Join & Quit

A real-time secret identity game about making alliances
by
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Playtesting notes

1. First Playtesting session (26.03.25)

Setting:

The playtesting session consisted of five players. None had played the game before. There is one rules-summary and list of characters per table. We use a computer as a general timer. It was played during the course's playtesting session.

Rules:

Core mechanics:
- Each player has a unique role, paired with a unique win condition and ability. The win condition should need the cooperation from other players to activate.
- Players should move between tables until a timer runs out. The final placement of the players will determine if they win or lose.

Phases: The game is divided into three phases.
- Phase 1 (day): Players can be anywhere in the room. (15min)
- Phase 2 (night): Players have to sit at a table, but can still move between tables (15min)
- Phase 3 (final hour): Players cannot talk. As per the order indicated in their card, they can move one last time. Active abilities are still in effect.

Communication constraints:
- Anything said at a table must be heard by every player at the table.
- No communication between tables.
- During the day (phase 1), players may have private conversations. If so, other players must leave them alone.

Mechanical constraints:
- Players can only show their full card to other players if their card allows them to.
- Players can show the corners of their card (their family traits) any time.
- During the night, players must always be at a table.
- Only one movement is allowed at the same time during the night. This movement may consist of several players, but they need to go to the same table.
- If two abilities clash, highest precedence wins as per indicated on the character.

Characters:

Demon

- Commoner, southern, master
- Win condition: make 3 other roles loose (if everybody loses, you still win)
- Ability: if you show your card to someone in a private conversation (out of a table), they swap card with you, the private conversation ends
- Order: 1, precedence: 1
- Cannot show

Princess

- Noble, northern, master
- Win condition: make the two servants sit together
- Ability: if you sit with 2 or more southern people,everybody loses.
- Order: 2, precedence: 4
- Cannot Show

Guard

- Noble, northern, servant
- Win condition: no more than one noble in the castle
- Ability: if your card is already revealed on a table, if one or multiple players join the table, you can force one player to move to the other table (you have to do it immediately without discussion) they cannot come back before another movement happens.
- Order: 3, precedence: 2
- Can Show

King

- Noble, southern, master
- Win condition: sit with the princess.
- Ability: When you join a table, you can move someone to the other table, they cannot come back before another movement happens.
- Order: 4, precedence: 3
- Can Show

Maid

- Commoner, northern, servant
- Win condition: don't sit with the demon
- Ability: you are immune to other people's ability
- Order: 5, precedence: 5
- Cannot Show

Main questions:

- Is the game fun ?
- Does the joining/quitting mechanic work ?

Observations + Feedback:

Rules: Although the explanation of the rules was relatively quick (~8min) which shows that the concept might be easily explained and a game started, feedback showed us that the rules were too confusing and complex. Certain characters were poorly worded (like the Princess or the Guard) and certain rules, in particular precedence, were a source of misunderstanding and thus frustration.

Gameplay flow: Players did not know how to approach the game at first and had a hard time getting in the flow. Not much information was shared and there were no private conversations effectively making the day/night separation useless. Apart from this, pace and duration looked good, although players did ask for the time to be reduced, as it might give too much time for players to "solve" the game. The no communication between tables is a good rule, although difficult to enforce, since when playing in only one room hearing the other table is unavoidable.

General observations: There was no demon jump as people were not incentivised to have private conversations. Moreover, the connotation of "demon" as evil makes the players mistrust them and treat them as a "bad guy", which goes against the design values. A lot of people were also often alone at their tables, and a mechanic should be created to limit such an event. Concerning the timers, players did not take them much into account. Finally, we hoped for a more "explosive" feeling at the end of the game, when winning conditions would be revealed, but we were rushed by time, which might have had an effect.

Other feedback: Player's had a lot of frustration with the way the cards were designed. They did not understand what and how to show their cards. They also did not understand (and later pointed out as a flaw), that they could not bluff during the last phase.

Final thoughts:

Overall for a first playtesting session we were happy with the result. The core mechanic (joining and quitting tables) showed promise and players had fun.

2. Second Playtesting session (03.04.25)

Setting:

The playtesting session consisted of ten new players. There is one rules summary per table and list of characters per person. We use a computer as a general timer. It was played during Ludopoly's game night.

Rule changes:

Movement: Players can no longer have private conversations outside the tables. They must always be present at a table.

Phases: Since players must always be present at a table, the distinction between the first two phases does not make sense anymore. There are now only two phases, day and night, which correspond to the usual gameplay of joining and quitting tables and the last movement respectively. This movement is now table based.

