



ROLL OF LAW

PART ONE: THE STORY BEHIND THE GAME

Gregory F. Jacob

In this article – the first installment of a two-part story about a small *Green Bag* project that blossomed into something bigger and better – Professor Jacob describes the roots of his *Roll of Law* table-top game. In part two we will learn about the design and production of the game. And then, if you are an especially fortunate extravagant subscriber to the *Green Bag*, you might just receive a special edition of *Roll of Law* in the mail. So, read on!

– *The Editors*

THE 2025 TRUMP TARIFFS put some smaller game-making companies out of business.¹ But in an odd twist, those same tariffs unexpectedly gave birth to Roll of Law Games LLC and its lineup of rule-of-law themed games.

The *Green Bag* is known for periodically rolling out bobbleheads of Supreme Court Justices or other impactful lawyers, which its subscribers may

Gregory F. Jacob is Senior Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Law at Regent University School of Law, and a Green Bag editor.

¹ See, e.g., Mike Didymus-True, *Online board game seller Boardlandia shuts down after tariffs add “unsustainable burden” to company’s existing challenges*, boardgamewire.com (April 23, 2025) (available at <https://boardgamewire.com/index.php/2025/04/23/online-board-game-seller-boardlandia-shuts-down-after-tariffs-add-unsustainable-burden-to-companys-existing-challenges/>).

or may not receive at the whim of the *Bag*. Those bobbleheads are produced by best-in-class bobblehead company Alexander Global Promotions of Seattle, Washington, but the dolls themselves are manufactured in and imported from China. In the spring of 2025 tariffs on virtually all imports from China suddenly became both high and subject to unpredictable change, and a small non-profit like the *Bag* could not afford to absorb the increased cost and risk associated with a large bobblehead order.²

But the *Bag* is no one-trick pony show. It has in the past produced jigsaw puzzles, card games, challenge coins – even towels. And so the *Bag* began to conjure potential alternatives to bobbleheads that would be just as entertaining, exciting, and legally relevant, but less susceptible to the risks of tariffs.

The initial idea for an alternative was supplied by the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1937 decision in *White v. Aronson*³ – not exactly a case on the tip of

² No amount of advanced planning by the *Bag* could have meaningfully protected it against the tariff risks. Tariffs are not assessed when an order for goods is placed, but rather when the goods arrive at a U.S. port and cleared by customs, which is subject to such vagaries as overseas manufacturing production schedules, shipping transit time, and customs processing. Between February and November 2025, U.S. tariffs on imports from China ranged from 10% to 125%, sometimes changing dramatically overnight based on the latest executive order. See, e.g., Executive Order (EO) 14195 (February 1, 2025) (10% tariff on imports from China based on fentanyl national emergency), at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-02-07/pdf/2025-02408.pdf>; EO 14228 (March 3, 2025) (increasing fentanyl tariff to 20%), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/further-amendment-to-duties-addressing-the-synthetic-opioid-supply-chain-in-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>; EO 14257 (April 2, 2025) (adding a separate 34% “reciprocal tariff” on imports from China under the International Emergency Economic Power Act effective April 9, 2025), at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/07/2025-06063/regulating-imports-with-a-reciprocal-tariff-to-rectify-trade-practices-that-contribute-to-large-and#page-15049>; EO 14259 (April 8, 2025) (raising the “reciprocal tariff” on China to 84% effective April 9, 2025), at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/14/2025-06378/amendment-to-reciprocal-tariffs-and-updated-duties-as-applied-to-low-value-imports-from-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>; EO 14266 (April 9, 2025) (raising the “reciprocal tariff” on China to 125% effective April 10, 2025), at <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/04/15/2025-06462/modifying-reciprocal-tariff-rates-to-reflect-trading-partner-retaliation-and-alignment>; EO 14298 (May 12, 2025) (reducing the “reciprocal tariff” on China to 10% for 90 days, which was further extended by subsequent executive orders), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/05/modifying-reciprocal-tariff-rates-to-reflect-discussions-with-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>.

