

Shadows of the City - Games and Play Documentation

Group Members: Hamdah AlSuwaidi (hja3557@nyu.edu), Khaleeqa Aasiyah Garrett (kag9691@nyu.edu), Shereena AlNuaimi (sa6607@nyu.edu), Janindu Nanayakkara (jn3303@nyu.edu)

1. Project Description:

The overarching theme of the game revolves around survival and shaping one's environment through teamwork, but it also incorporates deception as a core gameplay element. This dual focus on cooperation and deception adds layers of complexity and strategy, reflecting how collaboration and trust can coexist with hidden motives and trickery.

Our interpretation of the theme centers on the idea that survival and success in any environment, whether real or fictional, requires not only cooperation but also the ability to navigate deception. In designing the game, we wanted to emphasize how teamwork can be both strengthened and tested by deceitful actions and hidden agendas. Players must work together to achieve common goals while staying alert to the possibility of betrayal from within their ranks.

Drawing inspiration from Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle's MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), we structured the game environment around four primary player roles and two player types. The Mafia player, acting as a "killer," introduces the element of deception, secretly working against the group. The moderator oversees the game mechanics, ensuring fair play, while the remaining players, Citizens and Detectives, are socializers and achievers who must collaborate to complete tasks and uncover the identity of the Mafia player. Cooperative play is at the heart of the game, where Citizens, the Doctor, and the Detective must unite to identify and eliminate the Mafia members while also fulfilling game objectives. However, the Mafia's hidden role adds a layer of mistrust, as players must decide who they can trust while working toward common goals. This tension between cooperation and deception requires players to think critically and use social manipulation to their advantage.

The night phase introduces a player versus system dynamic, where individual players, interacting with the moderator, make secretive decisions such as eliminating other players. This phase amplifies the theme of deception, as players' actions remain hidden from the group, raising the stakes and creating uncertainty.

2. Process and Implementation:

To decide on the final gameplay, we began by brainstorming the core concept as a team. Everyone contributed ideas, and we quickly agreed that we wanted to create a game that would reflect the challenges and collaboration dynamics of working on group projects. Drawing inspiration from Mafia and Among Us games, we decided to incorporate elements of deception, teamwork, and strategic thinking.

Once the basic concept was decided, each team member took on specific tasks to bring the game to life. Khaleeqa focused on designing the board and creating the rulebook. The board design was a critical part of the gameplay, so she carefully chose a hexagonal layout that would allow for dynamic movement and strategic positioning. The rulebook also needed to clearly outline the game's mechanics, from the voting system to the influence token mechanics, ensuring the game was easy to understand and fair.

Janindu and Hamda worked together on the action cards, which introduced various tasks and challenges players would face. These cards were essential in shaping the flow of the game, providing players with opportunities to make critical decisions during gameplay. Janindu's input was crucial in structuring the actions, while Hamda helped refine the balance of the cards to ensure they didn't overpower the players or disrupt the gameplay.

Hamda and Shreen took on the design of the action and character cards. The character cards, which represented roles such as the mafia, detective, and doctor, were carefully crafted to reflect the unique abilities and strategic importance of each role. Hamda's design skills ensured that these cards were not only functional but also visually appealing and easy to understand at a glance.

Shreen was responsible for designing the box, creating an attractive and functional way to store all the game components. The box was designed to match the theme of the game and make it easy for players to organize the different pieces, such as cards and tokens.

Throughout the process, we collaborated closely to ensure that all the elements of the game worked together seamlessly. We held regular meetings to discuss progress and make sure

everyone was on the same page. As we tested the game and refined the mechanics, we made adjustments based on feedback from playtesting to ensure the game was both fun and challenging.

For the game design, we focused on promoting player interaction and cooperation. A voting system was implemented to allow players to make decisions together, such as accusing or defending others, which encouraged constant communication and teamwork. The game was structured into day and night phases: the day phase focused on open discussion and voting, while the night phase introduced uncertainty, allowing players, especially the mafia, to act secretly.

To balance power dynamics, we created distinct roles, mafia, detective, citizens, and doctor, each with unique abilities that influenced the game's outcome. These roles required strategic collaboration and prevented any one role from dominating the game.

We introduced influence tokens to regulate actions like accusations and votes, ensuring that players used them wisely and responsibly. This added a layer of accountability to the gameplay.

The final game space featured a hexagonal board, allowing flexible movement and strategic positioning. This layout promoted exploration and interaction, encouraging players to engage with different districts and make decisions based on their positions within the game.

