

The Butterforger

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Abstract

A courtroom comedy set in the Old World, for four-to-five players and a game master

The Butterforger is a roleplaying game written by Olle Jonsson, with assistance from Frederik Berg Østergaard and Luisa Carbonelli. Edits and enhancements added by René Toft, Jason Morningstar, and Emily Care Boss.

The Fine Print

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1 Dramatis Personae

- The Magistrate (Played by the game master)
- The Prosecutor (A Player)
- Barrister and Solicitor, Advocate of the Defense (A Player)
- Witnesses, experts, and others (Played by the other players)

2 Background

In a swan sweet as butter...

In the Imperial Opera House of Altdorf, the guests at the high table found the butter that was used in a heraldic butter swan to taste unnatural, artificial, and yes, plainly forged. The butter would be excised, the forgers punished, and the imperial purity and quality laws would be upheld. That code, being civilization's milestone, had always stood as a vital counter-force against the encroaching chaos.

Much energy was spent. Representatives from the guild of dairy farmers, the dairy cartel, and the cheese-makers' guild (and, by accident, the guild of magicians) found that the malefactor and the false butter stemmed from a little village outside of Remer, in the province of Ostermark. What a scandal! A Magistrate, sent from the Institute for Imperial Food Control, was dispatched to the countryside to find a guilty party.

The Magistrate was judge, theologian, and reverend of food-stuffs, all in the same person. His huge retinue of soldiers, lawyers, and barristers of 1st and 3rd degree turned the provincial village upside down by their mere presence. But the fancy city folks are in for some surprises themselves. The Game In Brief The Magistrate, played by the game master, is in the village, looking for someone guilty. It's unclear why the people in the courtroom have been called, but that's beside the point. The game and the case are about the process. One thing is crystal clear to all, though – the defendant is guilty, and that is not really up for debate.

The players play the prosecution, the defense, and all the witnesses, experts, and others that may have stumbled into this court. Two players will be lawyers, and two will play everyone else. The defendant is not played, but is present in the room.

The prosecution and the defense alternate in calling a witness to illuminate the case. The game lasts a total of 90 minutes, ends when that time is up. Perhaps there is time for eight to ten witnesses, each using about five minutes of court time. When all witnesses have testified, the lawyers both offer their closing arguments, after which the Magistrate sentences the butterforger to a punishment. The meting out of that punishment – whatever it is – is the responsibility of the courtroom audience, according to ancient custom. One is guilty until the Emperor has offered a pardon.

3 Something About Play Style

If someone asks "What does the room look like?" the game master should allow all the players to offer details, a potluck of ideas and images. The story comes alive in the shared telling. It's a strategy for the game master to encourage participation and grant the players more ownership of the story. Your players may not have any knowledge about Warhammer's Old World. This is not a problem! Don't be afraid of writing new castles onto the map, or removing large existing things - having fun is more important than any consistency with the source material.

If time and style allows, the GM can add story-juice to the players by asking them to narrate the world: "How does the audience react to that?" or "It's about noon, how are the eating arrangements taken care of?"

The author of this game likes his roleplaying to be direct and acted out. Even if the GM sits down most of the time – the role of Magistrate is quite sedantary – the GM could have her arms flailing, gaze darting, and her voice grumbling or whispering. During cross-examination, lawyers prance around be-

fore the witness stand, and the witnesses all enter and leave the stand. So yes, there should be a physical witness stand, which you can enter and leave. Rules The lawyers, that is the Prosecutor and the Defense, can use two special powers: Discrediting the adversary, and complaining about procedural errors. The instructions that follow are repeated on the players' character sheet. Objection! You can always shout "Objection!" and hope to take over the witness. But, to get to do that, you need to provide the Magistrate with a fresh, valid reason. Preferably, the reason should be based on well-established case law, an Imperial edict, or historical precedent. The legal system is a labyrinth of possibility. Here are some examples: - Objection, your Honor! How can we take this flea's word as truth if he refuses to swear on the Great Book of Sigmar? And how can this blood-sucking insect swear on the Great Book of Sigmar if he will not stay on the book in the first place!