³ 302 U.S. 16 (1937).

most lawyers' tongues. The question decided was whether jigsaw puzzles qualified as taxable "games" within the meaning of the Revenue Act of 1932. The Court held that jigsaw puzzles are not games:

Ample evidence disclosed that, in commercial usage, jigsaw picture puzzles were never regarded as games; also that the trade recognized a definite distinction between puzzles and games. We must assume that Congress had knowledge of these things⁴

The Court reasoned that although the Revenue Act did expressly cover "games," that reference was intended to apply only to "games of contest" and not to amusing solo diversions like puzzles. For support, the opinion cited *Webster's New International Dictionary* (the second edition) which defined a "puzzle" as "something which perplexes or embarrasses; a difficult problem or question; hence a toy, contrivance, question or problem designed for testing ingenuity, as a cross word puzzle."⁵

The Court's decision in *White* was unanimous. Wouldn't it be fun to prove a unanimous Supreme Court wrong by creating a jigsaw puzzle that undeniably *was* a game? Moreover, Justices Harlan Fiske Stone and Benjamin Cardozo had concurred only in the result in *White* without explanation. Perhaps they agreed the particular puzzles before the Court were not games, but could imagine other puzzles that might be?⁶ It seemed a possibility worth pursuing. And so the great puzzle/game project of 2025 was launched.

⁴ *Id.* at 20.

⁵ *Id.* at 19 (quoting the court of appeals' opinion).

⁶ One fun sidenote on *White*: A prior Fourth Circuit decision in *Baltimore Talking Board Co. v. Miles*, 280 F. 658 (4th Cir. 1922), held that a ouija board was a taxable "game" within the meaning of an earlier federal revenue statute. The Fourth Circuit seemed embarrassed to admit it even knew what a ouija board was, stating that it "knows in a general way that the Ouija board is seriously used by some persons in the belief that it affords mysterious spirit communication" but "*cannot pretend to be ignorant* that it is very largely sold with the expectation that it is to be used merely as a means of social amusement or play." *Id.* at 660-661 (emphasis added). *White* did not overrule the Fourth Circuit's holding that a ouija board is a game, but instead distinguished it rather weakly. *White*, 302 U.S. at 21 ("The ouija board is wholly different from the puzzle here under consideration; nothing indicates that it was commonly regarded by the trade as a puzzle, and, in an application for a patent, it had once been described as a game."). Game or no, I would not hold your breath waiting for a *Green Bag* ouija board that purports to predict the outcome of Supreme Court decisions.

But what kind of game should this be? Editor-in-Chief Ross Davies and I brainstormed possibilities over multiple breakfasts.

In our original conception, the *Bag* would create a double-sided jigsaw puzzle, one side of which would be a great work of art depicting people playing a game, while the other side would be the actual gameboard. That set us on a fairly defined path: it turns out most masterwork paintings of games take as their subject either cards or chess, and classic card games don't typically use a board, so that landed us with chess. Which is not such a bad place to start, since chess is generally understood to be the most played game in the world.

At this point I must, I fear, make a confession: I don't enjoy playing chess. I do consider this to be a great personal failing. I am a huge gamer with more than 150 games in my "game closet" at home, and it is quite possible that I am the highest ranking federal official ever to attend the annual Gen Con gaming convention in Indianapolis while serving in office (I attended in August 2008 while serving as Solicitor of Labor, the third-ranking official in the U.S. Department of Labor). And despite my dislike of chess, I even own three chess boards. But whereas the strategy for most board games comes naturally to me, I don't have the intuitive feel for chess that great players seem to, and I don't enjoy the enterprise of thinking eight moves ahead as chess so often seems to require.

The upshot was that while we had decided our project would incorporate a chess board, I definitely did not want the game to play anything like chess. I thought our subscribers would enjoy a game that was faster, fresher, infinitely replayable, and involved meaningful strategic decision-making but without being mentally overtaxing or bogging down trying to predict every possible future move. The game also needed a meaningful theme, one that was both fun and decidedly *Baggish*.

