PROFESSOR: We go into a reading today. So this is an interesting book that came out from something called the New Games Movement, which I have mentioned a few times in class but just as a reminder. I think it was mostly in the 60's. How many of you kind of got that vibe while you were reading this? But it's interesting because it's written in this almost Hemminway-ish kind of short little sentences-- short little declarative sentences about wellness, and happiness, and getting along with the community and stuff like that. But all of the principles, at least in the chapter in today's reading, aren't actually all that different from what I've been teaching all semester long regarding game design and play testing, if it's your job to actually make a game.

What Bernie DeKoven and some of his other colleagues-- has anyone heard of the *Whole Earth Catalog?* Brant, was it?

AUDIENCE: Brant, yeah. What was it?

PROFESSOR: The *Whole Earth Catalog.*

AUDIENCE: That was the thing with the parachute?

PROFESSOR: Well, actually, that's a New Game Movement in particular. Yeah. It's kind of the same community of people who are just trying to find ways to-- not only to find ways for people to get along with each other, but also things like [INAUDIBLE] where you're taking military equipment and turning them into things that you play with and stuff like that. So today's chapter has a lot of stuff about how people who don't necessarily see themselves as game makers can use some of the practices that we've been talking about in this class to basically change the way they play games that they already play. And in the process of that create new games. The New Games Movement-- there's actually a *New Games Book* that is more about the kinds of games that you can play. It includes things like parachute.

If you've ever done that game where there's two people back to back-- you're sitting back to back and then your job is to stand up, I think without using your hands. Is that right? Oh, you lock your arms. Yeah. Also that game where everyone gets into a tight circle, reaches in, grabs somebody else's hand and the whole job is to untangle it. You see that in schools a lot nowadays, as well as games like parachute. And all that came from this New Games Movement. Again, it's a reaction to wars in Vietnam and, I guess, Korea. Am I getting my chronology right?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, Korea then 'Nam.

PROFESSOR: Yeah, and just trying to say, how do we learn how to play with other people instead of fighting other people? But there are a couple of interesting ideas in here that I felt were kind of unique to today's reading that we haven't necessarily addressed in class. Did anything leap out in *Changing the Game?* Yeah?

AUDIENCE: He talked a lot about borrowing rules. So taking something from another game and kind of putting in your own. And making it your own and getting you over the hump of having to make up something completely new.

PROFESSOR: Yeah, and it's kind of funny because the example that you talked about-- it's kind of like borrowing the rule on the fly, like from a different variant of the same game. But I think the same principle can actually be applied to a much wider range of things like safety rules. Like say you're playing a game like tag or something like that, and you haven't necessarily mapped out the boundaries of your game, but the game that you've played with your friends before decided that one of the boundaries was going to be the edge of that road, right? Nobody can run past that road. That's a fairly sensible safety rule. It'd be easy enough to just borrow a rule from that and just say, just like that last game that we played, no one crosses that road for safety reasons. Yeah?

AUDIENCE: Another one on this combat that's really, really confused as far as where it comes from, especially when your game isn't necessarily about the whole combat. Like nothing like just not having to worry about how the combat actually works. We borrowed a few different ones. Like we tried Risk, we tried [INAUDIBLE]. It's like, we don't actually want to spend time on developing a fair combat system, just trying stuff out.

PROFESSOR: Sure. I mean, as game designers you can certainly sort of be inspired by what other people have done. And of course, again, you're designing a game meant for somebody else to play, where it's what Bernie DeKoven is writing about. It's about changing a rule that you're about to play or maybe even a possible play. [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: I just found it interesting how [INAUDIBLE] rules that sort of help players play the game as it is right now. And rules that actually change the strategy that you have to [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: Right. So there are rules that clarify what it is that you can or you cannot do, right? And then there are rules which he explicitly states as the definition of a change game. It's one that requires you to come up with a new strategy. So things like that safety rule that I described earlier doesn't necessarily fit that. But it fulfills other purposes like being able to play well, giving you the feeling of wellness. I can't believe that line, but it's great. But then there's also rules like, we're going to change the game because it's not challenging given the way it's currently played.

