

# **“Lord Knows I Don’t Begrudge Her It”**

A 24 Hour Roleplaying Game

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## **1. Introduction**

“Lord Knows I Don’t Begrudge Her It” is a 24-hour Roleplaying Game inspired by William Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*. The game is set in the southern United States in the early nineteen hundreds. The players take the role of a household in which one of the family members has recently died. Before death, the dying family member made the rest of the family promise to bury him or her in a neighboring town. It is therefore the duty of the surviving family members to transport the corpse of their dearly departed kin to a proper burial site. However, each member of the family has ulterior reasons for wanting to go to town, and is largely using their newly dead relative as an excuse to get what they want.

It won’t be easy.

“Lord Knows I Don’t Begrudge Her It” is a game for two to six players, though three to five is probably ideal.

### **Acknowledgements**

The initial seed for “Lord Knows I Don’t Begrudge Her It” was planted during a conversation with my dear friend Esther Stiff, who has never played an RPG in her life to the best of my knowledge. My best friend and better half Janelle Hutter is, as always, a great inspiration to me and an encouragement to make certain I know what I’m talking about.

The game rules are no doubt indebted to the following other games: The Shab-al-Hiri Roach by Jason Morningstar, The Mountain Witch by Timothy Kleinert, Dogs in the Vineyard by Vincent Baker, and There Is No Spoon by Steve Darlington.

## **2. Family Generation**

“Lord Knows I Don’t Begrudge Her It” is a game about a family, composed of individuals with individual desires and motives. Despite these separate (and often conflicting) impulses and personalities, the family must work together or none of them will be able to attain what they want.

### The Family

The first thing that the players must determine is the nature of the family itself. It is assumed for the purpose of the game that the family is composed of poor country folk. The size of the family will be equal to the number of players plus one (the dead one). The family may be comprised of “immediate” family members (fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters) or it may include other relatives such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, and so forth. The family is assumed to all live together. The deceased may be any member of the family, from grandmother to daughter. As they will in some ways define much about the rest of the family, they are the first family member to be generated.

### The Deceased

The players must discuss several aspects of the recently departed. What was their identity? How did they die? Why did they want to be buried away from their home? What was most important to them in life? Of what were they most afraid? Fleshing out the dead member of the family will help to give the players an idea of their own place in the family.

### The Player Characters

After the departed member of the family has been fleshed out, the rest of the family must be constructed. This is in part an individual exercise, as each player creates their own character, but it should also be (at least partly) a group activity, as the characters are created to not only exist on their own, but also as members of the family unit. The characters need names.

### Motive

Each player must choose one Motive for their character. In the game, the most important thing to your character is his or her Motive. This is what drives your character forward; what keeps them on the path toward their destination, and, most importantly, that which they value the most in the world. The Motive can be almost anything, but with the following requirements: there must be some reason that the Motive can only be fulfilled by a trip to town, where the dying member of the family has requested burial. Perhaps, for example, the motive is an object your character wishes to buy; perhaps there is someone in town that they wish to meet with. Or perhaps your character genuinely wishes to give your dead relative the proper burial that they deserve. Regardless, when obstacles threaten to turn you from the path to town, the only things that you can call on to make it through the hardship are your family and your devotion to your motive.

Each character begins the game with 15 Motive Points (see Gameplay and Resolution, below). This represents the character’s resolve, their will to continue on the journey.

### Means

The Means is the item or items necessary for the character to fulfill their Motive. In one sense, the coffin holding their dead family member is a Means for the entire family, as it provides an excuse for going to town. If the coffin is lost, the pilgrimage becomes unnecessary, and the family will have to turn back (see The Coffin, below).

However, each character must also have a personal means for fulfilling their motive. In some cases, this may simply be enough money to buy an item that they wish to possess. In other cases, the Means will be subtle. The only guidelines are that without the character's Means, he or she will not be able to accomplish their Motive – and that their Means must be something that can be lost.

A character *must* have both Motive Points and the Means in order to achieve their Motive when the family reaches town.

#### Relationships

It is important to determine the relationships between the characters. Ideally this will be enlarged upon during the game, but it is important to at least begin thinking about it here. Which family member does your character consider the closest? Does your character harbor animosity toward any of his or her relatives? Why? It may help to chart the relationships of your character to his family on a sheet of paper.