Right around that time, the Administration began to label aliens from Venezuela whom it considered to be members of the criminal gang *Tren de Aragua* "alien enemies" under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, and then without any intervening process to whisk them away to El Salvador's maximum security Terrorist Confinement Center (CECOT).⁷ Reporting on

⁷ See, e.g., *US deports more alleged gang members to El Salvador mega-prison*, Reuters (April 14, 2025) (pictorial), at https://www.reuters.com/pictures/us-deports-more-alleged-gang-members-el-salvador-mega-prison-2025-04-14/?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=twitter.

the related court battles sparked an idea. One great way to theme a game is to add cards, which – through rule-modifying effects, artwork, and quotes – can add both narrative interest and strategic twists. What if our game included a card that allowed you to seize one of your opponent’s game pieces and indefinitely stash it in a foreign prison until it was dispelled? “Fun” wasn’t the first word that came to mind to describe that card. But in a moment in time when it seemed that every legal boundary was being tested and contested, an entire deck of such cards might add depth to the game and an implicit reflection on how the rule of law was operating in 2025. Love the cards or hate them, they were our reality.

And so the card that eventually became “CECOT, El Salvador” was born. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was in the headlines almost daily, so it didn’t take long to fill out a deck of similar ICE cards, ranging from “Alien Enemies Act” and “Revocation of TPS”⁸ (which empower ICE’s game pieces), to the “866-DHS-2-ICE” tip line (which gives ICE extra moves), to “Reprogrammed Funding” (which allows ICE administratively to channel extra resources into its enforcement efforts), to “Targeted Raid” (which allows ICE to search through its deck for any card of its choice).⁹

⁸ TPS stands for Temporary Protected Status, 8 U.S.C. § 1254a.

⁹ For real-world analogs to these ICE cards, *see, e.g., A.A.R.P. v. Trump*, 605 U.S. 91, 92 (2025) (“The President has invoked the Alien Enemies Act (AEA), Rev. Stat. § 4067, 50 U.S.C. § 21, to remove Venezuelan nationals who are members of Tren de Aragua (TdA), a designated foreign terrorist organization.”); *Mullin v. Doe*, 609 U.S. ___, 2026 WL 1825840 at *5 (June 25, 2026) (“The Secretary of Homeland Security has terminated every TPS designation that has come up for renewal.”); <https://x.com/DHSGov/status/2075323800602726681>) (DHS video publicizing the ICE tip line, with accompanying text: “Call the ICE Tip Line at 866-347-2423 (866-DHS-2-ICE) to report illegal aliens in your area.”); <https://www.ice.gov/tipline> (“Today, the Tip Line averages more than 15,000 call per month.”) (last visited July 16, 2026); Justin Doubleday, *House appropriators slam DHS for ‘egregious’ ICE overspending*, Federal News Network (July 1, 2025) (in the context of reporting on 2025 DHS plans “to transfer \$312.5 million from Customs and Border Protection and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, respectively, to fund ICE operations,” stating that “[b]etween fiscal 2014 and 2023, DHS notified Congress of plans to move a total of \$1.8 billion within existing DHS appropriations to fund ICE operations.”); *Galvez-Mondragon v. Warden, California City Correctional Center*, 2026 WL 1992900 (E.D. Cal. July 9, 2026) (“[D]uring a targeted raid by ICE officers in Los Angeles, California, petitioner was arrested and placed into immigration detention where he remains to this day.”).

But if one player was going to be ICE and would get to deploy a deck stacked with rule-bending cards, who would ICE compete against? Opposed NGOs like the ACLU? Or perhaps the courts themselves, which on some days ICE seemed not merely to be litigating before, but virtually to be at war with? Neither felt like quite the right framing. Courts in particular are supposed to call balls and strikes in resolving legal disputes and redressing injuries, not to be dedicated players in setting public policy.

The answer was supplied by the other “agency” that was filling the newsfeeds in 2025: the transformed U.S. Digital Service within the Executive Office of the President, now rebranded by the Trump Administration as the Department of Government Efficiency or “DOGE.”¹⁰ If ICE represented a mentality of total enforcement, DOGE was the polar opposite, slashing and deregulating its way through the federal government with the rather blunt knife of computer algorithms.

Press reporting on both DOGE and ICE was unrelentingly negative, and often deservedly so, but both agencies also had a missional point. The plain text of the Immigration and Nationality Act¹¹ mandates considerably tougher enforcement of our immigration laws than Presidents of either party have practiced for decades. And scaling back federal bloat and overregulation at a time when the national debt exceeds \$39 trillion is a matter of common sense.