Mechanics: As per the feedback received during the first playtest, we simplified the mechanics. We removed precedence, character order for the last phase and the show condition. The families are also now limited at 1 per character.

Characters: The new characters were created with a medieval theme in mind. We renamed the "Demon" into the "Thief", in order to make them appear less threatening. The "Opportunist" was introduced to disencourage players from leaving other players alone at a table.

Rules:

The Game consists of 2 phases: first Day then Night.
Day (20min):
SIT OR SWITCH: During the day you can move freely between tables. You must always sit at a table.
BE PUBLIC: One table = one conversation. No secrets. You can show your card at any time to everyone at your table. You have to show your card to use your ability.
BE FAIR: If somebody has activated their ability and it is mechanically valid, you cannot immediately claim another ability to stop them unless said otherwise.

Night:
At night, there are 3 phases, one for each table, in order: 1: castle, 2: town, 3: forest.
FOLLOW TABLE ORDER: During each phase only the players seated at the corresponding table can move.
MOVE ONCE: You can only move once in total during the night.

<u>BE QUIET:</u> No talking at night.

Characters:

Opportunist

- Family: Commoners
- Win condition: sit alone at a table
- Ability: if alone at a table at any point, can prevent anyone to join until the end of the game

Thief

- Family: Commoners
- Win condition: Make every player in town lose
- Ability: If you sit alone with another player and they show you their card, you can swap cards.

Innkeeper

- Family: Commoners
- Win condition: Sit with at least two nobles.
- Ability: If you enter town during the day and reveal your role, nobody can leave until someone else joins or you leave.

Farmer

- Family: Commoners
- Win condition: sit with at least two clergy
- Ability: You are not affected by other player's abilities

Monk:

- Family: Clergy
- Win Condition: At most 1 person in the forest.
- Ability: During the night, before you move, choose a player at your table. They must move.

Nun:

- Family: Clergy
- Win condition: At least 3 commoners win.
- Ability: If alone with another player you can give them your card. They are protected from other player's abilities. They cannot give your card to another person and must give it back if you ask to.

Bishop:

- Family: Clergy
- Win condition: Sit at the castle with at least 1 noble
- Ability: During the day, when at a table choose a family. They cannot leave this table until you or someone else leaves the table.

King:

- Family: Nobility
- Win condition: At most 1 commoner in the castle
- Ability: During the night, after you move, choose a player. They must move, even if they have already moved before.

Squire:

- Family: Nobility
- Win condition: At least 2 clergy win
- Ability: If alone with another player at your table you can give them your card. At any point during the night you can freely join their table. They cannot give your card to another person.

Queen:

- Family: Nobility
- Win condition: Sit at the castle without the King or in town with the Monk
- Ability: During the day, when you leave a table, you can choose someone. They must leave with you.

Main questions:

- Are the rules easy to understand ?
- Are players quicker to get into the flow of the game and start using their abilities ?
- Do players try to go for private conversations when a table has few people in it ?
- How do the characters work together?

Observations + feedback:

Rules: In the first game we did not impose seating positions. The second game we imposed a starting position of 3/3/4 to balance the players into the different tables.

Gameplay flow: We played two games which highlighted the problem with the "Opportunist". The first lasted 5 seconds since the forest was empty and they locked it right away. The second game, the same thing happened after 8 minutes, which led to boredom from that player, who ended up leaving the game. The night phase was unclear. Players did not know when they were allowed to move, and some moved which caused others to decide to move after instead of all players at a table deciding at the same time to move or not. What about when they move into a table that can still move?

General observations: Some abilities were confusing, especially those affecting movement. The wording was not clear, and players did not understand the purpose of the ability, as the other players could just move back to the place they were at before.The thief could not change roles, as nobody wanted to actively show their cards with the thief in play. The thief also created a paradox by being alone at a table, we should change the wording to take it into account. The castle being the first to move did not help the roles that need the castle to win, since they can plan for a long time, but other players can just ruin it by moving there after their possible movement.

Other feedback:The king and queen players felt lost and helpless. Their abilities need rework, but we also need to take into account that it was their first time playing the game. People did not like how many players could be at a table at the same time and suggested we implement a maximum number of players per table. We are hesitant in implementing such a change without further testing since the fact that a table was locked for most of the game likely influenced this outcome. Finally, the players thought that the timer was too long and they had too much information to strategize with.

