**DES 115 Playtest Report: Card Game**

**Designer:**  [Matthew Oliver] **Project Name:** [Hidden Joker]

**Date:** [10/30/22] **Project Version: [**Prototype (v0.5)]

**PLAYTEST #1**

**Playtest Goals**

* Determine if rules were clear
* Determine if deception aspect of game was implemented well
* Determine whether I covered all important information and situations

**Playtest Notes**

**List of playtesters**

* Haoran Wang ([haoran.wang@digipen.edu](mailto:haoran.wang@digipen.edu))
* Eli Grossman Gerlach ([eli.grossmangerlach@digipen.edu](mailto:eli.grossmangerlach@digipen.edu))
* Nate White ([nate.white@digipen.edu](mailto:nate.white@digipen.edu))

To summarize: the session went very poorly. The rules weren’t clear enough, they didn’t cover all situations, the goal was confusing, and it’s clear that the deception aspect is essentially nonexistent. The biggest issue by far was that the game is governed by randomness. There is no real skill involved meaning that there’s no way for the Joker to trick people even if they wanted to.

The players seemed to be very confused during the game and certainly weren’t having much fun. There was some confusion as to the rules which came down to odd explanations on my part as well as poor formatting. The players weren’t sure what they were supposed to do with their two cards and also put all used cards back into the deck to be used in the next round. The idea of one person being the joker also didn’t come up at all.

The biggest piece of feedback was that the game is way too random which really detracts from the whole deception aspect. They also agreed that they couldn’t strategize at all and were basically just playing one turn at a time.

Overall it’s clear that I need to make large changes to the game in order to get rid of the randomness and make the deception aspect actually important. I’m planning on getting rid of the idea of drawing two cards and playing them into the middle for an “at risk” person entirely. Though I’m not exactly sure what I’m going to do yet.

**PLAYTEST #2**

**Playtest Goals**

* Is the game now too similar to blackjack
* Does deception play a larger role in the game now
* Are the rules more understandable
* Is it actually fun now

**Playtest Notes**

**List of playtesters**

* Ben Kurtin ([ben.kurtin@digpen.edu](mailto:ben.kurtin@digpen.edu))
* Rishabh Anand ([r.anand@digipen.edu](mailto:r.anand@digipen.edu))
* Brody Endstrasser ([brody.endstrasser@digipen.edu](mailto:brody.endstrasser@digipen.edu))

This session went much better. I made some pretty big changes to the rules to hopefully make it so the game wasn’t ruled by randomness. The entire structure of the game is different, but I think the changes were necessary. I kept the core idea, and it works now. The biggest issue was that the trickster chose not to do anything and won anyway through pure luck.

The players seemed to understand the rules with the only questions being about things I forgot to put in. There wasn’t really much fun had because in this round the trickster didn’t have to do anything to eliminate the innocents. They also stopped the game after it got to two people because the trickster has an almost 100% chance of winning at that point.

The most obvious thing I need to change is I’m going to make it so the trickster **has** to do something every round, they can’t be allowed to play passive. I also think that the game would work much better with 4 people and so I’m going to change it to be a specifically 4 player game. Though I will play with the same 3 players again after this playtest simply because I’m running out of time.

The game does feel a little too similar to blackjack so if I were to continue with this game I’d probably add more rules to further differentiate it. Ideas I had were a global card that affects everyone, or having card combinations do special things. Deception didn’t play a role in this game since the trickster didn’t do anything, but I think my change will fix that. The rules are much better now and I think I’m close to making it genuinely fun.

**PLAYTEST #3**

**Playtest Goals**

* Was forcing the trickster to do something a good change, or is more needed
* Is the Trial actually important now, i.e. can people make guesses on who the trickster is
* Should I add more things to differentiate the game from blackjack

**Playtest Notes**

**List of playtesters**

* Ben Kurtin ([ben.kurtin@digpen.edu](mailto:ben.kurtin@digpen.edu))
* Rishabh Anand ([r.anand@digipen.edu](mailto:r.anand@digipen.edu))
* Brody Endstrasser ([brody.endstrasser@digipen.edu](mailto:brody.endstrasser@digipen.edu))

I think I’ve finally got something good here. Forcing the trickster to do something had exactly the effect that I wanted and the players seemed to have a lot more fun after that change. Accusations were being thrown, trials were being held, and everyone seemed much more engaged.

The players had already played before so there was little confusion with the rules, but this time they actually used all of them. They held a trial in every game, most of the time getting it wrong because Rishabh is, in his own words, “a natural menace.” But there was still the issue of the game basically being over when only two people were left.

If I were to continue changing this game I have some cool ideas and got an interesting suggestion. One of the players suggested that I make it so eliminated players can still affect the game somehow, that way there’s still a chance that the innocents win after it gets down to 2 people. I think that would be an interesting thing to balance and would fit well with my head canon of what’s happening in the game.

The change to the trickster went wonderfully, I don’t think anything more needs to be done with their role. The trial also came up in every game they played, even though they got it wrong most of the time. The important thing is though that they were actually making an attempt to figure out who the trickster is. I feel like the game is different enough from blackjack for now, but in the future I would definitely change it more.

**Mathematical Analysis**

In the first playtest motivational force and expected values were essentially nonexistent. The game was so random that there were no choices to be made and no way to predict the outcome. In the second playtest things were much better, there was at least actual strategy. The trickster chose not to do anything because there was no motivational force to do so, if they already knew that they weren’t losing the round then why would they risk exposing themselves. Their strategy was to not do anything so that no one knew who they were, at the time it worked beautifully. After changing this rule the strategy of the trickster instead became to push suspicion onto someone else by swapping their cards. The motivational force became more tricky after that because the goal became to make it look like someone else was the trickster, even if it meant taking a loss. This is because the Trial is a much bigger threat than just losing a round.

The expected values of this game come mostly in the form of the blackjack hits as the other mechanics are psychological. The game does not follow the typical values of blackjack as the way the cards work is slightly different and 6 cards are removed from the deck right from the start, 3 of them face cards. This means that on average players will have more cards in their hand as they try to get closer to 21. It also means that hitting is safer because you know a few high cards are missing, and you know what cards are missing because they’re in the bag of tricks. As for actual percentages this depends on the value of your hand. For example, if you have a total of 11 or less in your hand then the expected value of you going over 21 after a hit is 0%. Calculating the odds for a total over 11 is more difficult because it depends on how many people have hit the deck before you and taken cards, but assuming you were the first person then the odds of going over at different totals are as follows. 13: ~39%, 15: ~58%, 17: ~69%, 19: ~85%. The reason each of these percentages are about is because there are already face cards missing from the deck, as well as cards placed in the bag of tricks. Thus the obvious move is to hit when you have a lower total, and pass when you have a higher total.

**Raw Notes**