But although reasonable minds could certainly believe the ends sought by the agencies (broadly described) were good, deep reflection was urgently required about whether the specific means being deployed were legal, consistent with the ordered liberty the Framers designed the U.S. Constitution to promote, and implemented with the good faith that the Constitution’s mandatory oaths in Article II § 3 (President) and Article VI (all other federal and state officers) require.

Supporters of the Administration’s agenda should ask themselves: would you really be comfortable placing a card like “CECOT, El Salvador” in the hands of the opposition the next time you lose an election? Because the deck of powers and precedents you are creating won’t always be your own.

¹⁰ EO 14158 (Jan. 20, 2025) (“Establishing and Implementing the President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’”), at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-202500125/pdf/DCPD-202500125.pdf>.

¹¹ Pub. L. No. 82-414, 66 Stat. 163 (1952) (as amended).

Similarly, if you loved DOGE's hollowing out of USAID and the U.S. Department of Education, will you feel the same way when a President with different policy priorities decides to RIF the Border Patrol and the military into oblivion? Because the paths of power you are paving are unavoidably two-way streets.

Or for opponents of the Administration's agenda, have you reflected honestly on the things your own team has done with the Presidency – DACA, the eviction moratorium, and unilateral student loan forgiveness, to name a few – that have eroded societal expectations regarding faithful execution of the law and helped to make this moment possible? Similarly, if you love how administrative agencies typically wield their power when your camp holds Article II, have you read with care the open-ended statutory language through which trucks and tanks can be driven (see, for example, the Insurrection Act¹²) that Congress has sloppily allowed to govern our public affairs and to define the bounds of the liberty we claim to cherish?

Decks of ICE and DOGE cards that accurately but starkly depicted those agencies' operations in 2025 would, amidst the friendly competition and fun of a game, implicitly raise those fundamental questions. So DOGE would get a deck as well. Its flagship card would be "Fork in the Road," a reference to the emails sent to virtually all federal employees in January 2025 urging them to retire and receive several months of pay without work, or else face the prospect of being fired amidst the imminent slashing of agency rosters. When "Fork in the Road" is in play the DOGE player flips a coin each turn, and if the opposing player incorrectly calls "heads" or "tails" one of their pawns chooses to retire and is removed from the board. Other DOGE cards soon followed: "Chainsaw the Government" slashes the opponent's resources, "Cancel Travel Authorization" limits the movement of opposing pieces, "Data Surveillance" helps DOGE home in on its targets, and "You're Fired!" does more or less what you would expect.¹³

¹² 10 U.S.C. §§ 251-55.

¹³ For real-world analogs to these DOGE cards, see, e.g., Deferred Resignation Email to Federal Employees (Jan. 28, 2025), at <https://www.opm.gov/about-us/fork/original-email-to-employees/>; Kayla Jimenez, *Elon Musk wields chainsaw on stage, says he and Trump are battling 'the matrix'*, USA Today (Feb. 21, 2025) ("The chainsaw he wielded alluded to slashing government spending"), at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/02/20/elon-musk-waives-chainsaw-before-giving-doge-update-at-cpac/79352970007/>; EO 14222 (February 26, 2025) (freezing federal employee credit card usage for 30 days

As the concept of competing ICE and DOGE decks clicked into place, a name for the game also flowed naturally from it: *Roll of Law*. A play on the phrase “rule of law,” with a distinct gaming twist. Of course the use of the word “roll” strongly suggested that dice would be involved, but dice were not yet part of the game mechanics. They would be now.

As noted previously, one key priority was ensuring that the game would not bog down with overthinking the way “high strategy” games like chess sometimes do. Dice supply randomization that breaks up the ability to meaningfully predict the future. I quickly realized that my goal could largely be accomplished by linking the ability to move game pieces to the faces of the dice. A player would roll two dice every turn, and then choose between the two results in selecting which piece to move. Sometimes the optimal move would be available, sometimes it wouldn’t, and every choice would involve a tradeoff. That’s life in Washington – even if the politicians refuse to admit it.

