - describe how and why

These details are specifically meant to frame scenes depicting the dramatic moments of a Fetish life, the moments of risk and decision making, the moments of empathy or violence, the moments of confrontation with oneself and others. These are the moments worth playing.

The **mortals** could be friends or adversaries or accidental witnesses, but either way the Fetish is never truly alone or isolated from the surrounding population.

The world is our real world, rational and material, but some **small detail** will always look strange in the eyes of a Fetish, giving a **slightly surreal** touch to their view of things.

The **dangers** are those of everyday life on the streets: a tense situation might degenerate into violence, a difficult task might lead to failure and humiliation, securing a warm spot for the night or the last piece of stale bread might involve facing challenges or hard choices... in all of this the Fetish might be the one directly endangered, or they might be **a witness to someone else's hardships**. Either way what they chose to do or not do will be meaningful.

If possible, **each Eye** should provide one of the above descriptions or, at the very least, contribute with some additional scenographic details (*is it raining? is there a peculiar smell in the air? what colour are the little girl's mittens? etc..*). It is possible for an Eye to provide more, or all, of the required descriptions, but this should only happen because there are not enough players at the table. No Eye should stay silent during this phase of the game.

Playing a Scene

Now that the scene is open, the game goes on as a conversation.

The Seeker describes what their Fetish says, does, thinks and feels.

The Eyes describe what the mortals say and do and how they appear, **never** how they feel or what they think.

The Eyes say if new **mortals** arrive in the scene. The Eyes describe any environmental events that happen here and now: *does it start raining? does a siren blares in the distance? is there a key under the doormat?* When the Seeker looks around, the Eyes describe what is seen. When the Seeker talks to someone, the Eyes answer in that person's voice. **The Eyes are the world around the Seeker.**

This conversation goes on, back and forth between Seeker and Eyes, until one of the following conditions is met:

- the Fetish is described as performing an action, and an Eye calls it out as **Difficult**
- the Fetish is described as performing an action, and an Eye calls it out as **Perilous**
- the Fetish is described as performing an action, and an Eye calls it out as **Both** difficult and perilous
- a mortal is described as performing an action, and the Seeker calls it out as **D.** or **P.** or **B.**

When a mortal performs such actions, they are resolved and then the scene goes on.

When a **Fetish** performs such actions, they are resolved and then **the scene ends immediately.**

The next Seeker is appointed, and they open a new scene.

Of Space and Time

Each scene can happen at **any time and place** where it could make sense. Fetishes will never directly meet each other, so their individual stories don't need to directly tie in. Each Fetish story might take place in a different metropolis on the globe.

Scene by scene, the same rule applies. Narrated events **must make sense to all players**, but each scene could happen at a different location with no need to explicitly describe how the Fetish traveled there. Likewise, scenes could happen one after the other, or hours after the previous scene, or weeks, or months, or years. Just remember that the Fetish has no powers (yet) and will age like everybody else.

The Straight Path

The game rules shape play so that the story will jump constantly from one Fetish to the next, keeping things moving and dynamic. But some find this dispersive, constantly changing focus between different storylines. To fix this, players can agree on **not changing the role of Seeker**, following the whole story of a single Fetish at a time, only appointing a new Seeker after the previous Fetish has met their end.

Taking Action

What Difficult Means

When a player feels like saying “**Wow, wait a second, that’s not so easy!**” then the action described is Difficult. When this happens, the party that called out the action (the Eyes or the Seeker) has to define an **immediate** condition for the action to succeed:

*“That’s difficult. To do it **you must first** give them the little food you have left.”*

*“That’s difficult. To do it **you must also** take the time so search the rest of the house.”*

*“That’s difficult. If you do it, **it will also happen that** the window shows signs of a break-in.”*

This is not a bargain. Players are not meant to haggle or negotiate. This is how things are. The condition must be such that the acting character can say “**Yes, I do it**” and accomplish the original action right there and then, or say “**No, I won’t do it**” thus failing/aborting the original action.

What Perilous Means

When a player feels like saying “**Wow, wait a second, someone will surely get hurt!**” then the action described is Perilous. When this happens, the party that called out the action has to make it clear:

- who will get hurt
- in which way they will get hurt
- how badly they will get hurt

More than one person could get hurt at the same time, and the hurt might be physical or emotional or social or different for everyone involved, as long as it is **real meaningful damage**, not just a trivial bruise of the ego or of the skin.

Again, this is not a bargain. And the hurt must be such that the acting character can say “**Yes, it happens**” and accomplish the original action right there and then, or say “**No, it doesn’t happen**” thus preventing the hurt but also failing/aborting the original action.

What Both Means

When a player feels like saying “**Woah there, that’s not easy AND someone will surely get hurt!**” then the action described is Both, and has no chance of success. The party that called out the action has free reign describing how the acting character **fails and causes hurt**, to themselves and/or someone else.

Most **action-movie** endeavors will easily fall under this category. This is very intentional. As this type of action leaves no room for the acting character to shape the outcome, it is best to **offer their player a chance to take the description back before** the disastrous outcome gets narrated.

