



Murder at Midnight is a hybrid character-comedy / murder-mystery, in which you have one hour to prevent the untimely death of a central character. You play as the Joker (the playing card, not the Batman villain), who has been invited to a soirée at the mansion of the aristocratic Miss Hearts. But which guest has it out for her – the portly Mister Clubs, the reserved Miss Diamonds, or the handsome Mister Spades? What other secrets are they hiding?

(Be warned that reading below this point will spoil the prototype.)

There are five time-steps in the story. You enter the parlor at 11:00 PM, and depending on your choices, different actions and characters will be available to you at the landmark of each quarter-hour. At the stroke of midnight, all the characters gather together and play out the ending you’ve created.

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| 11:00 PM | <p>You enter the parlor with the other guests. You have the choice to either join in the dancing or inspect the room.</p> <p>If you inspect the room, you can find an ornate Ming vase set precariously on its pedestal, and seat it more firmly.</p> |
| 11:15 PM | <p>This is the first parallel event. Miss Hearts wants one more dance with Mister Spades, who she fancies as her suitor. However, they crash straight into the Ming vase.</p> <p>If you fixed the vase at 11:00, it will only wobble around a bit. If you didn’t, they break it and the butler needs to come clean up the mess.</p> |

11:30 PM

The guests settle down into conversation. You have the choice of talking to **Mister Clubs** or **Miss Hearts**:

If you talk to **Mister Clubs**, you can convince him to propose to Miss Hearts at midnight – though this locks you into a bad ending, and just adds some funnier dialog to it.

If you talk to **Miss Hearts**, she asks you how she looks. If you **say there's something wrong with her makeup, she grabs Miss Diamonds and runs off to the bathroom**. You *must* do this to get one of the good endings (for a bit of counter-intuitive fun.)

11:45 PM

This is the second parallel event, where the story really begins to diverge based on your prior actions:

If Miss Hearts and Miss Diamonds are **still in the room**, Miss Hearts begins performing by the piano, and you have the chance to talk to **Mister Spades** or **Miss Diamonds**. The latter stonewalls you, but the former asks you if he should come clean about "his secret." If you tell him that he should, **he will come out of the closet and propose to Mister Clubs at midnight instead**.

If Miss Hearts and Miss Diamonds are **in the bathroom**, you still get the chance to talk to Mister Spades. But something else happens: you take a breather, and discover that Miss Diamonds dropped her handbag on the floor when Miss Hearts pulled her away. **You can pick it up and disarm her pistol!**

12:00 PM

This is the third and final parallel event. It's time to see what happens at midnight!

There are three steps in this sequence, though the second one is optional. There are four bad endings and two good endings (note that getting step 2 is mutually exclusive with a good ending.)

1. **Mister Spades proposes.** If you told him to come clean at 11:45, he proposes to Mister Clubs, revealing he is gay. If you told him to stay silent, he proposes to Miss Hearts.
2. **Mister Clubs proposes (optional.)** If you told him to propose at 11:30, he does so now.
3. **Miss Diamonds fires.** If you didn't disarm the gun at 11:45, Miss Hearts falls to the floor, and you must start over (you aren't told who was holding the gun.) If you did disarm the gun, Miss Diamonds is apprehended, and you get one of the two good endings: with either Spades and Hearts or Spades and Clubs. In my opinion, the "true" ending is the one with Spades and Clubs (since it is the resolution of Spades' secret.)

Structurally, the three parallel events in this story could be categorized as "same place / different time" and "same time and place / different characters".

This prototype ended up being a *lot* longer than I expected, and I think the slower pace near the beginning might take some of the joy out of replay. Despite that, the dramatically different endings were very fun to write and are hopefully rewarding to discover.