Final thoughts:

The rules were still confusing and there was some poor wording, but it was definitely better than the last playtest. The removal of mechanics to concentrate on the core mechanics was a good choice. The night phase being the main source of confusion indicates that a better mechanic for the last moments should be implemented.
The players (apart from the ones with movement abilities) definitely had an easier entry into the flow of the game.
There were not many private conversations that were happening since players were afraid of giving information to the thief.
Most of the characters meshed well together, except the "Opportunist", which did not achieve its role and the thief that had trouble triggering its ability. We should rework or remove those characters.

In conclusion, we are happy with the changes that we made, and we think that simplifying the mechanics even more will benefit the game.

3. Third Playtesting session (01.05.25)

Setting:

The playtesting session consisted of ten players. Most of them had never played the game, but two had played during the second playtest. Players had their role and a summary of the roles. Full explanations and rules were presented at the "tables". Since we playtested near the lake, we did not have physical tables.

Rule Changes:

We removed the day / night phases as it created confusion. In order to still have a similar effect of phasing we implemented three different timers, each separated by 1 minute (Town: 10 min, Castle: 11 min, Forest: 12 min). The timer was thus also reduced further, to limit the information that players have in the endgame.
The timer was displayed with one smartphone per Table.

We changed some of the characters. Firstly we removed the "Opportunist" which had been problematic during the last playtest and implemented the "Spinster". The idea behind the spinster was so that it would create more chaos and encourage communication, since the player wants to get to know the information he created. We also specified conditions for each movement ability, so that it is not immediately negated by a "going-back" movement. Finally, the thief only needs to be alone with their target, as encouraging people to give out their card was impossible to do.

Artistic Direction:

We changed the style of the character sheets, choosing font families (Grenze Gotisch and Caudex) that matched the medieval setting of the game. We chose a color scheme that was meaningful and matched the families. The evolution of the style was preserved in these playtesting notes, in particular the list of characters in each section corresponds to the actual character sheet that was handed out to players during playtests.
We instituted conventions to improve the readability of the character sheets and cards. Tables are written with a capital letter in bold caudex, table movements are underlined, Grenze Gotisch is reserved for Roles. Colors and icons represent each family. The yellow fleur-de-lys

represents nobility: yellow is the color of gold, wealth and fleur-de-lys is the symbol of nobility in a lot of countries (mostly France). The purple Jerusalem cross represents the clergy. The cross is an obvious symbol of Christianity and purple is the liturgical color of penitence in the Catholic Church. The green oak leaf represents the commoners. Green is the color of plants in nature and the oak is a very common species of tree in western europe.

Rules:

<u>SIT OR SWITCH</u> You can quit your **Table** if its timer is running. You can freely join any **Table**. You must always sit at a **Table**.
<u>BE PUBLIC</u> One **Table** = one conversation. No secrets. You can show your card at any time to everyone at your **Table**. You have to show your card to use your ability.
<u>ONE ABILITY AT A TIME</u> If somebody has activated their ability and it is mechanically valid, you have to wait for their ability to be resolved, before moving or using yours.
<u>AT THE END</u> When your **Table**'s timer is over, don't move, don't use your ability. Wait for the **Squire** to move. Wait for the **Spinster** to guess. If you sit at the **Spinster**'s table your win condition might be reversed.

King - nobility

Ability: When sitting at a table you may choose a family. They cannot leave this table until you or someone else leaves the table. If you choose nobility, you are free to move.
Win condition: At most 1 commoner in the **Castle**

Queen - nobility

Ability: When you leave a table, you may choose a player. They must follow you and cannot leave until you or someone else leaves this new **Table**.
Win condition: Sit at the **Castle** without the **King** or in **Town** with the **Priest**

Innkeeper - commoners

Ability: When you enter **Town** you may declare that you are the **Innkeeper**. If so, nobody can leave until someone else enters or you leave.
Win condition: Sit with at least two nobles.

Bishop - clergy

Ability: When a player leaves your **Table**, guess the **family** of a player at your **Table**. If your guess is true, they have to leave.
Win condition: Sit at the **Castle** with at least 1 noble

Thief - commoners

Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player, you can swap Roles with them. This ability fails if they do not have their card.
Win condition: Make every other player in **Town** lose

Priest - clergy

Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player, you can see their Roles. This ability fails if they do not have their card.
Win Condition: At most 1 person in the **Forest**.

Spinster - commoners

Ability: When you leave the **Forest**, point a player, they have to reveal their role after you leave.

Win condition: Guess every other player's roles at your **Table**. If all guesses are true their win condition is reversed.