Maybe the current set of rules has a simple exploit that just leads to one person winning all the time. Maybe someone is just way more skilled at this game than somebody else or you're playing with a five-year-old, something that like. And you want to have some challenge, you want to keep some challenge for the kid. But if you just stick with the rules right now, the kid will be endlessly challenged and will not ever be able to win, and you're not being challenged at all. That's where you give yourself-- and he brings this up, what's that the thing you introduce into the game to be able to rebalance that? You should know it even if you didn't read it. If you're playing with somebody who is way less skilled than you, you give yourself a handicap. Yeah.

Yeah, so handicapping is a really interesting concept regarding game balance. Because normally when we think about game balance, it's all about how do we think of the rules so that everybody is kind of equally skilled, everyone kind of has a fair chance of winning, a decent chance-- maybe not exactly an even chance of winning, but at least a fair chance of winning. But he's introducing the concept of handicapping as a way to be able to reintroduce challenge in the situation where players are not equally skilled because of physical reasons, because of expertise or familiarity with the game, that sort of thing.

So let me see, is that it? Anything else that people remember from the reading? Again a lot of the stuff-- there is an interesting little bit that he talks about cheating as a thing that players should be trying to do if you are already in the mood to be able to then suggest rule changes to the rest of the community. And you should be finding the loopholes, right. You should be trying to figure out, given the current set of rules that you're playing right now, what are the problems with that set of rules and how do you improve on them?

And the way how you figure out whether these rules are important, or well written, or problematic, is you try to break them. And then, if you break them, then you realize that, oh OK, that rule was really necessary in order for the game to play, but your attitude is, I want to continue playing with all of you. Then you say, all right, we're not going to do that anymore. I think it takes a tremendous amount of trust among players to be able to accommodate that. I don't know how many people actually play regularly in environments like that.

AUDIENCE: Are you saying that you should be trying to cheat to show the rules [INAUDIBLE]?

PROFESSOR: That you should be trying to find the exploits. You should be trying to figure out exactly how ironclad this rule actually is, right. Or whether this rule is a good idea in the first place.

AUDIENCE: By breaking the rules?

PROFESSOR: By breaking them. It's very, very strange. It's a very, very interesting suggestion. I can't recall of a situation when I've been in a play community, as he describes it, where there's enough trust to be able to let people get away with that.

AUDIENCE: Honestly, I think it's just less interesting. I think it's more interesting-- I forget who said this-- this is like a quote that's like, creatively actually comes from constraints. I think it's a lot more interesting to actually try to find the broken strategy in a game as it is.

PROFESSOR: OK, to find the degenerate strategies within the rules as supposed to figure out where the rules are broken.

AUDIENCE: So some of them play the-- [INAUDIBLE] change the rules [INAUDIBLE]. Sometimes when playing games you're like, how do we-- but I feel like every time I've done those with other people, it's always been important to everyone that everyone knows what the rules are [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: And that's one thing that he very, very clearly states. It's like, you are cheating publicly. You are broadcasting the fact that you are cheating, which brings up the question, are you really cheating or are you just proposing a rule change, right? But the idea of treating the rules as something that could be maleable, I think, is what he's really getting at. He doesn't fight to use the word cheating, which I'm not entirely sure whether that's the right word to describe it.

AUDIENCE: To me it seems sort of similar to the phase idea of [INAUDIBLE] what's underneath the game. So if you start breaking a rule and you're doing it publicly with the knowledge of other people, just to see what happens if we start to break this rule, I think you can get into some interesting issues. Like well, what makes the game tick? I don't know, I feel like a lot of games I used play as a kid, we would explicitly break rules. We would know of the rule of the game, but we would choose to either not play with it or to just limit it. This resource is limited. Like well, you know, this time when we play it it's not going to be. Let's just see what happens.

PROFESSOR: Right. Yeah, and that's the attitude that he is trying to encourage.

AUDIENCE: I feel like if you're like, for whatever purpose you're playing a game-- like if you're playing to win or if you're playing just for fun or something, players are too keen to change the rules when they don't do [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: Players aren't or players are?

AUDIENCE: Players are. Like if you're just not very good at a game or you run into some sort of obstacle or strategy that [INAUDIBLE] done that. I think players, in general, jump to changing the rules too frequently.