### 3. Game Play and Resolution

#### Events

In “Lord Knows I Don’t Begrudge Her It”, the game is played as a series of events. Players take turns as the Observing Character (OC), narrating the events from their character’s perspective. The players roll to see who will be the first OC. For the next scene, the OC will be the player to the previous OC’s right. During each event, the family encounters an obstacle that threatens to prevent them from reaching the town. The family must get through the obstacle before they can continue on their way. An event progresses as follows:

1. The Observing Character determines the difficulty of the threat or obstacle. He creates an appropriate obstacle based on the difficulty.
2. The OC begins to narrate the scene from his character’s point of view.
3. As the narration progresses, and the family is faced with the obstacle of the OC’s choosing, they use their Motive Points to attempt to overcome the obstacle.
4. When the family has spent all the Motive Points that they wish to spend for the round, they all roll 1d6 for each Motive Point that they have expended.
5. Meanwhile, the OC rolls a number of dice equal to the number of family members. These dice are of the type determined in the first step.
6. The results of the family’s dice are added. The OC adds together the results of his or her own roll, separately.
7. The two results, of the family’s dice and the OC’s dice, are compared. If the family’s result is greater, they succeed in overcoming the obstacle. Go to 14.
8. If the Observing Character’s result is greater, the obstacle becomes Complicated. The next person in line to be the OC takes over. Instead of rolling the d4 and creating a new obstacle, however, the new OC simply continues the old obstacle, but heightens the drama.
9. The family spends Motive Points, as before.

10. The dice are rolled, as previously. The new OC rerolls the obstacle dice, adding one die of the same type to represent the increased severity.
11. The dice for both “sides” are totaled, and the results compared. If the family’s result is greater than the Observing Character’s, the family succeeds in overcoming the obstacle. Go to 14.
12. If the Observing Character’s result is greater than the family’s, a Failure results. The OC determines which of the family is affected by the failure. The Coffin deteriorates by 1d6 points.
13. Anyone wishing to sacrifice their Means in order to negate Motive Point loss declares their desire now. (See below)
14. Anyone wishing to start an in-family conflict declares their desire now. (See below)
15. The title of Observing Character passes to the next person in line, and the process begins again.

### Game Length

Before beginning, the players should discuss how many events they wish the game to last. Note that Complications and In-Family Conflicts do not count as events – they are continuations of events or interludes between events. The more events that the players take on, the greater the chance that they will fail to achieve their Motives, and the greater the chance that they will have to abandon their journey and return home. Off the top of my head, four to six events (including the Burial, which is always last (see The Endgame, below)) seems like a fair number to start with.

### Determining Obstacle Difficulty

The first thing that an Observing Character does is to secretly roll 1d4. This establishes the severity of the obstacle or threat about to face the family, as per the following table:

Roll	Die Type
1	d4
2	d6
3	d6
4	d8

#### Using Motive Points

As the narration of the event continues, the other players may, at any time, spend Motive Points to attempt to help in resolving the event at hand. They announce their desired action and declare the number of Motive Points that they wish to expend. Each Motive Point spent during a round is counted as 1d6 during the event resolution. A player may expend Motive Points more than once per event. There is no upper limit to the amount of Motive Points a character may spend, and no lower limit to the number of points a character must spend. The Observing Character each round is considered passive, and cannot expend Motive Points.

### Resolution

When the family is unwilling to expend more Motive Points, or feel that they have spent enough, the Observing Character calls for a roll. Each character rolls a number of d6 equal to the amount of Motive Points that they spent during the scene. Meanwhile, the Observing Character rolls 1dN for each family member (including the Observing Character), where N is the die type for the Event. The two numbers are compared: if the

sum of the Family's dice is equal to or greater than the sum of the Observing Character's dice, the family succeeds in overcoming the obstacle. If the sum of the Family's dice is less than the sum of the Observing Character's dice, however, the event becomes Complicated.

#### Complicated Events

A complicated event means that something goes horribly amiss. The obstacle that was impeding the family's progress suddenly worsens. Perhaps the thunderstorm from which the family was seeking shelter becomes a flash flood. Perhaps the vagrants who had been begging the family for food turn suddenly violent.