3. *Playtest Assessment:*

After the first iteration of the game was produced the group playtested the concept and made tweaks over each iteration to the flow of the game.

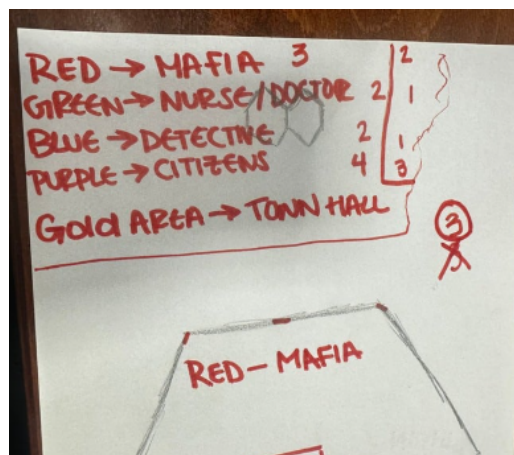


Fig 1: initial ideation of the concept and theme of the game

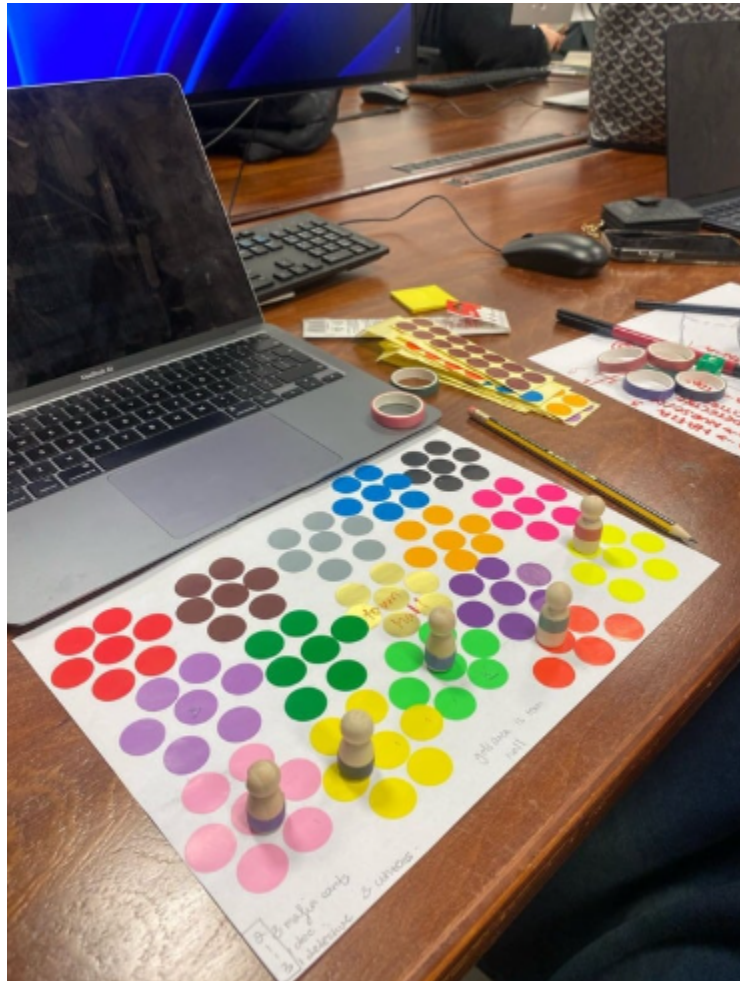


Fig 2: first iteration of the game concept on a playable surface

Then we tested the game amongst peers before producing a working paper prototype.

After a paper prototype was produced we put this to test in class amongst our classmates, where the availability of a large group of playtesters enabled us to find valuable insights as to how dynamic the mechanisms were and also in determining an ideal number of participants for the best flow of the game. "Feedback from playtesting revealed that the tension during the accusation phase was a particular highlight; one participant commented, 'The debates were intense and every vote felt critical,' confirming that the game's design effectively evokes

emotional engagement. Survey responses showed that approximately 85% of players felt the balance between teamwork and deception was well executed, reinforcing the game's intended meaningful play. Additionally, several players suggested that providing more concrete examples during the final scoring phase would enhance clarity—a recommendation we have since incorporated into our revised rulebook."