PROFESSOR: Too frequently?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: OK, let's dig into that. Why too frequently? Why do you feel that happens too often?

AUDIENCE: I'm thinking along the lines of competitive games here. You just get tired of how they have blame other people besides themselves.

PROFESSOR: OK.

AUDIENCE: Just in general.

PROFESSOR: But what if you were trying to change the rules for other people?

AUDIENCE: Yeah, no, I think that sort thing requires a really in depth understanding of all the strategy [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: Well, say I'm in a fighting game tournament or something like that where usually the rules are pretty rigidly enforced, right?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: But I'm not like a top-level player. I just happen to be on a real winning streak among people that I know and I don't seem to be able to lose right now. So I think what Bernie is talking about is describing a situation where, especially if you are that person who seems to be on a winning streak, you might want to suggest a rule change to be able to bring the challenge back to you, right. I've seen players do this specifically in our kids where it's like, I'm going to pick the character that I'm crappiest at because I can't seem to be able to lose by playing the characters that I'm actually good at. That's [INAUDIBLE] very interesting for me.

AUDIENCE: I mean, [INAUDIBLE] rule changes to [INAUDIBLE] I'm calling it cheating.

PROFESSOR: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Because to me cheating implies that you are not. Me changing the rules and everyone agrees on the rules and how the rules change, and it's not. Then you have changed the rules. You are now playing by a different set of rules. If you play by those, you're not cheating because you're not playing by the original. I feel like cheating is anything where you are breaking the set of rules that was agreed upon.

PROFESSOR: Well, cheating also, I think, has a certain assumption that everybody else is not breaking the rules, right. No one is playing with a different set of rules but you. All but the cheat. In fact, a lot of cheats only work if everyone else sticks to the rules as written and then you're the only one cheating. So again, I think he's trying to get across the attitude but used the wrong word for it by describing it as cheating

AUDIENCE: You brought up the example of fighting games and picking a character that you're not very good at. That's not even a rule change, in my opinion.

PROFESSOR: That's true. Well, yeah, I guess. I'm trying to think of the implicit-- maybe not a rule change, but it's more like a values change that you should be playing to win, right.

AUDIENCE: You can make a rule that, OK, normally everyone can choose whatever character they want, but yours is always better than us so that when you play in our play group, I choose your character.

PROFESSOR: Oh, yeah. You get to choose my character or something like that. You tell me who you want to play against and I'l try my best to play that game. Let's start in with Miguel and then over to Laura. Yeah?

AUDIENCE: So, one thing I wanted to bring up was so you think if one person isn't being challenged enough then they can start experimenting. But in my experience it more often happens when the entire group is not being challenged anymore. In the sense of, you two just played Catan three times over the last few days. And she was kind of tired of Catan. You're kind of ready to do something else, but you don't have a different board game [INAUDIBLE] or something.

PROFESSOR: So then make a variant, sure.

AUDIENCE: --different variants up. And it's like everyone is trying to increase the challenge, not because it's not challenging. There's still [INAUDIBLE] who is going win and you all sit down and start playing. But it's not challenging in the sense that it's not engaging and not interesting.

PROFESSOR: I think the reason why it's easier to do it when there's a lot of people finding a game uninteresting is because it's easier to get a consensus to be able to enforce a change of the rules, right. It's a lot harder to say-- say I'm 12 and I'm playing with a whole bunch of other 12-year-olds, and there happens to be a 9-year-old in the group and we're playing soccer or something like that. It's harder for anyone to convince the rest of the 12-year-olds to take it easy on a 9-year-old. Like, all right, what if we give an extra player on the 9-year-old team or something like that.

Not to say it can't be done and I think that's what Bernie DeKoven is saying, no you should be able to do that sort of thing. And it kind of makes the game more interesting for everybody, not just for the person who is having a hard time. It makes the game more interesting even for the people who have an advantage because now it makes it a big-- more of a fight, I guess, for them to be able to win. Laura?