Adding dice helped, but early play testing revealed that serious gamers sometimes still took too long trying to optimize their move. This could not be allowed! And so the “Strategic Limitation” rule was created, which holds that because all evidence indicates that DOGE and ICE prioritize action over thought, no turn may take overlong. If your opponent seems to stall, you may initiate a measured count of “One Roll of Law, two Roll of Law, three Roll of Law ...” – and if you reach “ten Roll of Law” before they move, they lose their turn. Reasonable discretion in deploying the harrowing Strategic Limitation count helps make for a friendlier game, but the

and restricting agency travel), at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/implementing-the-presidents-department-of-government-efficiency-cost-efficiency-initiative/>; Ken Thomas, *How Federal Workers Are Dealing With the \$1 Limit on Their Corporate Cards*, *The Wall Street Journal* (March 4, 2025) (“IRS officials received confirmation Monday that no new travel authorizations would be approved that require the use of a government credit card”), at <https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/trump-doge-federal-credit-card-freeze-994bcf0e>; Alexandra Ulmer, Marisa Taylor, Jeffrey Dastin and Alexandra Alper, *Musk’s DOGE using AI to snoop on U.S. federal workers, sources say*, *Reuters* (April 8, 2025) (reporting on DOGE use of artificial intelligence to surveil communications of federal employees for hostility to Trump and Musk), at <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/musks-doge-using-ai-snoop-us-federal-workers-sources-say-2025-04-08/>; Madeline Halpert, *‘You’re fired’: The people Trump has sacked since taking office*, *BBC News* (Feb. 8, 2025), at <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g3yk3m3z4o>.

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lurking threat supplies appropriate atmosphere and pace to an imagined clash between DOGE and ICE, and once you have learned the cards, most games take only 15-20 minutes to play.

The decision to deploy a chess board started us down the path toward *Roll of Law*, but we still had not determined how the board and pieces would work. In chess, the two players square off trying to topple the opposing king, but DOGE and ICE are not truly opposed enemies seeking to defeat one another. So the game was reconceived as a race to the finish in which each agency seeks the honor of being the first to complete its mission. For DOGE, that meant firing all of the federal employees. For ICE, that meant deporting all of the undocumented aliens. Many prospective players, I knew, would deplore either or both of those goals. But *Roll of Law* aimed to present the unvarnished reality of the agencies' operations in 2025, and that was a pretty apt (if perhaps slightly overstated) description of their objectives.

This reframing went a long way toward ensuring that the game would not play like chess. The objective would not be to topple the opposing king, but rather to eliminate the opposing, powerless pawns. To accommodate this shift, the board was rearranged. All of both players' pawns were placed on one side of the board in an alternating zigzag pattern, and all of their "attack" pieces were placed on the other. To unclog the board, the kings were removed, and each player was reduced to using a single rook, knight, bishop, and queen, with each player's attack pieces occupying one half of one side of the board. The pieces would move on the board with their normal chess movements, making the game feel familiar and easy to learn.

Roll of Law thus became a "pawn-taking game": if you are the first to eliminate your opponent's eight pawns, you win the game.

The core game mechanics were filled out by several further choices. Part of what slows down chess is the need to protect your best pieces and their ability to control the board with their expansive movement patterns. But DOGE and ICE always seemed to be in attack mode, without much apparent concern for resulting breakage. To encourage similarly aggressive game play, it was decided the attack pieces would never truly be lost, but rather if captured would immediately return to the board in their starting position. You could not stop them, you could only set them back.

Empowering the attack pieces to unrelentingly return to the board like Terminator T-1000 units intent on completing their mission injected a lot

energy into the game. The prospect of an immortal queen, however, posed serious game balance issues. Every other chess piece uses a specialized movement pattern, but the queen can replicate the moves of any piece other than the knight, making her vastly superior to the rest. To resolve this imbalance the queen was designated the agencies' "Counsel," in which role she wields her legal acumen to block the movement of opposing pieces, but cannot herself effect captures in the field. Transforming the queen also had the salutary effect of adding to the game theming. Once the queens were bestowed official titles the other pieces were quick to demand them as well (this is Washington, DC after all): ICE would execute its mission through the Secretary (rook), Under Secretary (knight), and masked agent (bishop), while DOGE would be led by the Director (rook), Deputy Director (knight), and tech bro (bishop).

