

Checkpoint: Berlin

Players: 5 – 10

Game Style: Party, Bluffing

Difficulty: Low

The Czar's diamonds have been stolen. And there's a ring of thieves smuggling them out of Berlin to the West. And the checkpoint guard knows about it, and will do everything he can to confiscate luggage from travelers that look even remotely suspicious in an attempt to collect the diamonds. Of course, since the guards are just as corrupt as the thieves, it's not like the guards are planning on returning the diamonds to their rightful owners...

What you need:

A deck of playing cards.

Some unused opaque DVD cases (optional)

How to win:

The players are divided up into two teams, the Gang and the Guards. The Gang is trying to pass the diamonds through the checkpoint without the Guards confiscating them. At the end of the game, whichever team winds up with the most diamonds win. And, oh yeah, the Gang might have an undercover Guard in their midst.

What to do:

Separate the deck into four small decks by suit. The Clubs will be used to determine the roles in the game. The Diamonds will be used to signify the stolen diamonds. The Hearts and Spades will be used as regular items with which you can try to hide the diamonds with. In reality, no one cares about the Hearts and Spades. And the ranks of the Diamonds don't matter.

If you have less than 9 players, remove the face cards from the Spades deck.

Additionally, If you have less than 6 players, remove the Face cards from the Hearts deck.

Determine roles:

The next step involves determining who will be the thieves, who will become the Checkpoint Guards, and who may, possibly, become an undercover guard as a part of the gang of thieves.

For this step, you want to use the cards that belong to the suit of clubs.

With 5 players, you will need the King, Jack, and the 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

With 6 players, you will need the King, Queen, Jack, and the 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

With 7 players, you will need the King, Jack, and the 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

With 8 players, you will need the King, Queen, Jack, and the 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

With 9 players, you will need the Ace, King, Queen, Jack, and the 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

With 10 players, you will need the King, Queen, Jack, and the 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Shuffle these cards face down, one per player. There will be extra cards leftover. Whoever holds the Ace, King and Queen reveals those cards. These become the Checkpoint Guards. The rest of the players constitute The Gang and keep their cards secret.

If the deal occurs where the King is not dealt to a player or, in the case of a game with the Queen, if the Queen is not dealt to a player, (and also in the case of the Ace not being dealt out) then all cards are collected, shuffled, and dealt out again.

Once it is verified that the correct amount of Guards have been dealt (based on the number of players), the Gang is instructed to close their eyes. Once the

Guards see that everyone's eyes are closed, the Guards must ask, "Will Agent Jack reveal himself?" At this point, the player who has the Jack should open his/her eyes. Agent Jack is actually working with the Guards as an undercover agent. Once Jack and the Guard silently nod in agreement that they are aware of each other, Jack closes his eyes. The Guards instruct the Gang to open their eyes, and the game can begin.

It should be noted that there is a chance that the Jack was not dealt out to the players. If no players reveal themselves as Agent Jack, the Guards can verify this by looking at the extra, unused cards, and see if one of those is the Jack. In fact, the Guards should do this regardless, in order to "throw off the trail" from the rest of the Gang.

The rest of the setup:

Shuffle and deal out the spades deck to the Gang members.

Give each member of The Gang a DVD case.

Shuffle the diamonds and hearts together and place them face down in the middle of the table.

And now, the intrigue at Checkpoint: Berlin begins.

The game:

The game is played is a series of rounds. Each round has a series of phases that must be performed. These are:

- Reveal loot
- Divide the loot
- At the checkpoint
- Remove the traitor (can be performed at any time except when at the checkpoint)

Reveal loot:

“Attention all Checkpoints, our sources have revealed that some of the missing Czar Diamonds are rumored to be on the move. Please act accordingly.”

Any member of the Gang draws off 5 cards from the central Hearts/Diamond deck and places the cards on the table face-up for everyone to see. Again, the only cards that really matter for scoring are the Diamonds.

If no Diamonds are drawn, continue drawing until a Diamond is revealed.

Divide the loot:

The current technology we have is suitable for tiny “whisper ears,” our top men are currently working on undetectable video equipment. Alas, it appears to be a few years away in the least.

The Checkpoint Guards close their eyes. While they cannot see what transpires during this phase, they

can hear. So it is important for the Gang to proceed with caution.