AUDIENCE: Well, I think the other issue I have with the word cheating in describing changing the rules-- and less so against for individual players-- I know, for example, there are games that I've played since I was really little where it wasn't really intentional that we were not playing by the original rules. It's just that when I was seven and I learned how to play Monopoly or Clue or some really generic board game that I learned when I was really little. I did not sit through all the rules or I thought I knew the rules and didn't really remember them. And so you had a change in the rules unintentionally. And I think that's a very different category.

PROFESSOR: Yeah, house rules.

AUDIENCE: Your house rules become so much different. Even if you play with other people and you're kind of all playing by your own house rules, it doesn't really feel like-- I wouldn't always call that cheating. It's not because you're not trying to play by the correct-- what you think are the correct rules.

PROFESSOR: And more importantly, everybody in the room's agreed to that set of-- this new set of rules, right. So cheating is again not a great word to be able to describe that.

AUDIENCE: I feel like when you're modifying rules there's a few different ways to do it. Sometimes you just add a little to a game. You're just like, it's not interesting enough, make up some initial variants to make it sort more [INAUDIBLE]. And other times if you're doing it it's [INAUDIBLE] Catan with friends there, we [INAUDIBLE] because it's really overpowered if you just-- it's really overpowered strategy [INAUDIBLE].

Some groups a lot more [INAUDIBLE] overpowered strategy [INAUDIBLE] after playing twice we've [INAUDIBLE] one beater in there [INAUDIBLE] because he's ridiculously over powered. And so [INAUDIBLE] different levels of [INAUDIBLE] They see things and there's experimenting [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: I think in the end, Bernie DeKoven's kind of coming from, you should be free to challenge authority. That's kind of like the implicit thing that you get from the whole catalog as well.

AUDIENCE: Going back to what Nathan said, people are sometimes too keen. For example, something might seem initially overpowered but then you play it, you might be after the first game, everybody's just like, oh yeah, it's broken, might as well just change it, right. Whereas, if you'd played another game, you might have realized, oh wait, you can actually counter this by just doing X.

PROFESSOR: So actually a really interesting counterpoint, which is not part of our reading is Dave Sirlin who is a MIT alum, actually, who wrote a book called *Playing to Win.* This is not part of our class reading but he will definitely back that up, right. His is like, no it's everyone's responsibility to play as hard as they can because you have an-- especially for certain kinds of games-- you haven't discovered everything that your game systems capable of.

And if somebody can beat you playing that same game with the same set of rules, then clearly it's possible to beat that player or at least get up to the point where they are equally skilled. So now there's a whole bunch of game design philosophy to come out of that as well. And I believe we played-- did we play Yomi in this class before?

AUDIENCE: We used to.

PROFESSOR: We used to? Yeah, OK. There's actually an iPad version of it now. It's definitely not an iPhone version because it's way too much text to fit on an iPhone screen. But Yomi is a game that-- it's a card game version of basically a Street Fighter type fighting game. And it's all about anticipating what the other player is going to do and if you manage to get it right, you can build up your combos and everything. But the whole idea of everything that Davie Sirlin's worked on, I believe he did a remix version of a Street Fighter, which was [INAUDIBLE]. Yeah, the HD remix versions.

The whole idea of everything that he wrote about it and everything that he makes is that these kinds of competitive games really should be more about, how do you challenge yourself to improve better? And it's a lot less about the community around you. It's a lot more about you and the game system. So you are submitting yourself willingly to the authority of the game system, which of course, game designers create. And then if there's anything that you should be challenging, you should be challenging your ability to be able to rise to the occasion, right.

AUDIENCE: Everyone should be doing [INAUDIBLE], right. If that person's arguing that, they're not giving you a good experience. They're letting you down.

PROFESSOR: Right. They're not fighting as hard as they can. And even Bernie describes this, right. The whole idea is what happens if you give somebody a chance to-- it's like, I could have played this game optimally because I know this game so well and have beaten you into the ground. But I'm just going to-- instead of handicapping myself, which is a sort of public declaration that this is how I'm going to be doing it, I'm just not going to play optimally. Then I think both Dave Sirlin and Bernie DeKoven are actually in agreement. This is not a good way to play. Because the person who is getting the benefit of that feels cheated of experience as well. Did I see?