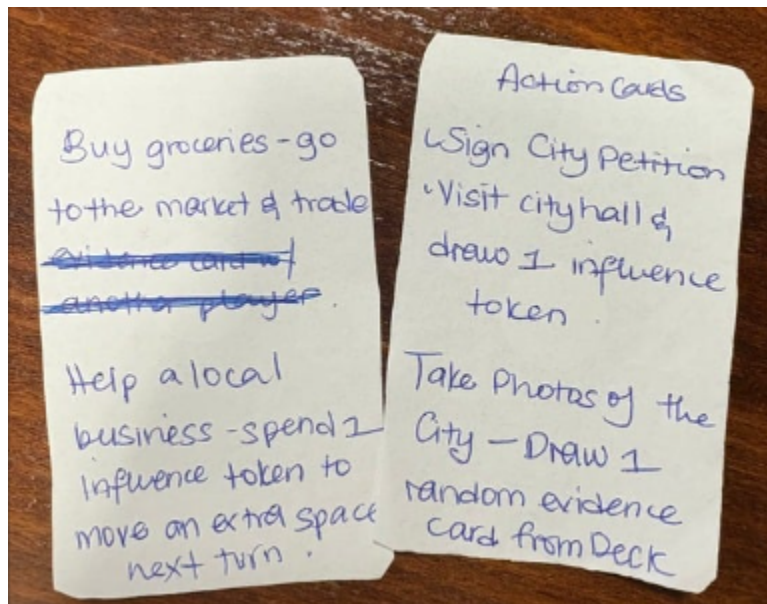


Fig 3: Action cards during paper prototype phase

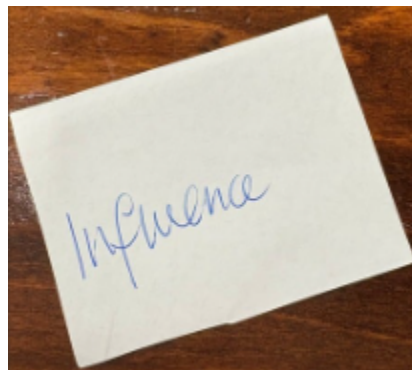


Fig 4: Influence tokens during the paper prototype phase

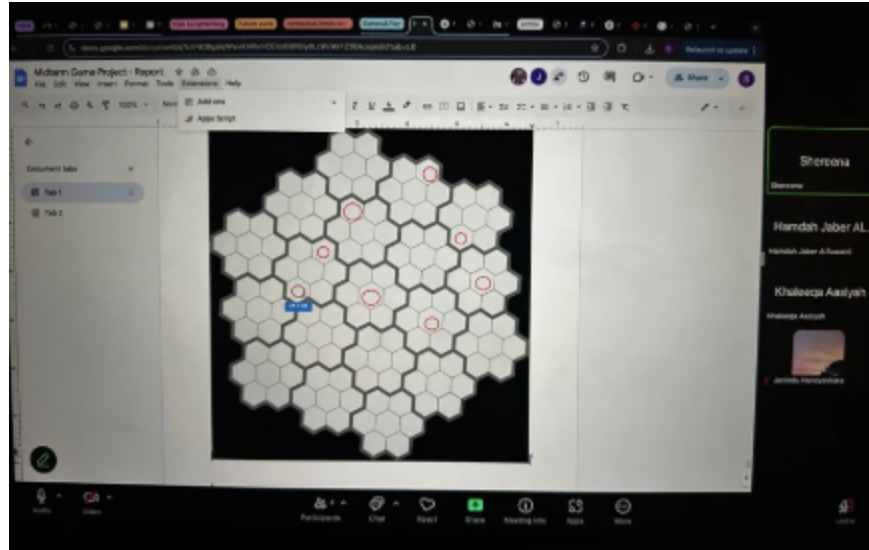


Fig 5: Online zoom meeting to finalise the board design and movement ruleset



Fig 6: paper prototype of the game

During the play test sessions we sought active feedback from the participants verbally and also through the playtest questionnaire. We ran Shadows of the City through several playtest sessions with different player counts and group dynamics. The playtests revealed some fascinating insights about our game, and we made the following improvements:

First off, the most intense moments consistently happened during accusations. Players got seriously invested in these confrontations, leaning forward, gesturing emphatically, and making passionate cases for why someone must be Mafia. These moments created the exact tension and excitement we were aiming for.

We also noticed the Detective role needed balancing. In early tests, the Detective was getting eliminated too quickly, which threw off the game balance. We adjusted by making Mafia players work harder to identify the Detective, which created more suspense and gave the Detective player more agency, also implementing the rule whereby they would be eliminated if they accuse a player wrongly.