Nun - clergy

Win condition: At least 3 commoners win.
Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player you can give them your card. They are protected from other player's abilities. They cannot give your card to another person and must give it back if you ask to.

Farmer - commoners

Ability: You are protected from other player's abilities.
Win condition: Sit with at least two clergy

Squire - nobility

Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player you can give them your card (they can refuse). After the end of the timer, you can join their **Table**. They cannot give your card to another person and must give it back if you ask to.
Win condition: At least 2 clergy win

Main questions:

- Does the new timer mechanic work ? And how do they mix with the different abilities?
- Do the characters mesh well together?
- Are the written rules clear? Is the summary sheet helpful?
- Is there enough or too much chaos?

Observations + feedback:

Rules: The rules were mostly understood and the misunderstandings or paradoxes that appeared in the previous iterations mostly did not show up.

Gameplay flow: The timers seemed to work, even though it created some down time for the tables that ended earlier. It is also harder for the players to realise when the timer of the other tables is gonna be up. One way to fix it might be showing the three timers on a big screen or in every table. Also, the most "explosive" feeling is when two players that made alliances were sitting at two different tables and won together. We should try to encourage such win conditions.

General observations: Due to the environment not being ideal, the mechanic of separate timers in each "table" was harder to evaluate, though a positive feedback was that we did not need much apart from phones and cards for the game to be playable. We were not able to see the Spinster in action as their player did not activate its ability. We should playtest it again to see if the character meshes well with the rest.

Other Feedback: Players told us that there are pretty much no downsides to give away your role and spread information. We might want to add another role that creates information mistrust or has an ability that would make players afraid of immediately revealing who they are. There was a misunderstanding from a player with the key word "Town", which they read as "Table" in the Innkeeper ability. While a small mistake, we decided to change the name of the table from "Town" to "Village" so this mistake does not happen again. Finally, the role summary created more confusion than the standard list of characters, although the color scheme was liked.

Final thoughts:

The timer mechanic worked well and we will keep it for the next prototype. We think that the core mechanics are set and work, and we need now to round out the characters. Unfortunately we did not have the chance to see the newest character at work, but we will keep it for the

next session. The rules were clear for the most part, most of the confusion coming from the summary cheat that we had made. Finally, we think that while there was more chaos that the last few prototypes, the game still needs a bit more.

Fourth Playtesting session (12.05.2025)

Setting:

9 players, including 4 who participated in a previous playtest and the two game creators. We removed the Priest to accommodate the 9 player setting. We played two games. Players had a full character sheet. Playtest happened during the final presentation of the game.

Rule Changes:

An offline [app](app) clearly showing the table and the different timers is added for clarity. The main motivation for this addition was to allow players to be aware of the time remaining at the other tables.
Role cards are now a full description of the ability and win condition, instead of a summary.
The bishop's win condition was inverted to make it more interesting.
The squire was removed and substituted by the baron: a more chaotic character that can possibly solve the problem of the game being "too easy" and have a downside to revealing info.

Rules and Characters:

See next pages.

King

nobility

Ability: When sitting at a table you may choose a family. They cannot <u>leave</u> this table until you or someone else <u>leaves</u> the table. If you choose nobility, you are free to move.

Win: At most 1 commoner in the **Castle**

Queen

nobility

Ability: When you <u>leave</u> a table, you may choose a player. They must follow you and cannot <u>leave</u> until you or someone else <u>leaves</u> this new **Table**.

Win: Sit in the **Castle** without the **King** or in the **Village** with the **Priest**

Spinster

commoners

Ability: When you <u>leave</u> the **Forest**, point a player, they have to reveal their role after you <u>leave</u>.

Win: At the end, guess every other player's roles at your **Table**. If all guesses are true their win condition is reversed

Bishop

clergy

Ability: When a player <u>leaves</u> your **Table**, guess the **family** of a player at your **Table**. If your guess is true, they have to <u>leave</u>.

Win: Sit with no nobles

Thief

commoners

Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player, you can swap **Roles** with them. This ability fails if they do not have their card.

Win: Make every other player in the **Village** lose

Priest

clergy

Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player, you can see their **Role**. This ability fails if they do not have their card.

Win: At most 1 person in the **Forest**.

Farmer

commoners

Ability: You are protected from other player's abilities.

Win: Sit with at least two clergy

Innkeeper

commoners

Ability: When you <u>enter</u> the **Village** you may declare that you are the **Innkeeper**. If so, nobody can <u>leave</u> until someone else <u>enters</u> or you <u>leave</u>.