AUDIENCE: I think I need to clarify that oftentimes you can use [INAUDIBLE]. So in a game with really defined strategies, you could sort of be going for some strategy that you believe to be sort of optimal because you wanted [INAUDIBLE] other players that you were like-- and it could be, be and you sort of are [INAUDIBLE] along the lines of, oh you [INAUDIBLE] possibilities of the game in there. So you can just try hard and you can do that. I think you're actually working toward that purpose if you do something like-- you're not going to try a strategy that's totally bad, but who knows.

PROFESSOR: You know, I do that a lot and I always feel compelled to publicly declare that this is what I'm doing. I think because I don't want anyone to think that I'm stupid. I really do something bad [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: A lot of times when I play a board game, I play with people were really, really good at understanding and making board games, too. If I think that something might be an interesting way to play that game, I'll say it out and then it become more of a cooperative, how could this strategy be--

PROFESSOR: Let's play this out. Let's see what happens, right. A learning experience for everyone.

AUDIENCE: Well, what would you have done from my shoes? It's like at this point we're not even playing to win, we're playing to develop a strategy.

PROFESSOR: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Yeah, I was thinking [INAUDIBLE] you're not necessarily playing to maximize your fun right now. You're playing to explore [INAUDIBLE] the game has. And maybe find a bigger strategical future later on, I guess.

PROFESSOR: And I think that's in keeping with what Bernie has tried to write about. He ends up the chapter by talking about how you are scoring, right. How you're deciding what a win is. And in this particular case, it's a situation that we're describing, a win is learning how a new, untested strategy is going to play out. It becomes less about who is the individual who's actually winning and more about, are we getting something new from our understanding of this game? Which can be really entertaining.

Whereas I think Dave Sirlin, not quite so willing to let that go. He's a little bit more adamant that, no you should be winning based on the definition of the rule set, not based on something like extra community arrived position. And Bernie DeKoven is trying to fight for, no community determines when the conditions are fine. In fact, there are many good reasons for you to go for that. Different points of view. I'm not saying that anyone is [INAUDIBLE] about that.

AUDIENCE: I mean, I think if you want to maximize-- like in the long term-- your chances of winning has to be [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: Oh yes, absolutely. Yeah, I will agree. If you're a professional player who is in a team, you are probably going to be working with your teammates a lot of times-- not to determine who is better at the game, but to try to make everybody else play better, right?

And there's just two different perspectives on how you arrive at that. One is to always play as hard as you can so that everyone has to sort of rise to the occasion. And the other way is just-- no, it's OK to do things like experiment. It's OK to do things like handicaps.

It's OK to do things like-- I'm just going to play-- I was just playing a game recently where like I'm going to do a sub-optimal strategy on purpose, just to see whether my opponent's capable of fighting it off. Because it's just ridiculous. So yeah-- I had fun even though I didn't win.

So today I was thinking of going through three games. But what time is it now?

AUDIENCE: 3:00

PROFESSOR: It's almost 3:00? OK, so I think we're going to do two games. I'm going to very quickly have a discussion about what are all the different versions of Mafia that people have played. How many of you have played a version of Mafia or Werewolf or something like that? No? Everybody? OK.

All right, let me quickly give a description. The general framework of these games everybody gets a card, and the card gives you a role. These are usually just regular playing cards where-- one version that I have played is that if you have a king or queen or a jack of clubs, you are mafia. And it's your job to kill everybody else who didn't receive a king, queen, or jack of clubs.

And then everybody else is a villager whose job is to figure out who are the mafia players. So everyone closes their eyes and open their eyes based on the cues of a person who is like a moderator. If I ran the game here in class, I would be the moderator. And I'd say like, nighttime, everyone closes their eyes. Mafia awakes. And then the mafia do not say anything, but they can communicate with things like gestures and moving their head. And they're basically sort of using body language to vote on who dies that night-- usually by nodding, or by pointing, or something like that.

And then everyone closes their eyes. The moderator declares who dies. Everyone opens their eyes again, and that person reveals their card. And that shows whether they were mafia or not. And the whole idea is that in between rounds everyone speaks freely. And so there are accusations that are flying around, and suspicions, and exchanging of very, very tangential evidence-- like, I thought I heard rustling over there.