The board mechanics were now set, but a very necessary element was still missing. DOGE and ICE each had their decks of cards with rule-bending powers, but in a game entitled *Roll of Law*, the law surely needed an opportunity to fight back. An old *Green Bag* mainstay perfectly fit the bill: Thought Bubble Gum. The *Bag* had long republished erudite statements of the law in the form of "Thought Bubble Gum," which it reprinted on refrigerator magnets, sticky notes, towels, and even actual packs of gum. Subtitled "a confection for your mind, not your mouth," Thought Bubble Gum cards could add precisely the kind of provocation of thought that the game was designed to foment. And their in-game effect would be straightforward: they would nullify the effect of DOGE and ICE cards. Is your rook locked up by the "CECOT, El Salvador" card? No problem! Deploy a Thought Bubble Gum card and "CECOT" goes to the discard pile, allowing your rook to return to the board.

Soon a third deck emerged consisting of pink Thought Bubble Gum cards, with quotes from Benjamin Franklin ("A republic, if you can keep it."), John Adams ("To the end it may be a government of laws and not of men."), Hugo Black in the *Steel Seizure Case* ("In the framework of our constitution, the President's power to see that the laws are faithfully executed refutes the idea that he is to be a lawmaker."), and others. Two blank Thought Bubble Gum cards were also included so that each gamer could add their own preferred republic-preserving thoughts to the game. The Thought Bubble Gum deck would be equally available to both players to

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draw from, and would provide needed defense against their opponent's maneuvers.

With high-minded Thought Bubble Gum now added to the game, I believed that everything was set. But play testing – critical to the fine-tuning of any game – proved me wrong.

To initiate play testing I wrote out by hand the text of each DOGE, ICE, and Thought Bubble Gum card onto an index card (for a total of 36 cards at that point), converted one of my neglected chess boards into the *Roll of Law* layout, and poached some dice from *Axis & Allies*.¹⁴ I then jotted down a key indicating which actions the various die rolls allowed:

- 1 = draw a DOGE or ICE card
- 2 = move your rook
- 3 = move your knight
- 4 = move your bishop
- 5 = move your queen
- 6 = draw a Thought Bubble Gum card

The ensuing dozens of matches that I played with my colleagues, friends, and kids (even my seven-year-old plays, and she has beaten her dad more than once) revealed some needed improvements.¹⁵

First, the fast and action-packed game pace worked largely as I had hoped, but sometimes the board would jam up, particularly if the attack pieces got boxed in by the Counsels or became wedged between their own team's pieces. Several potential fixes were tried until the game was revolutionized by the introduction of the "swap action." Henceforth, a roll of "one" would allow a player to move any of his pieces exactly one space in any direction (including diagonally), and if another piece happened to be occupying that space, the pieces switched positions. The "swap action" did not permit capturing, but even pawns (which otherwise had no die roll of their own) could do it, and it added fluidity and strategic depth to the game while keeping the game continuously moving. To make room for the "swap action" on a die roll of "one," the "six" was modified to now permit

¹⁴ Larry Harris, *Axis & Allies* (Milton Bradley, 1984 "Classic" edition).

¹⁵ Many thanks to Derek Lee, Matt Sheehan, Matt Mills, Adam Weisbarth, Tim Haynes, Forrest Wallace, Jason Yan, Sean Tikkun, Sage Hallward, and Scott, Catherine, Perrin, and Avaleigh Jacob for many hours of cheerful play testing and feedback.

players to draw a card of either type: an action card from their agency deck for offense, or a Thought Bubble Gum card to bolster defense.

Second, players wanted more cards! In the original game conception, the powerful DOGE and ICE action cards were drawn only when the appropriate die roll materialized, which I figured would happen roughly one out of every three turns with players rolling two dice. But sometimes the dice were stubborn, and even when they weren't players needed to spend some of their card-drawing rolls on defensive Thought Bubble Gum, so a player might conceivably draw only three or four action cards in an entire game. Yet the cards supplied most of the theming and game narrative, and I found many play testers choosing, just for the fun of it, to draw a card even at the expense of capturing a pawn. Often they said they just wanted to see what the next card might do, even if the tradeoff hurt their chances of actually winning – a mentality that oddly felt a bit like role playing DOGE's and ICE's greatest headline hits. To accommodate popular demand it was decided that players would start the game with two agency action cards in hand (supplying immediate themed aggression), together with a single Thought Bubble Gum card (supplying early defense). An optional rule was also added permitting a player who rolled doubles to draw an action card from their DOGE or ICE deck instead of moving a piece. The resulting significant injection of extra action cards greatly increased the fun, and avoided the disappointment of players feeling like they never really got to play their agency's hand.