Win: Sit with at least two nobles

Nun

clergy

Ability: If you sit with only 1 other player you can give them your card. They are protected from other player's abilities. They cannot give your card to another person and must give it back if you ask to.

Win: At least 3 commoners win.

Baron

nobility

Ability: When a player at your Table shows their card, if there are at least 2 other players at the table, you can block their ability and steal their card. They keep their **Role**, but lose their ability, and can reclaim their card if they sit with you only.

Win: You win if you have at least 3 other cards at the end.

Sit or Switch You can quit your **Table** if its timer is running. You can freely join any **Table** (unless specified otherwise). You must always sit at a **Table**.

Be Public One **Table** = one conversation. No secrets. You can show your card at any time to everyone at your **Table**.

Use your Ability You have to show your card to use your ability.

One Ability at a Time If somebody has activated their ability and it is mechanically valid, you have to wait for their ability to be resolved, before moving or using yours.

Watch the Timer When your **Table**'s time is up, don't move, don't use your ability. Wait for the other table's timer to end.

End When all timers are over. Wait for the **Spinster** to guess. If you sit at the **Spinster**'s table your win condition might be reversed. Then reveal your **Role** and check with all players who won. In order:

1) Spinster
2) Queen/Baron
3) King/Bishop/Farmer/Priest/Innkeeper
4) Nun
5) Thief

Main questions:

Is the new app contributing to clarify the time left and flow of the game?
Are the roles fun and create interesting dynamics ? Spinster ? Baron ?

Observations and Feedback:

Rules:
The spinster, baron and reworked bishop worked very well to bring dynamism to the game and limit the oversharing problem.

Gameplay flow:
The app worked well to indicate time, however the screens would turn off which is an issue. This can probably be solved by having a line of code that blocks the screen saver. Explanation of the Rules can be improved by having a script of the introduction of the game, written down.
The game was very alive and a bit chaotic, especially the second game. The following issues happened:
- The thief triggering their ability at a table with 4 people, because two of them where standing and it was unclear whether they were at the table or not.
- The baron grabbing player's card without showing his card
- The queen dragging people out of the castle and spamming her ability, causing people to run back to where they wanted to be
- players running to get their card back from the Baron and waiting for their turn between tables
- Players showing their card very quickly and some players at the table missing it

General observations:
Obviously, in a social deduction game, there must be some freedom in the playing space to allow people to be creative and have fun, but some blurry limits must be drawn to limit strategies that might affect people's experience negatively as well as resolving ruling conflicts.
Most players won at the end, and overall the experience of being able to attain situations where most people find their place is quite aligned with the game's values. The main design challenge is to promote cooperation, but keep the game challenging and dynamic with enough chaos.

Other feedback:

The character sheet could become clearer, by sorting the roles so that the columns match the families.

Final thoughts:

Possible ways to instore a playing etiquette are:
- Limiting the number of seats at a table and forcing people to actually sit in order to be at the table
- Requiring from every player at a table to place one hand flat on the table
- Requiring cards to be placed in the middle of the table when shown or when activating abilities. And forcing players to let go of their card for a short time.
- Touching the timer to mark the action or grab it like in jungle speed.

Future Changes

Etiquette and Playing Posture:

After the chaos of the last playtest we realized that it was important to establish clear rules about how to behave during plays, to avoid ambiguities. This is necessary for game replayability as a lot of chaotic interactions are only fun once, but might impact players negatively and will not align with the game's values. We are still discussing what exactly to implement, but our efforts are centered around designing conventions or protocols that resolve conflicts in movement around tables and use of abilities. Most of the conflicts come from properly ordering events in one timeline, which is difficult because things happen in parallel. We believe that we can get inspiration from concurrency algorithm that for instance use a concept of [lock](#).
We are thinking about asking players to touch a specific part of the table, or grab a totem, or the timer to perform actions, forcing them to wait for actions to be resolved before starting a new interaction. The advantage of using the timer is that it doesn't require more material. The drawback is that it might interfere with reading the time. Also, something we have to take into account is that we want to minimize the time players spend in between tables, so players joining a table shouldn't have to compete to perform their joining action with sitting players. We might need a rule to mark players that are waiting for an action to be resolved to join the table. Maybe they can put their hand on the table.

Number Of Players:

Right now, the game is designed to be played for 10 players. The game's design values specify that the game should be flexible and adapt to player number and available time as opposed to the other way around. Having more players, or a flexible number of players introduces new questions: what Roles are in play/are not in play, are players aware of all the roles in play ?