You know, and it's like-- you know, that could be the mafia person just trying to throw you off the track. That could be somebody who is actually the villager. Only the mafia know for sure who is who. And then there are other hidden roles. So what are some other variants that you've played? Yeah? [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: So I've played where the card doesn't get revealed when you die.

PROFESSOR: Oh, yeah?

AUDIENCE: And one particular other thing that-- like all sorts of different roles, as well. And the voting mechanic for who gets killed-- so I've seen it played where people decide when the discussion is over. And then they little vote. And then the person who has the majority gets killed.

PROFESSOR: They vote by printing?

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: But the way that I always play is that all it takes for someone on the block is to have someone say, I'm putting that person on the block, and another persons says "seconded". And at that point, until a vote happens, you can't put anyone else on the block.

PROFESSOR: Oh, interesting.

AUDIENCE: So either everyone will vote and will say, OK, this person-- and a majority will result in a kill, at which point it's night instantly-- and that's that day. Or they fail to kill that person, and then people can feel free to like put up more people-- like to just point out another person which they like-- no, I'm like [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: You had your hand up.

AUDIENCE: The two most basic roles, in addition to like mafia and villager-- that I've seen in pretty much every game-- is the medic and the detective. The medic, every night, gets to point at someone, and if the mafia were trying to hit that person, that person stays alive. The detective, every night, gets to basically point at someone while everyone else is sleeping. And the moderator will either nod his head saying, yes, he's mafia or no he's not.

AUDIENCE: So I have sort of a variant of Mafia that's at MIT, mostly [INAUDIBLE] called Live Action Mafia. And the way this works is one day is one day-- so like often there's [INAUDIBLE] where like mafia lasts one [INAUDIBLE]. But in this version, the mafia can kill someone once per day by tapping them on the shoulder and saying bang. And essentially, because you obviously-- like in this game, you couldn't do this. If you're mafia, you couldn't kill someone in front of other Mafia players. Because then they will see you kill that person, and will tell everyone that you killed that person. And then you'll be lynched for it.

It's an [INAUDIBLE] game of-- often times you try to figure it as like-- people like [INAUDIBLE] so they get friends to lie for them about where they were in that location there. In one of the games recently there, someone said, oh, I was working on my lab until like 4:30 or something. And then someone found out who the partner was in that lab, emailed the partner, and the partner said they got out at 4:00. And this kill was at 4:15. That person was lynched.

And so there are a number of special rules and powers, but like [INAUDIBLE] the game, where the focus is on actually like figuring where people were like [INAUDIBLE].

PROFESSOR: One thing that I think-- one reason why that works well on the MIT campus is because it's a fairly small campus compared to other university campuses, even in Massachusetts. And even when you're off campus, you are often in close proximity to a lot of other MIT people. Do people know who else is playing in this game-- in a round of Live Action Mafia? Do you know who [INAUDIBLE]?

AUDIENCE: Occasionally there are some-- there are like [INAUDIBLE]. Like most of it's random. There's people in campus. There's always people playing at-- there's a fraternity across the river in Brookline. They're [INAUDIBLE]. And so it's when a kill happens there, and so immediately everyone's trying to figure out who was on the MIT campus. [INAUDIBLE] people are trying figure out who couldn't have gotten back there in time.

PROFESSOR: Right. That's nice because it helps you do the detective work.

AUDIENCE: I used to play, but I'm not friends with like a lot of people who are in the game. I just had a couple of friends going who always invited me to play. And so I usually get lynched pretty quickly, because because they'd just be like, we don't know this kid. So long.

AUDIENCE: My biggest problem with Mafia is like even just the like the table [INAUDIBLE] like there's like no--

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE] Mafia, if you don't know--

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: And so like what will end up happening based on the first round it like, John, you look suspicious. I think John's mafia. Everyone vote yes. And then everyone votes yes, and he dies. And he's sitting there like, I'm sorry, what?

PROFESSOR: Yeah. That's--

AUDIENCE: That's kind of how the game [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: Sorry?

AUDIENCE: I had more.

AUDIENCE: Oh, sorry.

