

# They Say You Should Beg Your Plants for Mercy

*NessunDove (Chiara, Maria & Oscar)*  
*Golden Cobra 2023 | 4-7 players | 2 hours*

**A larp about dealing with the fall of our civilization by talking to the plants who conquered the world, where you play the plants. And the humans on trial for our crimes against them.**

For each turn there will be one tragicomic Defendant, a person who stands accused of mistreating the flora and who must answer for themselves now that the Plants are back in charge. The players all embody an hostile jury of Houseplants, the top experts on human behavior, who sit still and masked in an apartment-turned-courtroom.

All players also take turns embodying one of the Defendants in scenes from the Arboreal Trials instituted after the reconquest of the planet. These scenes in the game always feature the Defendant alone with the Plants, and are about the judgement of their crimes, which to us may feel heinous (such as the destruction of the Amazon Rainforest) or petty (such as lethal neglect of the geraniums on your windowsill).

## Before playing

- Print and cut Plant, Confession, Defendant cards.
- Get masks for all the players (optional but nice).
- Find a room, define where the sunlight is coming from if there isn't an obvious window. If you are in a large space, define a subset of it as the play area, representing the Houseplant Court of Justice.
- Feel free to play the game with chairs or any support that will make the game more comfortable.

## Getting started

- Everyone gets a Plant card (lay them out and let people pick), a mask, a random Confession card.
- Shuffle the Defendant Cards and place the stack face-down in the middle, on a table easy to reach.

## Overview

- This game depicts the revenge of plants after they take back the reins of our planet to keep us humans from driving it into the Abyss. The tone aims to be tragicomical and you will get there by playing the Plant jury as merciless and alien, and human Defendants as desperate and willing to do anything for survival.
- Every player will embody a Plant for the whole game and will take turns playing one of the Defendants. The deck of Defendant cards is shared between all players.
- Plants follow special rules for communication, and there will be no direct conversation between them and the Defendants, who must appeal to the better sympathies of creatures they have never understood if they want to be forgiven. Alienation is a big part of the game, so allow this to be the way you explore it.
- We will play scenes that show the human alone before the Plants to answer for the accusations found on their Defendant Card. Their crimes, just like the conflict that led to the Plants' rise to power, have already happened offscreen, and we both explore them and judge them with the Defendant's pleas and Plants' Greek Chorus.

## You will beg your plants for mercy

The core dynamic of the game is about being alone with a jury that apparently wants to hear your case, but you don't share a language and there are no facial expressions to read.

How do you interact, then?

**The Plants wither and release deadly CO2 if they are not Swayed by the Defendant.**

**The Defendant may Sway a Plant by kneeling before it and saying what it wants to hear.**

So you will be doing two things:

- Playing the Plants**, and slowly releasing deadly CO2 if the Defendant does not sway them. Use this to encourage the Defendant to try a different approach, or lie down and accept their fate.
- Playing the Defendant**, and speaking for yourself or for humanity as a whole, showing either contrition or complete unrepentant when faced with your victims-turned-executioners.

## Playing the Plants

**Part Greek Chorus, part threatening listeners, part sadistic attention sponges.**

### You are masked, and silent

- ☞ You cannot speak to the Defendant, but may speak to each other if there is no Defendant in play.
- ☞ When there is a Defendant, be their Greek Chorus. Amplify or add details. You know about anything the Defendant knows, even if it's offscreen or in a scene that wasn't played directly.

### You don't move

- ☞ You must stay in the same spot unless the Defendant moves you. At their own risk.
- ☞ You don't have to be completely still. Move like a plant.

## Withering & Death

- ☞ You wither over time, unless the Defendant grovels before you. Wither by slowly curling up, until you are on the ground, close to releasing enough CO2 to choke out a Defendant.
- ☞ You never die. A Defendant can always bring you back by Swaying you.
- ☞ When the current Defendant is reading out the Defendant card, wither if their crimes are especially egregious to you. Use this to draw the Defendant to you.
- ☞ Go slowly. Play your character (e.g. Orchid likes being entertained). Be kind and notice the others— when the majority of Plants are withered, the scene will end with the Defendants' death, so try to coordinate and leave room for everyone without letting scenes drag on.