- Objection! Procedural Error! You say that only women are allowed to handle the non-processed milk, but in the case of Fräulein Birgit Malken versus farmer Johan Böse it is clearly stated that in the unlikely case of

- Objection, your Honor! The honorable counsel for the prosecution misapprehends the boundaries of case law in this matter; Emperor Magnus III, in a writ issued prior to the Great Diet of 2312, clearly defined limits to arbitrage in matters related to cloven-hoofed animals.

4 The Game Master

As game master, you will primarily play the role of the Magistrate, who from time to time will ask the lawyers to explain what the point is, and generally be quite tired of errors of procedure, slowness, and provincial idiocy. At the same time, you should let the players run wild. Keep the pace and be watchful of the clock. Don't be shy about shouting "Get Ouuuut!" from time to time. Also, you shall create a Legal Crisis.

The Magistrate

Personality: Grand, not all-powerful, but very close to it. You have traveled here as the axis mundi of a huge entourage of prosecutors, lawyers, scribes, and so forth. After turning 70, you've acquired a certain dignitas. The wig is glued to the skull, and small white weights in the corners maintain the status quo of the hair-do.

Many people think justice comes out of thick books, but that is not your modus operandi. You have people reading books for you.

Legal Crisis

You have a special task, as the Magistrate: create a game event which turns into a legal crisis. Think along the lines of "Lost Oath", "All Books Are Fake, Fake I Say!", "The Magistrate Suddenly Thinks He Is A Vampire" or the like.

In order to explain, here is a play example from the first test-run of the game, which is just one idea of how to take things.

Our courtroom play was progressing well, perhaps too orderly, so the frail physical condition of The Magistrate became an event in itself. We (the GM) invented the crisis The Apparent Death of the Magistrate, which added a scene with all the barristers (high, low, and in-between), to figure out what to do, and why the case had to move forward even without this important personage. So, as a GM: perform some weird dying (acting it out clearly), and then turning over to the players the business of interpreting, and deciding what this crisis meant, and what the lawyers were to do about it. In our game, this was done by a pointed question to the players: "Wow! What does this mean, legally, that he is... dead - he seems dead, yes, lifeless."

Quick list of words to just use

- improbus - immoral
- gravis - heavy
- dexter - right
- dignitas - dignity, worthiness
- aliquando - at one point or other
- audax - audacious
- ad modum - much
- causa - cause; reason
- extemplo - soon
- lingua - tongue
- Magistratus
- senectus - age (a senex is an old man)
- quemadmodum - how
- quotannis - every year

And, you could prepare even further, by trawling Wikipedia:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_legal_Latin_terms

In themselves, the words do not mean much, combine them all you want – it just sounds good.

Witness list, for use in courtroom

- Meatball salesman.
- Officer of purity control.
- Eyewitness.
- Son of a cow-drover.
- Store-room worker (nota bene: blind).
- Butter-tongue (expert witness).
- Donkey boss.
- A convicted butterforger.
- Priest.
- Mr. Arris.
- Siamese twins.
- Bald man.
- Unter Vogelsohn (“the man who thinks he is a dog”).
- Baker.
- Tallow-cooker.
- Old man (“bodyguard”).
- Flea circus man.
- Woman that alleges to want to marry the defendant. (The hopeful bride)
- Nobleman.
- The Vampir (nota bene: not a vampire).

You play the Prosecutor

Your task is to make sure protocol is maintained. The butterfonger will surely be punished, but procedure is more important than justice. You are to call witnesses to the stand, and cross-examine them. At the end of the case, you will present your closing arguments which concludes the matter, as well as offering your perspective on the judicial principles and procedures.

Personality: The office of prosecutor is usually hereditary, but you won yours in a card game. You're simply lucky. Often, you can notice when a witness is about to crack. Then you draw it out. You quite like it. "Let's just return to -" is a favorite phrase.

Back in the day you usually fell asleep on long-winded witnesses. Led to repercussions. Alas, you fall asleep no longer! Instead, you've become verbal, even verbose, in your disdain for uncooperative witnesses, useless witnesses, witnesses that don't help your case, frankly: all boring witnesses. By being rude, you stay awake. Refreshing.

