



## Dimma Davidoff: THE ORIGINAL MAFIA RULES

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Thanks to Azin Feizabadi, who first introduced us to the game.

Cover image: Royal Canadian Legion, Banff, Alberta, Canada.  
Photograph by Benjamin Tiven, 2011

## HISTORY

My name is Dimma Davidoff, I am the inventor of the original Mafia game.\* The game was created in 1986 in Moscow, Russia and quickly spread all over the world. Players made many additional modifications of the game rules, but the basic principle (informed minority vs. uninformed majority) is still intact. Below, you can find the original rules of Mafia, which, in my creator's opinion, are the most simple, effective, and fun. If you have any questions or comments, please email to me [ddavidoff@hotmail.com](mailto:ddavidoff@hotmail.com).

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## GAME CORE

Welcome to Mafia, a rite-playing game in which players become characters suspected in having Mafia connections. Two teams: the Honest and the Mafia will compete against each other. For the Honest team players, the task is to stop Mafia before it eliminates them. Mafia members have to hide their identity and pose as Honest players in order to manipulate the other team players towards self-destruction. It is in each player's best interest to prove his or her innocence (or if you are a Mafia member, to hide your guilt) by accusing and interrogating their fellow suspects, until all members of the opposing team are eliminated from the game.

## PRE-GAME INSTRUCTIONS

Prepare a deck of cards, paper, pencils and at least six players. When all players have assembled, count how many people are in. From the deck, take as many cards as there are players according to the following list:

6–7 players: 2 black cards + others red / 8–10 players: 3 black cards + others red / 11–13 players: 4 black cards + others red / 14–16 players: 5 black cards + others red

Inform the players of the number of the black cards included.

## GAME SCHEDULE

**Sunrise Phase:** First step is to divide the players into two teams. Each player gets one card from the prepared and shuffled deck, secretly looks at the card's color and returns the card to the deck. Then everybody closes their eyes and lowers their heads. Someone starts counting aloud (usually the person who dealt the cards). After number 5, s/he continues to count silently until 15, then s/he resumes counting aloud until 20. During the silent period, the players who got black cards, should open their eyes, raise their heads, and look at each other, then close their eyes and lower their heads again. On count 20, everybody should open their eyes. Now, all players are divided into two teams. Mafia are the players who saw each other and therefore know each other. Honest people are the players who saw nothing, don't know each other, and don't know who the Mafia members are. This is the only advantage of Mafia: they know each other. Honest players have to suspect everybody, but they have an advantage of being the majority. The main struggle during the next phase will be between the informed minority and the uninformed majority.

**Day Phase: Talk ...** At any moment, any player may put another player in the "suspected to be the Mafia" position. S/he should (better) provide grounds for the suggestion. Everyone (including the accused) has a right to argue. But when the accuser asks to vote, everyone should vote by raising their hands. If the majority of the players (not counting the accused) votes for "Guilty as member of the Mafia," the suspected player is "sentenced to death" and s/he is out of the game until the end of the round. If the accuser fails to get the majority on her/his side, the game continues with the same number of players. Accusations may happen any number of times during the discussion. Players who are eliminated from the game do not reveal their identity until the end of the game and should not try to help others who are still in the game. There is no way to know the team identity of the "dead" unless you have the next phase.

**Night Phase:** This is the only phase when you can find out if all Mafia members have been eliminated. So, once in a while, someone should propose to have a "Mafia Night." If the majority of the players who are still in the game agrees, the Night begins. Everyone takes a pencil and a piece of

paper, and secretly writes on it. Honest people must write “honest” on the note, while members of the Mafia must write the name of the person, whom they want to eliminate from the game. After that, everybody puts their notes in the middle and someone reads them. The number of the notes with the names will reflect the number of survived Mafia members, so the players will know if they have “killed” an Honest person or a Mafia member during the day. If the same name appears on all Mafia notes, the named person is “murdered” and is out of the game until the end of the round. In any other case, the named players survive the Mafia attack and the game continues with the same number of players.

For example, if three members of the Mafia are in the game, there should be three notes with names on them. Only if all three notes have the same name, that person is “murdered.” If only one member of Mafia is still in the game, her/his single shot will be enough to eliminate somebody.

The game ends when there are no shots during Mafia Night or all Honest people have been eliminated. Start again.

## POINTERS FOR THE BEGINNERS

1. Players are free to introduce new procedures during the game, but no one has to follow them unless s/he finds their usage at that moment reasonable.
2. Accidental or purposeful peeking by red card holders during the Sunrise Phase should be discouraged, however it will not give any advantage during the game. The trick of the game is always to persuade others to accept your knowledge and never to have the knowledge per se. By the way, this is the reason for my reservations about including different knowledge bearing characters (inspector, angel, seer). The only knowledge in the game is Mafia connections, everything else is artificial.
3. Paper and pencils should be the same for everybody. Otherwise, it will be easy to find who have written what during the Mafia Night.
4. For a new group, unless a clear leader emerges, the first round may

be a little slow. In the second round people who were unjustly eliminated have enough drive to prevent it from happening again. The third game is great without any reservations. If a group has someone who played before, s/he should provide initial leadership from the beginning.

## SCORING

If Mafia wins, each surviving Mafia player receives a number of points equal to the initial number of the Honest players. If Honest wins, every Honest player receives a number of points equal to the number of surviving Honest players.

\* In his autobiographical account of growing up in Manhattan, *Through the Children's Gate* (New York: Knopf, 2006), Adam Gopnik recounts a spate of evenings spent with friends eating Chinese takeout and playing The Mafia Game:

“The game demonstrates the many and pressing kinds of double-bind logic that fill a social group if its members suspect there are enemies within it. If you are in the Mafia, you have to kill all the people who correctly suspect that you are, but you can't be too obvious that the people being killed are the ones who suspect you, since that would confirm the truth of their suspicions. If you are a villager [called “honest” in the original version] you have to share information with the others in order to persuade them to vote the right way, but you can't share too much information, since some of the villagers with whom you're cooperating are certainly mafia.”