## Being Swayed

- ☞ You may be Swayed by a Defendant kneeling before you and saying what you want to hear.
- ☞ Give them positive feedback by un-withering as they say something you like. If they kneel silently, withhold your reaction. But don't wither further.

## Blooming

- ☞ Once per game, you may Bloom, which is the only time you communicate directly with a Defendant.
- ☞ To play this move, let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it. Make this silent moment meaningful.

## Playing the Defendants

**The succession of Defendants, whose life depends on the jury of Houseplants.**

### Becoming a Defendant

- ☞ Pull the top card off the deck and read the charges out loud so the Plant players can add details in their role as Greek Chorus. Then take as much time in stillness and silence to internalize the content. No rush.
- ☞ You may continue the previous scene immediately after the previous Defendant left, or jump ahead in time. Perhaps you witnessed the death of your predecessor, perhaps the situation outside the courtroom has changed somehow. Feel free to make something up on the spot.
- ☞ Don't judge your character. The Plants will take care of that. Say what you think they'd say to save their own life in a situation they know to be desperate, without making an effort to play them as a monster or caricature. The surreal effect is something you achieve by building up the situation together, not by single performances.

## Swaying the Plants

- ☞ To keep a Plant from withering and releasing deadly CO2, you can kneel before it and say something that pleases it. But keep in mind that Plants are enigmatic and not everyone appreciates desperate grovelling.

## Returning to being a Plant

- ☞ When the majority of Plants has withered, the Defendant must keel over and die. Withering is also a way for Plant players to tell you they're happy with what came out of the scene and they want to see it end.
- ☞ No Defendant may leave the courtroom. The only alternative to death is taking the Confession card offered by a Plant. It could be the pardon that lets you leave with your life. Or not.
- ☞ When the Defendant's fate is sealed, replace your mask and take your position back as a Plant, in whatever state it was before. Look away from everyone, put the mask on, and then look back at the room. Avoid putting on or taking off your mask while looking at people.
- ☞ Another player may take your place right away as a new Defendant, or simply allow the Plants to feel stillness.

## Principles

We are going to workshop three principles that make the game work.

### 1. Silence

This game is supposed to be a surreal experience. Pauses and timing are crucial to the atmosphere. Leave time after you speak and don't try to fill every moment.

**WORKSHOP: take turns asking each other bizarre questions (“What color is your breath?”), and practice leaving 10 seconds of silence after the answer.**

### 2. Give & Take

You will share the spotlight and play the Defendants, creating the world and story together in freeform conversation. The game works best if you slow down, and share the stage without speaking over each other.

**WORKSHOP: Count from 1 to 10, one person speaking at a time. If two people speak at the same time, start again.**

### 3. The Greek Chorus

The plants play two roles. As Plants, you force the Defendant to monologue because if they don't try to sway you you will wither, killing them. As players, you are the Greek Chorus, You amplify strong emotions—sometimes literally by echoing words and phrases the Defendant says. You may also flesh out details in the world. For example, saying out loud what the Protagonist *might* be feeling when they are silent, or adding details about the accusations on a card (“You had mercy for animals. Not for us”, “Camelias. They were camelias”) or the scene outside the courtroom window (“The smell of burning flesh and metal”). These are short, eerie details that push the Defendant to speak—fragments, not monologues.

**WORKSHOP: a player goes into the middle and shares a situation in a few words (e.g. “I was mowing the lawn”). All the other players then take turns, giving & taking, adding sensory (e.g. “The agonizing screams of each blade of grass”) and scene details (“Another lawnmower, driven by the neighbor”).**

### Last questions

Check if there are any questions about the rules, because the next phase, Defining the setting, will lead directly into the game.