During this phase, the Gang takes the revealed loot cards and can divide the cards up in any way they wish amongst themselves.

Each member of the Gang can place as many Hearts, Diamonds, and Spades inside his DVD case (his luggage) as he wishes. He must place at least one card, if possible. This can be discussed, as quietly as possible, or bluffed as much as they can. Again, the Guards can hear as much as they can, or as much as the Gang allows them to. Card should be placed in the DVD cases so that they are all face-down when the case is opened.

Once each member of the Gang snaps his DVD case shut, the Gang is off to the Checkpoint. Each member holds exactly one DVD case; and they cannot swap their cases once they announce that they are off to the Checkpoint.

The Guards open their eyes as the “crowd of travelers” arrive at the checkpoint.

At the checkpoint:

“The big problem with trying to obtain the diamonds for ourselves is, simply enough, that we cannot detain the thieves themselves. The last thing we want is a bunch of disgruntled thieves in front of a judge complaining that the very things that they rightfully stole were stolen by the guys who arrested them.”

During this phase, the Guards must select exactly half of the DVD cases to confiscate; the other half is let through the Checkpoint. The Guards collect the cases that they have decided to confiscate, open them up, and without looking at the cards, place the cards facedown in a stack next to them. This is their Confiscated Goods stack.

The non-confiscated DVD cases that are still held by the Gang are opened by the Gang members that hold them and the cards are collected and placed in facedown Successful Passed Stack off to the side of the Gang.

All empty cases are returned to the Gang members, and a new Round begins.

Before deciding, the Guards can ask any question the wish of the Gang members, in the hopes of picking up on subtle clues as to who might be carrying what. They may also ask to inspect any DVD case by taking it and shaking it (but being careful not to accidentally open it). Gang member must answer questions, but they do not have to

answer truthfully. Silent Gang members are not allowed across the border.

Agent Jack can try to quietly (or not so quietly) alert the Guards with information.

Remove the traitor:

At any point in the game, except at the checkpoint, the Gang can vote to “kill off” a Gang member from the game (hopefully, for them, it's Agent Jack). This done simply by a Gang member calling for a vote on one person, and if there's a majority in the Gang, that player is out of the game. However, the Guards still confiscate the same amount of DVD cases as if the removed players were still in the game.

The Gang can remove as many players from the Gang as they wish.

The killed off player does not reveal his role.

The game ends:

The game ends at the end of the Round when there is no more loot in the Heart/Diamond stack.

The Confiscated Goods stack and the Successful Passed Stack are revealed, Diamonds are scored in each stack. The Ace of Diamonds is worth 4 points, the King, Queen, and Jack of Diamonds are worth 3 points each. All other diamonds are worth 2 points each.

Whichever team has the most points wins the game. Remember, the Jack is a member of the Guards, even if he may have died in the process.

Strategic Implications:

The role of Agent Jack is an important role, in more ways than one. Just the threat of him being in the Gang keeps the Gang honest.

For example, there is nothing keeping the Gang from simply storing up all of the Diamonds and then, on the last round, simply put them all in the same DVD case, and then giving the Guards a 50/50 chance of winning or losing based on the simple probability of selecting the one case.

However, at this point, when the Gang arrives at the checkpoint, Agent Jack can simply announce at loud, "Hey, it's all in THAT case over there." The Guards win the game at this point, and Agent Jack deals with none of the messy implications.

In fact, once it has been known to the Gang that they have successfully passed enough diamonds to win, there isn't really any reason to continue, and the game can stop at that point.

Another interesting ploy the Guards can attempt to play up is using a false Agent Jack (whether or not Agent Jack is actually in play!). If they can somehow convince the Gang that a certain Gang member is Agent Jack (when he is, in fact, loyal to the Gang), so much the better. Watching the Gang crack due to suspicions amongst themselves is fun; having the Gang kill off a member of their own is priceless.

The killing of a Gang member for suspicious reasons should never be taken lightly. Even though the Gang is down one case, the Guards still confiscate the amount of cases as if he was still alive. When at full numbers, the Guards take 50% of the cases; when reduced by one, the guards take a much higher "cut".

Other notes:

If you do not wish to play with DVD cases, the Gang members can simply stack their loot that would go in the cases in front of each player. However, this does make it easy to see exactly how many cards each player is trying to transport. This may or may not mean anything to the wary eyes of the Guards.