Another insight was how much the physical board layout affected strategy. Players instinctively created "safe zones" where citizens would cluster, making it harder for Mafia to operate undetected. To avoid this we changed the layout of the board to facilitate a map-like structure that still kept the initial hexagonal shape of the districts. Communication patterns were particularly interesting - we observed how players' speaking styles and eye contact changed when they were assigned Mafia roles versus Citizen roles. This natural human behavior became a key part of the deduction process. The task completion mechanism proved effective at forcing player movement and creating opportunities for observation, though we tweaked the reward structure to better incentivize completing tasks over just making accusations.

Below, you can find the final outcome of our game:



Fig 7: Final Playing board, pieces and card design

4. Reflections and Evaluation:

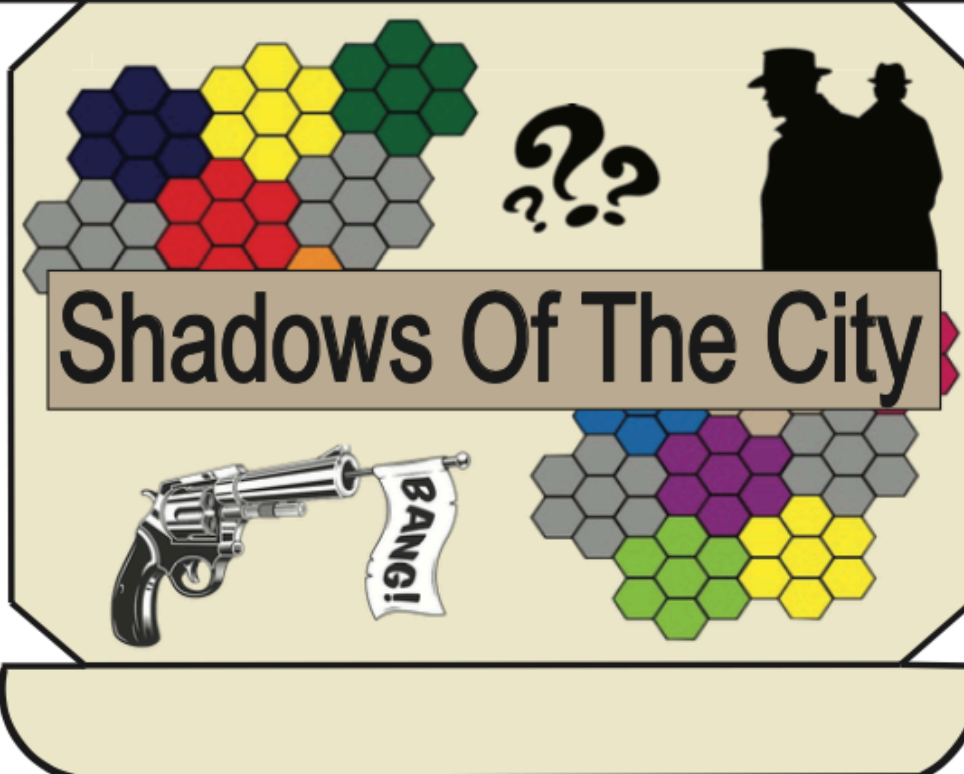
In building the final version of the game, we aimed to create a balance between teamwork, strategy, and deception, with the goal of fostering cooperation while introducing tension through hidden motives. Our expectations and goals for the game evolved over time through the iterative design and playtesting process. Initially, we set out to create a game that not only promoted teamwork but also simulated the challenges of working within a group where there might be hidden agendas or conflict. As we tested the game, it became clear that the balance between cooperation and deception needed to be refined, and we adjusted the mechanics accordingly.

The original concept was to create a game that would be engaging, interactive, and filled with moments of tension, especially around the accusation phase. The feedback from playtesting confirmed that these elements worked well, as players became deeply involved in the accusations and strategic decision-making. The addition of influence tokens and role-based abilities helped create a dynamic where players needed to collaborate while also protecting their individual interests, which aligned with our theme of survival and teamwork.

However, we encountered challenges in balancing certain aspects, such as the Detective role, which was often eliminated too early, and the physical layout of the board, which required adjustments to ensure fair play. These insights, gained from both internal testing and playtests with external groups, led to valuable refinements, ultimately making the game more engaging and well-paced.