Many action cards were also added, subtracted, or adjusted during play testing. Each deck got a "Lawyered Up!" card that empowers the otherwise hapless pawns to fight back by capturing opposing attack pieces, a "Not a Denny's" card that nullifies the effect of Thought Bubble Gum (as the card proclaims: Sorry, court's closed!), and a "Universal Injunction" card that restores a captured pawn to the board. A number of tweaks were also required to ensure the competing decks were balanced and humming, and the operation of each card was clear.

At last, it was finished. It was time to report in and go to press.

Or so I thought.

One game was about to become two. A new game design company, Roll of Law Games LLC, was about to be launched. And a long road lay before me learning how to bring real, boxed games to market.



When I met with Ross over a Northside Social breakfast to describe the game that had emerged from our earlier discussions about *White v. Aronson*, jigsaw puzzles, and chess boards, I had in hand all of the materials I needed to demo the game: handwritten index cards, an ornate chess board thrilled to finally be seeing some use, two dice, and my handwritten key for converting die rolls into game piece movement. After we cleared away the cinnamon bun plates and refilled our coffees, I had Ross shuffle the card decks while I set up the bespoke board layout. But while I described the core themes and mechanics of *Roll of Law* to my ever-enthusiastic *Green Bag* colleague, I also identified two potential problems that could mean that all of the game design work to date was nothing more than a dead end for the *Bag*.

First, I didn't think it was going to work to use a jigsaw puzzle as the board. It would be far too much trouble to put the puzzle together every time you wanted to play the game. Moreover, the cut-and-thrust of normal gameplay with die rolls and piece movement could result in the board inadvertently getting pulled apart, a frustrating mid-game disruption.

Second, as game design had progressed over the course of 2025, DOGE and ICE had become ever hotter political lightning rods, while the *Bag* is assiduously apolitical. The game was intended to be apolitical as well, a microcosmic portrait of the legal realities of our times, wrapped in a rule-of-law theme that the game's title communicated was the project's central point. But in our modern trigger-happy political environment, might some players conclude that including DOGE and ICE decks at all was tantamount to an inappropriate celebration, while others received the card content as an unwarranted criticism of what they regarded as necessary measures? The fact that different players could draw such diametrically opposite conclusions from the same sets of cards might indicate the game had hit its sweet spot and was likely to achieve its intended effect of encouraging thoughtful reflection on why we value the rule of law and what its essential elements are. Nor was there any subscriber base in the world so likely as the *Bag*'s to receive and enjoy *Roll of Law* as an exercise in reflective engagement. Still, the political environment we live in is corrosive and real, and I didn't want to do anything that might harm the *Bag*.

Ross quickly put both concerns to rest. As to the abandonment of the jigsaw puzzle, many a *Green Bag* project had followed a similar course

through the years, when good and fun ideas yielded unanticipated fruit and the original thought was returned to the shelf to be used another day. And as to the deep-seated feelings surrounding DOGE and ICE, the *Bag* would trust players to receive the game in the spirit in which it was intended, and if they did not, what higher use can a law journal serve than to thoughtfully jump into places of great tension in the law and offer new opportunities for reflection?

I also had an idea that would help remove *Roll of Law* from the modern political context. Once the rules and mechanics for the game were fine tuned, I realized that the game was actually infinitely themeable: with new cards and some adjustments to the board, the game could be rethemed for a Sherlock Holmes adventure, a Jane Austen novel, or just about anything else. (Sherlock and Austen versions are in fact in the works!) DOGE vs. ICE was the original inspiration and would continue its course, but I suggested to Ross that I could develop a second rule-of-law themed game to pair with it.