## A note about masks

*Plants are well-studied aliens—rearranging their bodies on a whim, forming hive minds, secreting deadly poisons. But the way they ask you to respect them, demanding without being pushy, each beautifully different, reminds you of your place in the universe.*

*This game use masks to capture this energy.*

*Masks create a strange kind of distance that allows surprisingly intense communication to happen. You feel free, speaking to someone who is masked. And those who are masked feel free to be alien. Demanding attention from you in a way that's just... Different.*

*And anyway, plants don't have facial expressions...*

## Defining the Setting

Take turns, each answering one of the following questions. After a player answers a question, they can choose a spot in the gaming space and take root there. People who have already taken root can only answer another question after everyone else has answered a question as well.

- ☞ Humans no longer rule the planet. How long ago did Plants seize the reins? (Days, weeks, months, years...)
- ☞ What was the last and most obvious ultimatum we missed before the end began?
- ☞ Do Plants really like classical music?
- ☞ Which human habit have the Plants ended up growing into? How do they feel about it?
- ☞ How many humans are left after the takeover?
- ☞ Are the Plants afraid of death?
- ☞ How have Plants already shown mercy for humans? (Preserving certain places, keeping us as pets, Plant-human symbiosis, watering us regularly, putting us to sleep...)
- ☞ What did the Plants expect from us up to the very end? How did we fail them?
- ☞ Do spelling and grammar mistakes annoy them?
- ☞ What's one good memory they have of the age before humanity?
- ☞ What's one bad memory they have of the age before humanity?
- ☞ How do we show deference to our new arboreal overlords?

## Starting Play

- ☞ You are now all Plants around the room. You may talk, or you may be silent. When it feels right, the first Defendant emerges.
- ☞ The first player to draw a Defendant card reads it out loud and places it face up next to the stack of face down Defendant Cards. Whichever card is face up is the current case until another is placed on top of it.
- ☞ After reading the card, the player must immediately take their mask off and take on the role of Defendant as they are forced or lured into the courtroom for judgement.
- ☞ Go until all Defendant Cards have been played and the fate of each Defendant determined.

## Ending the game

- ☞ Together, the Plants draw their conclusions about the cases they have overseen. Has their opinion about us stayed the same? Have they changed their mind on something? After all, this is what the future of humanity depends on.

## Debrief

- ☞ Put the Plant cards back, place the masks on the ground.
- ☞ In turn, share something you feel you had in common with one of the Defendants.
- ☞ Then, in turn, share your experiences of the game—positive or negative.
- ☞ Take the time to celebrate the best moments.

## The end

*To be immortal is commonplace; except for man, all creatures are immortal, for they are ignorant of death; what is divine, terrible, incomprehensible, is to know that one is immortal.*

—Jorge Luis Borges

## They say you should thank your sources

*This year's Golden Cobra challenge was to write the remake of a game from a previous edition. First of all, we brainstormed about the ones we'd played together and appreciated the most: two that came up were They say you should talk to your plants by Raph D'Amico and Personal testimony of the Last Kings of Heaven by J. Walton. By mashing together the two premises, we came up with the idea of a surreal plant tribunal where everyone in turn plays a defendant. Which is of course a human.*

*At that point, our challenge became trying to turn Raph's game into something completely different by changing as few words as possible. We've kept the layout and colors of the titles while changing the fonts to create that same-but-different impression.*

*Is it enough to change a little something here and there to turn a contemplative, intimate game and a scenario with a rigorous historical setting into a surreal, vaguely sci-fi apocalyptic romp?*

*We'll let posterity be the judge. And hope they're not sadistic houseplants.*

*Speaking of sadistic houseplants, we owe an acknowledgement to the brave friends in Lairo.it who playtested this scenario during our convention, Freeform 2023. Lorenzo, Umberto, Marta, Elio, Luca, Dodo, Alessio, Dervis, Adriano, Gigi: you were the cruelest jurors we could ever have wanted.*

*Another thank-you goes to Dario, who cheered our madness on from afar. His Italian translation of Raph's game helped us introduce this remake, as well as the original, to our local friends.*

## Defendant Cards (Front)

### The Devourer

Why hesitate to take the milk out of a veal's mouth and make some cheese, only to feast on innocent broccoli, ignoring the sproutlings' screams?