Players might want to stay their course anyway for a multitude of reasons: maybe for dramatic effect, maybe because even in failure and hurt their character will achieve the positioning they desire, maybe because it’s a perfect opportunity to turn the table with a Ritual action (as explained later).

Realism & Balance

None of the above rules is about statistical odds or realistic chances. They are about **drama**. About interesting and meaningful consequences. Most of all, they are about being willing (or not) to pay a price to do what you want to do.

What is difficult? Tying shoelaces while drunk could objectively be difficult, but unless it leads to immediate consequences that make for an interesting story... don't bother calling it out. On the other hand talking honestly with someone is a trivially simple action, but social or emotional circumstances might make it difficult (or even perilous!): that's when we want to see how things go, if they succeed or fail, if success has conditions or costs that might give pause to the character.

What is perilous? Being part of a street brawl should obviously qualify, but what about being rejected by someone? What about failing at something one cares about?

Not every failure and rejection is meaningful and relevant enough to **truly hurt**, especially since the Fetish lives already a life of hardship. When in doubt the Eyes **can and should ask** the Seeker for guidance: *do you think that your Fetish would care for this? Would they feel hurt by that?*

The rules about actions are tools to shape the story into something engaging, **dramatic** and **humane**. Players should not (ab)use them to get their way or to prevent bad things from happening to their characters. *The Name of God* is often a game of dark, bitter and tragic stories, although hope and redemption are always possible ... **the journey, with all its highs and lows, is what matters.**

Be sure to **talk about this** among players before starting the game, and **talk about it again** if ever the need arises to get everyone on the same page.

Death and Nastiness

When a **Perilous** or **Both** type of action happens there is nothing stopping the players from describing fatal damage... to anyone. Fetishes are the obvious protagonist of the game, but if their actions look like they might lead to an untimely death, don't hesitate! **Kill them off mercilessly**. Do the same with any other mortal. Don't hold back.

This is not meant to encourage a bloodbath in your game. On the contrary it should discourage players from pursuing **action-hero** scenes and stories... unless they really want to, and are ready to pay the price.

The same should apply to Difficult actions. They are not about overcoming a challenge, as the solution to it is offered within the problem itself!

"To succeed you must first... and also... etc"

"Yes, I do it"

End of the challenge :P

No, the aim is to have the character decide if the thing they want is worth doing something they might not want to do, or risking it set up the conditions for potential later drama. It's about setting a price to be paid either now or later.

(continue...)

Either way, be **nasty**. Be **cruel**. Be **deliberate**. Offer a price that will have the acting character (thus its player) wonder: *am I this kind of person? will I do this? will I accept such outcome?*

This is the best way to play. And the rules support it in three main ways...

One, character death does not mean game over, as all players will continue to play as Eyes.

Two, the Fetish has final agency in most circumstances, including the apparently desperate ones as will be shown when Ritual actions are explained.

Three, in the *Play Together Talk* the game explicitly tasks the players to **have a care for each other** as fellow human beings, if not as friends. Everyone should feel free to **express discomfort** about some delicate and controversial themes or descriptions, and expect the others to respect this and act accordingly. And in turn everyone should **keep an eye** on the others to check if the game content "**hurts good**" like an engaging drama story, or "**hurts bad**" like a personal problem.

When in doubt, simply ask.

Ritual Actions

At any time the Seeker can announce that an action their Fetish is performing has a special meaning, that it is a **Ritual** action. These actions have special rules that override the normal rules for all other types of actions. They are the beating heart of the game, **the only way** to gain hold of one's devine name.

Each Fetish card presents a unique set of two possible actions. Like the initial questions, their wording is very open to interpretation; **it is the Seeker's job to find meaning**, literal or metaphorical, in them. This is not something that can be pre-decided. During active play the Fetish will meet people, face challenges, endure dangers ... and through these situations, born out of inspiration or necessity, the Seeker will describe their Fetish as doing something fitting their Ritual actions.

There is no one right way to do this:

- **Steering** the Fetish actions towards the right conditions for a Ritual to happen is a valid and fruitful way to play.
- **Turning** a doomed action (that is **Both** dangerous and perilous) into an unexpected Ritual success, is accepted and even encouraged.
- **Letting** events unfold until the right situation hits you by chance is valid too, although it will result in a slower, more relaxed, story pace.

Moreover, the same text describing a Ritual action can be interpreted in different ways in different occasions. **It really is all about the Seeker finding meaning in what their Fetish does.**

How to Perform a Ritual Action

Unless absolutely obvious, the Seeker should clearly stop the narration and **follow the instructions on their Fetish card**. This means reciting the name of their Fetish, then explaining how their current actions fit with the instructions on the Fetish card. Notice how these are **game instructions to the Seeker player**, whom will then describe how the Fetish character acts within the narrative.

Example

This is an excerpt for the **Broken Bottle** fetish...

When you perform a Ritual action

Say I am the Broken Bottle!

Say what you do here and now

- to cut the one who gets too close

or

- to remind them of something beautiful from afar

Say I am the Broken Bottle!