AUDIENCE: I was going to say that a couple of interesting variants I've played with are like where you have things like the fool, where his job is to try and get killed as Mafia, or an innocent, where if the town accidentally kills them, then they just like automatically lose, and things like that.

AUDIENCE: I think the most confusing variant is the [INAUDIBLE] where they have the mafia, the medic, the detective-- then they also have, I think, the serial killer, who is supposed to be the last person standing, and then the arsonist-- I can't remember his goal. Then there was a transporter who could switch targets. You know, like if the mafia picks one person, and the transporter hasn't been picked, that other person can switch the mafia's turn. And then there was a seer who can talk to dead people.

PROFESSOR: Who specifies the roles? Is it just like a stable set of rules on an online server? Or is it like every round has this set of check boxes?

AUDIENCE: I think that how it works is that you choose what type of game that you want.

PROFESSOR: Oh, I see. So you're setting up a little lobby for this-- OK. I see. OK.

AUDIENCE: One of the funny ones that I played-- like there's one that was called Epic Mafia. It's actually like imbalance, but it's still fun. It's a crazy cop, who always-- so there's basically three cops and a mafia. And the cops don't know which cop they are. There's a crazy cop who always gets everything inverted. There's a regular cop. And then there's a cop who like always sees everything as truthful, or always sees everything innocent or everything as not-- I don't remember which.

It's actually really unfair for the mafia [INAUDIBLE] where you just like say, this is what I got. And then someone dies, and then you say this is what I got. And then, basically, you can just piece together who is lying. But it's interesting.

PROFESSOR: [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: Yeah, I was going to say. [INAUDIBLE] the game before that. There's a game where someone will swap God with one of the players. And decided to allow this to proceed.

AUDIENCE: Wait, hold on.

AUDIENCE: Did God [INAUDIBLE]?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: OK

AUDIENCE: So this person role-swaps God with one of the players.

PROFESSOR: Oh, OK.

AUDIENCE: And so the God's role became a villager. The moderator became-- it was like the moderator's role was now a villager, and like one of the random villagers-- they were all just now God.

PROFESSOR: OK.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

AUDIENCE: They're like-- Yes. And they're like this person who has now the new God made a bet with the player who was the head of the mafia that they could live until the end of game. And after it's money, like 10 different people won this thing.

AUDIENCE: So the different aggregates of roles happen more or less-- not by accident, but it's not like someone-- it's not like there are standards. It's like you get together with the group that's playing, and then you decide what goals there are. Or someone is like, oh, I thought about this beforehand, and I have some set up I think would be really cool. So my brother once put together a set up like that, which had I believe 17 people-- three of which vanilla villagers with-- I'm not sure whether it was four or five different sides.

PROFESSOR: Factions.

AUDIENCE: So there's like four or five different factions. So they were just playing like-- there's like mafia, and then there's like werewolves, which are identical to the mafia, and also get a kill at night. And then there's the serial killer, who's bulletproof, so he can't get killed at night. And he was also a separate faction trying to kill everyone else. And then there's the vigilante, who's like a good guy who also gets a kill at night. And so this game, it was actually, surprisingly, very good. Because everyone basically had a role, so no one was unhappy about that. And everyone more or less tried-- and the game is quick, because even though it's 17 people, you've got like four or five people dying every round for the first couple of rounds.

PROFESSOR: I'm trying to figure out why there are so many variants on Mafia. There's something about Mafia or Werewolf-- or any of the names that people use-- that seems to lend itself to people coming up with new variants and then adopting it. I mean, clearly it makes sense for-- you need to be able to have a large group of people agree on the roles before it starts. So I'm not so confused about that. I'm wondering why Mafia--

AUDIENCE: I think, one, it's really fast to play through, which makes it very easy to playtest. And then, two, it's also just really, really easy to extend. You could always make your own role, but you honestly don't need to. There's at least a hundred different roles. You could just like eenie-meenie-miney-mo and like aggregate into a game.

PROFESSOR: All right.

AUDIENCE: I was going to say that it's sort of boring for the villagers that they're just getting kicked out one by one.