You play the Defense Attorney

Your task is to see to it that procedure is kept. The butterforger will surely get his punishment. Procedure trumps justice. You are to call witnesses that you can ask about things related to the case. At the end of the case you are to hold forth: final conclusive remarks that sum the case up, and your perspective on the legal principles and procedures that should guide the verdict.

Personality: At the University, there were thick books on many areas of case law: dogs, children, even about angels. Your favorite area was heraldic image conflict law. Making justice between powerful families, and defending the right to someone's historical mark. Awakens the she-bear within you.

This sleepy case... what does it matter? Perhaps you can get heraldry in there, somehow.

The Defense Attorney always faces away from the witness. Turning around at an opportune moment is a key technique in cross-examination.

Extras: the witnesses

1. **Meatball salesman.** Serving the audience in the courtroom. Previous business partner of the forger. "Bastard owes me money." Likes to eat – it tastes good, right? Some people find that inappropriate in the courtroom. The salesman has smuggled in some sandwiches inside a cheese.
2. **Officer of Purity Control.** Everybody knows that urine is the best conserving agent. You prefer urine from the oldest of old crones. There's sustainability in that piss. You know a great deal of previous cases and own and maintain a large urine collection.
3. **The Eyewitness.** This "witness", bought and paid for by the prosecution, answers questions a little too quickly. Really wants to go home. The work as a witness can be hard to cope with at times. Lots of things to pay attention to, and some of the signals from the defense and the prosecution are a little unclear. "What does he mean? Should I agree now, or should I not agree?"
4. **Son of a cow-drover.** Not the sharpest tool in the shed. Knows everything about how the milk is carried in to the old butter crones. But what they do in there, you have *no* idea.
5. **Blind store-room worker:** Worked for the Forger. Has a helper, who speaks for him, for some reason... and he's looking for new employment among the audience (from the stand).
6. **Butter-tongue.** The most prominent butter connoisseur in the Empire. Butter-tongue tasted his way through all kinds of butter. From Last-Days'-Butter over Virgin Butter (from true virgins) to Death-Butter (made from the last milk of dead women). He knows what butter is made of.
7. **Donkey boss.** False butter has been churned the wrong way, for instance by donkeys running a churning-machine backwards, round and around. The donkey boss explains things best by showing them.
8. **Another butterforger.** You are an ex-forger of butter. The Codex Butyrum, the ancient tome that describes the true ways of butter do not explicitly forbid lard as an ingredient. Alas, you have not read it.
9. **Priest.** You demand some respect from the prosecution! Start with asking questions on the Holy Book of Sigmar. That basic courtesy, or you don't answer any questions. At all.
10. **Arris.** The flamboyant dilettante of the village. Loves the limelight and will go to any lengths to stay in at the witness stand.
11. **The two siamese hookers.** Claim that the butterforger told them how, why, and how much. If only they could agree.

12. **The man who bought the butterforger's hair-cure**
13. **Unter Vogelsohn.** The dog-man from Daarsted. The man that most of all looks like a dog. Quick to anger, and will bay at close questioning.
14. **The superstitious baker.** "Should I really testify in this case? Might it not mean bad luck - it is after all a case about food grease?" There is more than most people think, between heaven and earth, and you know what to do to protect life, livestock, and family. You see omens and signs everywhere, also here in the courtroom. You heard it gives good luck to touch the beard of a judge.
15. **The tallow-cooker.** The helper of the forger. Has delivered insane amounts of skaven fat to the Forger. In good faith, of course. - There's no such thing as Skaven, my good man. What, the, can the grease have been?
16. **The butterforger's bodyguard.** An old man, the "bodyguard" is quite short-tempered, but other than that he's got no special abilities.
17. **Flea circus man.** Brought his circus of fleas, that only he can speak with. They have important clues and informations. The fleas run away, of course, at the most unfitting time.
18. **The woman who would like to marry the butterforger.** She has nothing to add to the case, but was impressed with the picture on the poster.
19. **The nobleman** who tasted the butterforger's product, and likes it. "It is the best butter I ever tasted!" On closer examination, he was never in the village at the same time as the Forger.
20. **The Vampire.** Not really a vampire, but can not stand milk products. Hisses loudly to any and all. Talks in a weird accent.