An event that becomes complicated is treated as a new event in terms of changing the Observing character – a new Observing Character is selected. The scene, however, is continued from the previous scene. The same obstacle still faces the family, except that now it is even greater than before. This increase in threat is represented by the Observing Character rolling one extra die of the Event's type during the new resolution. The event is otherwise played as per normal. The family spends Motive points as usual – their points do not stack with those spent in the original event.

#### Success and Failure

If the family is successful in fending off this complication, the OC narrates the way in which they escape or overcome the obstacle. If they are not successful, however, the Coffin immediately loses 1d4 coffin points, and the OC rolls 1d4 and consults the following table to determine who was affected by the failure:

1. No family members are affected.
2. The OC chooses one family member to lose 1d6 Motive Points.
3. The OC chooses two family members to lose 1d4 Motive Points each.
4. The entire family loses 1d4 Motive Points each.

The OC narrates what happens to any affected characters, as well as the Coffin. This affect may be in the form of physical, emotional, or spiritual trauma or injury.

#### In-Family Conflicts

In the space between events, one family member may begin a conflict with another. This is resolved in much the same way as a usual obstacle; both players bid Motive Points against each other. When both players have bid all the Points that they are willing, they both roll 1d6 for each point spent. The sums of both rolls are compared, and the highest sum wins.

Other characters may join sides in an in-family conflict. In this case, the sum of all family members on either side of the conflict are totaled, and the numbers are compared. The highest sum prevails.

In-family conflicts may also be declared during the Endgame (see below).

### The Means

A character may give up their Means in exchange for keeping any Motive Points lost in a single event. This includes both points lost during bidding, and points lost if the character is affected by a failure. It may also include points lost during an inter-family conflict. To sacrifice the character's Means, a player must declare the exchange immediately following the event in which their character lost Motive Points.

The character's Means should not be sacrificed lightly, however; a character without a means cannot accomplish the goal set by his or her Motive.

### Regaining the Means

Regaining a character's Means is a difficult task. Essentially, a character must find a new Means to reach their Motive, or steal someone else's (if the other character's Means can be applied to the first character's Motive – for example, if both characters' Means are in the form of money.) To find a new Means, the player must declare his attempt to locate a new Means before the Observing Character draws an Event Card. Once a character declares such an attempt, they may not take it back, and no other characters may assist them in overcoming the obstacle. The character must succeed in beating the obstacle alone and without aid. If successful, the OC narrates the character's discovery a new Means. If the attempt is unsuccessful, the character's Motive Points drop to zero (see below).

The other option, stealing another character's Means, may be declared at any time, as with an inter-family conflict. However, while other family members may side with the defending family member, no characters may side with the character attempting to steal the Means. The conflict is otherwise no different than usual: The side with the highest roll succeeds. As with finding a new means, if the character is successful in stealing the Means, the OC narrates how the second character gives up their Means. If the stealing character fails, however, his or her Motive Points are reduced to zero.

### Running Out of Motive Points

When a character's Motive Points are reduced to zero, they have lost all of their will to continue to the destination. They no longer care about their Motive, and they simply want to be done with the entire journey. They want nothing except to give up, turn around, and go home. But there is one problem: the family is duty-bound to continue to town in order to bury their dead relative, and as long as the other characters are resolved to achieve their Motive (e.g., have remaining Motive Points), they will continue to hide behind the farce of fulfilling their obligation to the corpse.

The result of this is that the unmotivated character becomes the subject of the next event. Instead of the Observing Character drawing an Event Card, the unmotivated character announces their tactic for getting the other characters to give up their horrific odyssey. The OC rolls 1d6 per other family member during resolution for unmotivated character-related events. The character may attempt to destroy the coffin directly, to sabotage the other character's journey subtly, or may turn violent against other family members that he or she believes are responsible for leading the journey.

If the unmotivated character succeeds, the family gives up its pilgrimage and returns home. The game ends. If the character fails, however, they simply follow the rest of the family along on the journey, and cannot participate in events. They can still observe, however.

#### **4. The Coffin**

The coffin, containing the body of the recently deceased member of the family, is an ever-present element of the game. The family must get the coffin to town to put their dead relative to rest before they can achieve their own goals. The coffin represents both an obligation and an excuse.