- ☞ Why do you think you should be the last person to deserve such a trial?
- ☞ Who did you use to argue with about your choice of a vegan lifestyle?

### The Vandal

For all the hearts this one carved and filled with initials, there is no heart beating in their chest— otherwise, why disfigure centuries-old bark?

- ☞ Why were the last days before the invasion the best of your life?
- ☞ Whose initials was it that you carved inside the heart?

### The Serial Killer

What twisted mind would ignore other humans' warnings and rip precious blossoms from the ground in the name of outdated mating rituals?

- ☞ How are you going to explain that this is all a misunderstanding and you actually love nature?
- ☞ What was your favorite place to go hiking?

### The Maniac

Who could get drunk off the roar of their mower, harassing wildflowers every Sunday to chase after the obsession of a lawn shaved like a beard?

- ☞ Why do you think the plants should be grateful?
- ☞ Was the neighbor's grass greener than yours?

### The Pervert

What depraved urge leads a human to horribly maim countless oblivious victims, forcing them to grow new limbs and performing unnatural grafts?

- ☞ What rare hybrid were you trying to create?
- ☞ Which of the judges would be the perfect addition to your greatest work?

### The Deceiver

How can one promise to the most enlightened of humans to look after the plants they live with, only to drown them in their pots again and again?

- ☞ Who always used to tell you you had a green thumb?
- ☞ Which judge looks like it needs a good dose of water?

### The Defiler

How can one carelessly trample all over the green patches human struggle to maintain in amidst their asphalt wastes?

- ☞ Did you have better things to do instead of paying attention to plants?
- ☞ Why do you think the human resistance is coming to save you?

### The Slaver

How can one nurse saplings, feed them, see them grow, only to sell them off to the highest bidder or throw them away if they have the misfortune of falling sick?

- ☞ Perché mai dovresti essere condannato per aver fatto solo il tuo lavoro?
- ☞ Quale tra i giudici ti sembra proprio di aver coltivato?

### The Monster

What can we do against the ruthless hate of one who extinguished the voices of an entire forest, committing genocide in the name of palm oil?

- ☞ Why do you think you'll be able to strike a deal with the plants?
- ☞ What made you so powerful in human society?

Defendant Cards (Back)

The Serial Killer

 DEFENDANT 

The Vandal

 DEFENDANT 

The Devourer

 DEFENDANT 

The Deceiver

 DEFENDANT 

The Pervert

 DEFENDANT 

The Maniac

 DEFENDANT 

The Monster

 DEFENDANT 

The Slaver

 DEFENDANT 

The Defiler

 DEFENDANT 

## Plant Cards (Front)

### Tillandsia

*Tillandsia tenuifolia*

**Alien.** Humans never understood how you could live without roots. Or how you managed to take back the planet.

**Swaying:** You love confusion. You hate determination.

### Orchid

*Selenipedium grande*

**Dramatic.** As the fairest of them all, you've spent a lot of time close to the humans' magic box, and you've developed a taste for their entertainment.

**Swaying:** You love outbursts. You hate logical reasoning.

### Saffron

*Crocus sativus*

**Aristocratic.** You've always been demanding, and humans spent centuries worshipping you from root to pistil.

**Swaying:** You love subservience. You hate rebellion.

### Venus

*Dionaea muscipula*

**Creepy.** You've always wanted to be big enough to lure them in and swallow them whole. In a certain way, your dream has come true.

**Swaying:** You love promises of new victims. You hate peace offerings.

### Begonia

*Begonia clementina*

**Simple.** You always got along with your pet humans and you don't understand why you can't be friends anymore now that it's clear who's in charge.

**Swaying:** You love attempts at reconciliation. You hate aggressive backtalk.

### Succulent

*Cotyledon secunda*

**Vengeful.** Those bastards said you didn't need any care. They were sure you'd be impossible to kill. Oh, the irony.

**Swaying:** You love suffering. You hate being ignored.

### Maranta

*Calathea roseopicta*

**Out of place.** Humans chose you without knowing why, and then complained when you died all of a sudden. You weren't even invited to these trials.