The game's final version met our expectations in terms of player engagement, tension, and strategic depth. The incorporation of deception and collaboration allowed us to meet our design goals, and the playtests validated that the mechanics were successful in promoting communication, teamwork, and strategic thinking. The iterative process of designing and testing the game allowed us to refine the mechanics and ensure that they aligned with our original vision while also enhancing the overall player experience. We also decided to package the game in a box design as seen before to give players a more fulfilling gaming experience.

Games & Play Fall 2025



In summary, while there were adjustments to be made along the way, the final product successfully conveyed the intended theme of survival and environment-building through teamwork and deception, delivering a challenging and immersive experience that players enjoyed.

5. *Game as Meaningful Play*: Briefly discuss how your game expresses the intended meaning through gameplay and whether there were any metaphors in mind in the design process. This should include playtest feedback which may or may not, in varying degrees, align with your original intentions.

Our game was designed to express several meaningful concepts through its gameplay, with a focus on societal ideals and sustainability. During the design process, we drew inspiration from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), particularly Goals 3, 6, 9, 10, and 12, which address health, clean water, infrastructure, reduced inequalities, and responsible consumption. Positive reinforcement in the game, such as awarding influence tokens and extra moves, was tied to actions that support these goals. For example, action cards like “Help the Elderly – Go to Elder's home, gain 1 influence token” and “Pay Parking Fees – Visit the Bank and pay 1 Influence token” reflect these UNSDGs by encouraging players to engage in beneficial behaviors, reinforcing the idea that positive actions lead to rewards.

The game also employed metaphors to deepen the player's experience. The concept of teamwork was central to the gameplay, with the metaphor being that only by trusting and collaborating as a group could players complete their tasks and succeed. This reflects the value of teamwork in achieving larger goals, both in the game and in real life.

Influence tokens serve as a metaphor for power and resources, where the more tokens a player has, the more influence they can exert, such as making accusations or guiding the direction of the game. This mirrors real-world dynamics where access to resources often translates to increased influence and authority.

The actions depicted on the action cards also carry metaphoric meaning. Positive actions, like helping the elderly or cleaning the city, reward players with influence tokens, reinforcing the idea

that good deeds are acknowledged and rewarded. These actions encourage players to think about the societal impact of their decisions, even in a game setting.

The dice roll and board design were intended to represent the role of luck and chance in everyday life. Just as players rely on the dice for movement, they must adapt their strategies based on the luck of the roll, simulating how life often requires flexibility and adaptability in the face of uncertainty.

Finally, the voting system, particularly the process of voting out the mafia, symbolizes the power of collective decision-making and social skills. It highlights how consensus and group dynamics can lead to identifying the "enemy" (mafia) and removing them from the game, reinforcing the idea that cooperation and communication are vital in achieving shared goals.

Appendix

Appendix : Rule book

SHADOWS OF THE CITY

A Strategic Board Game of Deception

A game of mystery, deduction and betrayal for 7-10 players

Playing time: 45-60 minutes

GAME OVERVIEW

In Shadows of the City, players take on hidden roles in a city gripped by conflict between its citizens and the infiltrating mafia. Citizens must work together to complete tasks and identify the mafia, while mafia members secretly work to eliminate key citizens and take control of the city.

COMPONENTS

- 1 hexagonal game board featuring:
 - 1 Town Hall (central gold area)
 - 18 surrounding District hexes
- 11 Character cards:
 - Mafia members
 - Citizens
 - Detective
 - Doctor
 - Moderator
- 20 Action cards (with 2 tasks per card)
- Player pawns (1 per player)
- 1 six-sided die
- Influence tokens

GAME SETUP

1. Place the game board in the center of the table.

2. Shuffle and distribute Character cards based on player count:
 - 7 players: 1 Mafia, 3 Citizens, 1 Detective, 1 Doctor + 1 Moderator
 - 9 players: 2 Mafia, 4 Citizens, 1 Detective, 1 Doctor + 1 Moderator
3. Each player receives:
 - 2 Influence tokens
 - 2 Action cards (each containing 2 tasks)
 - 1 colored pawn
4. All players place their pawns in the Town Hall (central gold area).
5. Set the round to "Day" to begin the game.

CHARACTER ROLES

Mafia

- Goal: Eliminate the Detective and outnumber the citizens
- Special ability: Can eliminate players during the Night phase

Citizens

- Goal: Correctly identify and eliminate all Mafia members
- Special ability: None, but strength in numbers!