My first thought was to do a “Capture the Court” game, in which each player’s eight pawns represented the eight Associate Justices, and the kings would then be added back to the board as the Chief Justice. The card decks could, perhaps, be something like Originalism vs. The Living Constitution. And the game would be won by capturing the eight pawns and then the Chief Justice, thus successfully capturing the Court. I also experimented with versions in which the game would instead be won with just five captures, since it takes only five Justices to determine the outcome of a case.

I ultimately discarded the “Capture the Court” idea because the intended message of *Roll of Law* is that law should be rooted in enduring principle and resistant to individual whim, whereas this new concept seemed to suggest we should think about courts as subject to capture to achieve desired policy ends. The legal realists might agree, but it was uncomfortably in tension with *Roll of Law*’s core point. Even as I abandoned focusing a game specifically on the Supreme Court, however, the thought of adding the kings back to the board stuck with me. And as I began to think regal thoughts, my mind turned naturally to Shakespeare.

“A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!” Richard III’s famous last line, delivered just before his death at the close of the Battle of Bosworth, seemed almost written for the game. A Richard III card bearing that quote

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might allow a player to switch the position of his knight and king – a particularly fun trick if it was an effect that could be triggered every turn. Soon I found myself running through all of my favorite quotes from Shakespeare’s histories, from Henry V’s heroic “Once more unto the breach” to Sir John Falstaff’s quip to the Lord Chief Justice that “Virtue is of so little regard in these costermongers’ times.” The card possibilities were rich and endless. Moreover, theming a game after Shakespeare’s plays allowed for the introduction of a new kind of card: character cards, which added narrative flavor to the game and could in effect convert a specific game piece on the board into a particular character.

As I considered how best to appoint the characters and quotes I had collected around my desired “rule of law” theme, it dawned on me that Shakespeare had already supplied the answer. Set at the beginning of the War of the Roses, and encompassing as well the 1450 popular rebellion led by the commoner Jack Cade, *Henry VI, Part II* is packed with both court intrigue and incisive commentary on the roles of law, justice, virtue, and villainy in the governance of human affairs. Could there be more perfect lines for Thought Bubble Gum than King Henry VI’s “let’s in, and learn to govern better,” or his uncle the Duke of Gloucester’s “Banish the canker of ambitious thoughts”? Soon I had combed the play and converted it into a deck of 37 action cards and eight Thought Bubble Gum cards, each bearing a quote from the play. As the cards were played and the quotes read out (not a required element of the game, but the most fun way to play it, in my view), the play verily seemed to come to life on the tabletop board.

Although limiting the game to *Henry VI, Part II* meant that I had to leave behind a great number of my favorite characters and quotes (fodder for future projects!), Richard III happily had a role in the play fighting alongside his father, Richard Plantaganet, the scheming Duke of York. Consequently, I was able to keep a small vestigial Easter Egg in the game hinting at the broader original conception: the “Richard Plantaganet” card alone bears two quotes. First, from *Henry VI, Part II*, a quote from the elder Richard: “Sword, hold thy temper; heart, be wrathful still; Priests pray for enemies, but princes kill.” Second, a quote from York’s scion, taken from *Richard III*: “A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!” And through that card the younger Richard can at last procure that horse for which he was, in the end, willing to trade away a kingdom.

Henry VI, Part II is only rarely performed today, in part because of the massive cast of characters and numerous scene changes, in part because it is the middle play of a trilogy. But it contains what is unquestionably the best-known line of the entire *Henry VI* trilogy: “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.” It is also probably the most misunderstood. Uttered by Dick the Butcher, an early and enthusiastic supporter of Jack Cade’s rebellion to overthrow the nobility in favor of popular governance, Shakespeare’s point is not that lawyers are terrible and therefore we should go about killing them. The intended message is instead that if you want to overthrow the government, it is the lawyers who are the crucial cog holding the legal edifice together, so you should begin your coup by getting rid of them. Perhaps you kill them. Perhaps you instead give them rings of power, corrupting them over time into unlawyerlike shades that bear no further fidelity to the law. But either way, Shakespeare had bequeathed *Roll of Law* the perfect name for its second game: *Let’s Kill All the Lawyers*.

To be continued ...