PROFESSOR: So there's a flaw in the game that every one of these variants is trying to address, which is making things a little bit more interesting for the poor villagers. And that's, I think-- the fact that it's very clear that all the rules are just imposed by the people in the room-- definitely that's a Mafia tournament as far as I know. I guess we could have Mafia tournaments spring up in the middle of conventions and stuff like that. But they don't seem to last very long. It's hard to imagine a version of Mafia where you are in direct contact with the person who established the rules for the round that you're playing right now. So it's very easy to just think that there's no canonical set of rules.

AUDIENCE: I was just reminded of some things. There was one time where there was a game of Mafia where God failed to give out any Mafia cards.

PROFESSOR: Oh.

AUDIENCE: Like, he cheated, as far as that goes. And so god chose someone to kill every night, and pretended that there was a mafia doing. And so the group started as probably around 12 people. And at around five people, they were like, OK, this is impossible-- as in, the previous [INAUDIBLE] they were like, OK, if this happens then blah. And if this happens, then blah. And then they killed someone, and that person was innocent, even though they had to be guilty in order for it to make sense. But they were like, what's going on?

PROFESSOR: I don't know. I think that's the sort of cheating that we'll need to go to actually describing. Maybe we should try that once in a while.

AUDIENCE: You know, they were like pretty mad at the person.

PROFESSOR: I can imagine. I can imagine. Yeah, yeah. Maybe that's the counter argument.

AUDIENCE: You are never god again.

AUDIENCE: So I don't actually know what the game is called, but we call it spies. It's basically there's a certain number of spies, and a certain number of resistance players. It's very similar to Mafia.

AUDIENCE: Resistance.

AUDIENCE: Oh, Resistance? OK.

PROFESSOR: So this is a Mafia type game, yeah.

AUDIENCE: It's called Spies. It's like the opposite. It's very similar to Mafia, except that you have to have a certain number of missions by putting people on missions. And the spies try to fail them, and the resistance is trying to pass them. And we did something very similar to that, where we had-- one of our friends left the room for a minute. And we go, OK guys, next round we're all spies. And we came up with like pecking order for who does what at what time. And we all tried to like blame one kid for being the spy the entire time. Then, at the end, we finally managed to get to the point where everyone had voted for the only person that was not the spy to be the spy. We basically just messed the game up to try and like execute him and have fun with it.

PROFESSOR: Right.

AUDIENCE: But it kind of relates to that point of taking the rules and--

PROFESSOR: And Resistance is a little bit easier to identify that there is actually a set of rules. Because Resistance is a boxed product with a rulebook in it-- unlike a lot of other games of Mafia, where you kind of think things are pretty malleable.

I do want to move on to something else. But before I get to Lockup, a couple of questions. If you have a smartphone, try downloading this. I think it's free on both the Android and the app store, because we're going to play a couple of rounds of this-- if the Wi-Fi works in this room. Which it may not.

AUDIENCE: I really like Resistance, because there's actual public information which you need. It's not just, John's guilty. He's dead now. Right?

PROFESSOR: You don't just start the game by making stuff up.

AUDIENCE: Yeah.

PROFESSOR: Now, anybody who doesn't have a smartphone, you're welcome to use mine. Who would like to?

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: Yeah, go ahead.

AUDIENCE: But yes, I have a chart of Resistance games.

AUDIENCE: Wait, am I the only one who has [INAUDIBLE]?

PROFESSOR: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: You could play [INAUDIBLE].

AUDIENCE: You can [INAUDIBLE]

PROFESSOR: Although, actually, I'm going to get my iPad. I'll [INAUDIBLE].

[SIDE CONVERSATION]

PROFESSOR: OK. Yeah, SpaceTeam is a game that I want to give a try. And we'll see if it works. If you are surrounded with people who have like the same kind of phone as yours-- like Android and iOS are two separate things-- you can attempt to do it over Google.

AUDIENCE: There's some way you can play them--

AUDIENCE: I'm not on the Wi-Fi right now.

AUDIENCE: You can play Android and iPhone together.

AUDIENCE: Over Wi-Fi. If Wi-Fi works in this room.

AUDIENCE: I have Wi-Fi.

[SIDE CONVERSATION]