He goes on:

“The ostensible pleasure of the game lies in testing your own skills as a dissembler and as a spotter of dissemblers—in lying and spotting liars. Both eager cooperation and absolute paranoia are essential to the strategic game. Yet the really fascinating thing about Mafia is seeing how much pure irrationality lingers in its play, how little real deduction and how much sheer panic govern its conduct. The game quickly breaks down, as social groups will, into small circles of belief, which become lynch mobs of distrust on the next turn.”

Over the past couple of decades, the contemporary French sociologist Bruno Latour has propagated a distinction between “matters of fact” and “matters of concern.” Fundamentally, Latour is out to demolish the bedrock faith in scientifically-proven

“facts” constituent of Modern-era, Enlightenment-founded thinking. Because scientific assertions are based on experiments performed IN A VACUUM (both literally and metaphorically), he argues that while useful for debunking all manner of long-held myths, their “truth” is ultimately a distortion of reality, too.

In other words, facts are fundamentally flawed precisely because they are conceived in detached and autonomous circumstances. As such, they remain a pernicious means of perceiving, and so dealing with, the world. Latour calls instead for the facility to grasp not isolated objects but interconnected THINGS—the constantly shifting scenographies of interests, accidents, contradictions, conspiracies, changes in fortune, allegiance, currency, weather, and so on. And while, amid the ever-increasing prevalence and visibility of networks, we are surely becoming better at apprehending these relations—and their knock-on effects—and the effects of those effects—he maintains that our ways of looking are still way too grounded in the old mode.

In one particular talk titled *A Cautious Prometheus* (2008), Latour notes how the fallacy of facts is reflected in the old models of modeling, from architectural renderings and mechanical blueprints to scale models and prototypes, from perspective drawing and projective geometry to Computer-Aided Design and Google Maps. In their various distillations, flattenings, and abstractions, all bear a marked lack of resemblance to the phenomena they purport to represent. These simulations, or “gatherings” are less utopian, claims Latour, than simply atopic. Hence his persistent call for new ways of \*drawing things together\*—making things public not from a resolutely objective, external point of view, but from within and while going with the flow.

Here, then, the mundane Mafia Game is offered as a simple, precarious, and not altogether serious means to set up a different kind of vantage. Contrary to the usual omniscience of the bird’s- or God’s-eye view common to the modeling techniques listed above, when called upon to play either Honest or Mafioso, your perspective of the whole encounter is always from within, as an invested PLAYER. An advocate of what is gaining popular ground as “object-oriented philosophy,” Latour often speaks of ostensibly inert phenomena in terms of fully-loaded “betting” and “gambling” “agents” and “actors.” Little surprise, then, that easy-assembly role-play seems an appropriate format to witness how a given situation’s “object” plays out (or perhaps orients itself).

Crucially, the game’s short-lived alliances, enmities, suspicions, accusations, and protests assemble and collapse not only within a single round or single game, but with exponential complexity from one game to the next, and from one day or week to the next. When a recurring group of players become acquainted with both each other and the game, and as burgeoning realworld relationships overflow into the fictional scenography, negotiations become

perceptibly contaminated and, naturally enough, entropic. As the game's founder Dimma Davidoff, who first developed the game as a perfectly serious academic psycho-sociological experiment, proclaims, "The third game is great." Beyond that, who knows?

Davidoff further asserts the enigmatic and wholly Latourian injunction that "Players are free to introduce new procedures during the game, but no one has to follow them unless s/he finds their usage at that moment reasonable." Such chronic, baffling contingency sounds a lot like that recounted by Latour in his summary of "The Year in Climate Controversy" for *Artforum* in December 2010:

"... of course, there is no single institution able to cover, oversee, dominate, manage, handle, or simply trace an issue of such shape and scope. Even a summit of all the nations of the earth, preceded by the most strident media campaigns, could not digest an issue so intractable and so enmeshed in contradictory interests as this one ... myriad changes at all levels of existence, from cars to clothes, from architecture to industry, from agriculture to sewage. How could we imagine a global agreement amid so many entangled interests?"

With this in mind, potential players are pointed in the direction of Wikipedia's *Mafia (party game)* page to witness the extent of supplementary roles that have been added to the game's countless commercial and hobbyist adaptations over the past couple of decades. Examples include the Teenage Werewolf who must say the word "werewolf" at least once each round, the Dentist who may select any other player at night and remove all of their teeth to prevent them speaking during the following day, and the Village Idiot whose only objective is to convince the rest of the town to kill him. Davidoff dismisses such additions as superfluous, merely distracting from the game's basic coefficient: "The only knowledge in the game is Mafia connections, everything else is artificial." And yet Latour would surely counter that an altogether artificial game is entirely appropriate these days; in fact, implies a whole other scenario in which the redesign of the game—and the ability to observe the consequences of that redesign as and when they happen—and to respond to those consequences in situ—becomes the game itself: The New Mafia Rules.

During the week beginning 18 July 2011, for instance, we introduced our own new character, a "Rupert Murdoch" who, in addition to his/her initial designation as Honest or Mafioso, is also privy to the nightly carnage. First thing next morning, Murdoch is required to deliver a report to the whole community, the veracity of which depends entirely on his/her daily discretion and/or whim. Ultimately and uniquely, Murdoch's aim is neither to eliminate nor safeguard the rest of the players, only to perpetuate the game—and his or her presence in it—for as long as is practicably possible.

(Stuart Bailey)