##### **Coffin Points**

The family starts with 10 Coffin Points. These represent the state of the coffin and the deceased inside the coffin. Coffin Points deteriorate naturally (at the rate of one point per event) as the body inside the coffin decomposes, but they may also be lost when a Failure occurs. At 8 points, the corpse begins to smell of decay. This smell grows in intensity and foulness as more Coffin Points are lost. The smell almost immediately begins to attract buzzards and other scavengers, and is repulsive to any other humans encountered.

##### **Losing the Coffin**

If the family's Coffin Points are reduced to zero or below, the state of the Coffin has deteriorated beyond all help, or has been lost in some way. The family must abandon their duty to the deceased. All family members lose 1d4 Motive Points. Any family members without a Means or with a Motive score under 5 points must abandon their journey and return home. Any remaining family members immediately enter the Endgame phase.

#### **5. The Observing Character**

The players will take turns as the Observing Character (OC), the character from whose point of view the story is told. The first OC is determined randomly, and the title is then passed to the right at the end of each event, complication, or in-family conflict.

The Observing Character essentially acts as the GM, narrating what occurs to the family during the event at hand, setting the scene for the other characters. But the Observing Character is also a character in the game (albeit a character passively observing the event at hand; OCs do not spend Motive Points with the other players). They narrate the events from their character's limited and biased perspective, rather than from an omniscient and impartial perspective. Acting OCs are encouraged to describe events and other characters in the way that their own character sees them – to make judgments and evaluations of their actions and choices and to form or reinforce opinions of the other characters as a whole. An OC may not act on these judgments (at least until the end of the event, when he or she may declare an in-family conflict). But it is crucial that the characters use their allotted turns as the Observing Character to develop their own character and to deepen

and illuminate their character's relationship with the other family members. This is especially true during in-family conflict.

The OC's other major duty is to describe the events that occur to the family – the obstacles that they must overcome. In general, when an obstacle threatens the family, it should do either one or both of the following: (1) impede the family's progress. Perhaps this is accomplished by blocking their way, as with a bridge out or a heavy rainstorm. Perhaps they are confronted by a problem that they cannot ignore, such as one of the wagon wheels breaking, or one of the mules dying. Or (2) threaten the coffin. Perhaps a swarm of flies begins to land on the coffin, attempting to lay their eggs in the nutritious decaying flesh of the deceased family member. Perhaps the barn in which the family was spending the night is set on fire, and if nothing is done both coffin and body will be burnt.

If you are to OC a complication, however, your job is not simply impede progress or threaten the coffin, but to threaten the physical or mental well being of the family members. If the coffin is threatened by buzzards and the family unsuccessfully attempts to shoo the scavengers away, perhaps the birds attack the family next. If the family fails to properly harness an escaped mule, perhaps the animal flees again, only this time it is dragging one of the family members behind it.

## **6. The Endgame**

When the family at last reaches the Town, it is time to determine what finally becomes of them.

### **The Burial**

If there are any remaining Coffin Points, the last event that the characters must face is to bury their departed family member. They must find a suitable location, and some way of digging a proper grave for the deceased. There is no OC for this event: all family members with Motive Points must participate, and may narrate their actions. Each player rolls 1d8 for the obstacle dice, and then rolls a number of d6 equal to his or her remaining Motive Points. Players with no remaining Motive Points roll only 1d8. Players make note of their d8 result, and the sum of their individual Motive Point dice.

The sums of the obstacle dice and the family's Motive Point dice are compared. If the total of the family's dice is greater than the obstacle dice, the burial is successfully completed, and the family's obligations to the deceased are fulfilled. If the family fails to bury their dead member, however, the family narrates what atrocities occur during the burial, and each member subtracts 6 points from his personal

If a character's personal roll, the total of the individual's last remaining Motive Point dice, exceeds the result of his or her d8 obstacle roll, the character's Motive goal is reached, and they fulfill their heart's desire. If a character's personal roll is less than the result of his or her obstacle roll, however, the character is somehow prevented from acquiring their Motive.

### **Epilogue**



After each character has narrated what happens to their character in town, whether they achieve their motive or not, the players may narrate what occurs after the characters' journey. What becomes of each of the characters? Do they all return home? What happens to the family as a whole?