Chant the mantra

When you stop, make your choice

Saying out loud “***I am the Broken Bottle!***” is very important. It is a perfect and atmosphere-building way to interrupt the normal flow of the game conversation, clearly signalling when the Ritual mechanics begin and end.

Then the Seeker will be asked to choose one of the two available options and describe appropriate Fetish actions or, going the other way around, explain how what the Fetish is already doing fits one of the two rituals.

Finally, the Seeker will “***chant the mantra***”. This signals to the Eyes that it is time to do their part in the ritual. One at a time they will follow their own instructions and then join the Seeker in chanting the mantra. When all Eyes are chanting, the Seeker will stop. Everyone will stop too. And in the sudden silence the Seeker will have to choose:

- accept the conditions posed by the Eyes, thus performing the Ritual successfully
- refuse the conditions posed by the Eyes, thus failing to perform the Ritual

Chanting the Mantra

This is the part where many players seem to have problems with the game, as they feel shy or skeptical at the prospect of doing something as weird as **intoning a continuous series of prolonged low-pitched “ooooooooh” sounds**. This is unfortunate, because the effect at the table is quite impressive and evocative once all the Eyes pitch in too, one by one adding depth and power to the mantra.

This is one of the small real-life rituals that the game asks the players to perform because, if they do, enrich the play experience.

Players should **always encourage** each other to embrace this ritual, helping each other to step a little bit out of their comfort zone if necessary, leading by example and offering support. We are all on the same boat, let’s feel silly together!

At the same time players should **never push too hard**; what is a trivial act to some can be painfully embarrassing to others, and being forced to do something one really doesn’t want to do is a surefire way to suck the joy and fun out of the game. As already mentioned, at the end of the day players should **always take care of each other**.

An alternative, and hopefully less embarrassing, mantra could be achieved by **thumping hands** on the table in a rhythmic way. Any simple beat will do as long as it is kept consistent and performed with conviction: THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP THUMP...

The Cost and Reward of Ritual Actions

Ritual actions are very powerful. They allow the Fetish to **succeed** at whatever they were doing, and also to **restore** one piece of their forgotten divine name. But they also have a steep cost. Technically speaking they are **Both** difficult and perilous actions that succeed instead of failing.

So when the Seeker intones the mantra, the Eyes will have to come up with two conditions:

- what else needs to happen for the action to succeed
- who gets hurt and how

Just like with normal D-P-B actions the concept of “cost” is meant in a **narrative and dramatic** way. The whole point of adding consequences and of hurting people is to make the story move forward in interesting, tense and emotional ways.

As a reward the Fetish is one step closer to transcendence and, on top of that, accomplishes successfully the action.

Convincing someone? They are convinced.

Stealing something? It is taken, it is yours.

Raging against a gang of thugs? They are beaten at your feet.

The Fetish might not be happy of how exactly this came to pass. Maybe they left a bad impression on someone whose opinion they value. Maybe someone they cared for has been hurt. Maybe they had to give in to their darkest self. Maybe the Fetish died accomplishing this one Ritual feat.

If the Seeker refuses, none of the conditions imposed by the Eyes will come to pass. The Fetish will somehow get directly and immediately hurt (physically, emotionally, socially, etc) but this time it is the **Seeker's** task to describe the outcome of this botched action however they see fit. There is a cost, but they are in control of it.

Transcendence

Once a Fetish performs successfully **three Ritual actions** their story comes to an end. Just like any other D-P-B action performed by the Fetish, the Ritual action brings the current scene to an end. The next time the Seeker opens a scene for their Fetish they do so **without any interference from the Eyes**, and must instead narrate the transcendence of their Fetish.

What this means is:

- describe where the scene takes place
- describe when the scene takes place
- describe how the Fetish **destroys their “prison of flesh” using the simple tools of this mundane world**
- what are they thinking? how are they feeling? what does it mean for the people in their life?
- this immediately ends the scene. From now on that player will only play as an Eye

Simply put, the Fetish will kill themselves.

And do so using conventional means.

From the outside it will just look like a homeless person committing suicide.

But the Fetish **knows**... they **know** this is the final step needed to transcend the mortal world and truly reappropriate their godly nature. Freedom, at last, and divine power.

This scene is completely in the hands of the Seeker, to end their Fetish story however they feel is best. It could be a sad and tragic end, or a melancholic and sweet goodbye. It could be poetic, or brutal. It could spell personal redemption, or final doom.

The End

Just a few memories from the first playtesys of this game, when it only had four Fetishes...

A **Shadow** transcended by screaming their anger against an incoming train, facing alone with a baseball bat their inner demons.

A **Stars** transcended by falling asleep in their bed, with pills and a smile, fondly remembering a lifetime of loved ones and quiet accomplishments.

A **Worm** transcended by getting shot down in a dark alley, morbidly clutching the eye they had just carved from a local mobster.

A **Winter** transcended by walking into a December river, searing away the regrets of a painful life with freezing cold water, finally achieving the purity of ice.