**Swaying:** You love pointless rambling. You hate those who think the world revolves around them.

### Cactus

*Opuntia polyantha*

**Unflinching.** They've always feared your thorns. No matter. You will not bend, not out of pity for them, not to the rest of the jury and its lust for vengeance. You have always been good at resisting thirst.

**Swaying:** You love valid motives. You hate bribery.

### Swordfern

*Nephrolepis biserrata*

**Wise.** These hairless monkey are so young, how could you expect them to get anything right? You're here to make them see where they went wrong.

**Swaying:** You love admissions of guilt. You hate displays of arrogance.

Plant Cards (Back)



**Saffron**

*Crocus sativus*



**Orchid**

*Selenipedium grande*



**Tillandsia**

*Tillandsia tenuifolia*



**Succulent**

*Cotyledon secunda*



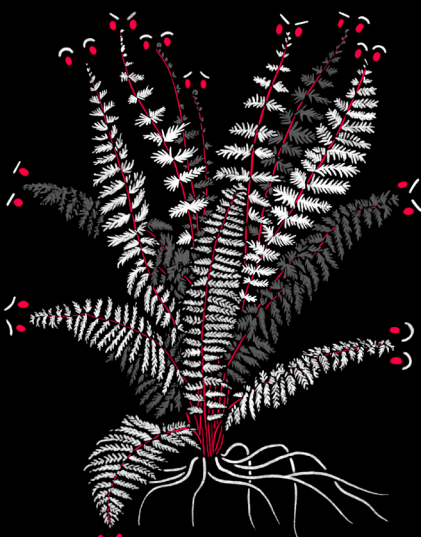
**Begonia**

*Begonia clementina*



**Venus**

*Dionaea muscipula*



**Swordfern**

*Nephrolepis biserrata*



**Cactus**

*Opuntia polyantha*



**Maranta**

*Calathea roseopicta*



## Confession Cards (Front)

### You are sentenced

As soon as you touch the Plant, you feel poison burning in your veins. You only have time to utter one last curse.

Who's the target and what do you wish them?

**Say it and play out your death.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are sentenced

You struggle to breathe. You start wheezing, grasping at your throat.

What would have been your last wish, if only the Plants had granted you one?

**Say it and play out your death.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are sentenced

Pressure starts building in your skull, driving you to insane rage.

You throw yourself at a Plant. Which one and why?

**Say it and freeze up before you can reach it. Then play out your death.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are sentenced

Your mind is filled with a vision of the future. What little is left of humanity is a slave to the Plants. It's terrifying, but there's a silver lining... What is it?

**Rave about the vision before your heart freezes in fear. Then play out your death.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are sentenced

Your life flashes before your eyes as you fall to a sudden bout of allergy. This is your last chance to find forgiveness. What are you really sorry about and why does it have nothing to do with Plants?

**Say it and play out your death.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are sentenced

The Plants' verdict flashes in your mind: Guilty. But you won't go down quietly! Who's the target of your final monologue as the last hero of humanity? And what do you urge them to do?

**Say it and play out your death.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are pardoned

Your mind is filled with a vision of the future. What little is left of humanity, naked in the middle of wild nature, in perfect harmony...

But there's a weird detail. What is it?

**Say it and walk away free.**

*Let your Confession card sprout out of your hands until the current Defendant chooses to take it.*

### You are pardoned

A memory comes back to you. Your grandfather, crouched over his vegetable garden, imparting an important lesson about Plants.

What was it he always liked to say?

**Say it and walk away free.**

*Fai sbocciare la Confessione dalle tue mani in silenzio finché un Imputato non decide di prenderla.*

### You are pardoned

For a moment, you could swear you heard a Plant speak. Which one? What did it say?

Pick it up and move it somewhere else, thanking it for what it did for you.

**Do it and walk away free.**

*Fai sbocciare la Confessione dalle tue mani in silenzio finché un Imputato non decide di prenderla.*

Confession Cards (Back)