Detective

- Goal: Same as Citizens
- Special ability: Can investigate and eliminate one player each Night phase, but risks elimination if wrong

Doctor

- Goal: Same as Citizens
- Special ability: Can protect one player each Night phase

Moderator

- Not a player role but a game facilitator
- Manages the Night phase
- Oversees accusations and voting

GAME FLOW

The game alternates between Day and Night phases.

Day Phase

During the Day phase, players take turns in clockwise order:

1. On your turn, roll the die to see how many spaces you can move.
2. Look at your action cards to see where you need to move on the board.
3. Move your pawn through connected districts toward the district on your action card.
4. Multiple players can occupy the same district
5. Complete tasks from your Action cards to gain influence tokens.
6. Make accusations (optional, costs 2 Influence tokens)
7. You cannot move through eliminated players' pawns

Tasks

- Each Action card contains 2 tasks
- All Action cards should be **HIDDEN** to all players
- To complete a task, move to the specified district and land on the icon.
- When you complete all tasks on a card, gain 1 Influence token
- Mafia players should pretend to complete tasks but don't actually have to (you won't know anyway, their action cards are hidden!)

Accusations

To accuse another player of being Mafia:

1. You must be in the same district as the player you wish to accuse
2. Pay 2 Influence tokens
3. The Moderator announces: "[Player name] wants to accuse someone"
4. You state your accusation
5. All players (except the accused) vote on whether they agree
6. If the majority agrees:
 - The accused reveals their Character card
 - If they are Mafia, the accuser gains 2 Influence tokens
 - If they are Citizen/Detective/Doctor, the accuser loses their next turn.
7. The eliminated player's pawn remains on the board as an obstacle

Night Phase

When the Day phase ends,(all players have successfully moved in the round) the Night phase begins:

1. The Moderator announces "Night falls, everyone close your eyes."
2. All players must close their eyes.
3. Mafia turn:
 - The Moderator says "Mafia, open your eyes."
 - Mafia members silently identify each other
 - The Moderator asks "Mafia, choose someone to eliminate."
 - Mafia members silently agree on a player to eliminate
 - The Moderator says "Mafia, close your eyes."
4. Doctor turn:
 - The Moderator says "Doctor, open your eyes."
 - The Moderator asks "Doctor, choose someone to protect."
 - The Doctor points to a player they wish to protect
 - The Moderator says "Doctor, close your eyes."
5. Detective turn:

- The Moderator says "Detective, open your eyes."
 - The Moderator asks "Detective, do you wish to investigate anyone?"
 - If the Detective wishes to investigate, they tap the suspect on the shoulder
 - If the suspect is Mafia, the Moderator nods; if not, the Detective is eliminated instead
 - The Moderator says "Detective, close your eyes."
6. The Moderator announces "Everyone wakes|up, it's daytime."
 7. The Moderator announces any eliminations that occurred during the night.
 8. If a player was both targeted by the Mafia and protected by the Doctor, they survive.

ELIMINATED PLAYERS

If a player was eliminated:

1. They can be revived by another citizen paying 3 influence tokens for their lives. (Remember you can only make accusations by paying 2 influence tokens!, are they worth it?)

If no one pays, they remain eliminated and:

2. Their pawn remains on the board as an obstacle - this means other players can't move through the space where the eliminated player's pawn is located
3. They must reveal their role card to all players - showing whether they were Mafia, Citizen, Detective, or Doctor
4. They are out of the game and can no longer participate in gameplay, voting, or night phase activities

INFLUENCE TOKENS

- Each player starts with 2 Influence tokens
- Tokens can be gained by:
 - Completing all tasks on an Action card (+1 token)

- Successfully accusing a Mafia member (+2 tokens)
- Tokens can be spent to:
 - Make an accusation (costs 2 tokens)
 - Save an eliminated player (-3 tokens)
- Tokens can be lost by:
 - Falsely accusing a Citizen/Detective/Doctor (-1 token)

VICTORY CONDITIONS

Mafia Wins If:

- They eliminate the Detective AND have more living Mafia members than Citizens/Detective/Doctor combined

Citizens Win If:

- They eliminate all Mafia members
- All the actions in the action cards have been completed and the action cards deck has been depleted

TIPS FOR PLAYERS

- **Citizens:** Pay attention to who is actually completing tasks versus who is just moving around
- **Mafia:** Pretend to complete tasks and blend in with citizens
- **Detective:** Use your investigation ability wisely, as a wrong guess is fatal
- **Doctor:** Try to protect players who seem to be contributing the most without revealing your identity
- **Everyone:** The game is built on mistrust and deceit. Don't get caught!

Appendix 2: final board design and card designs in full

