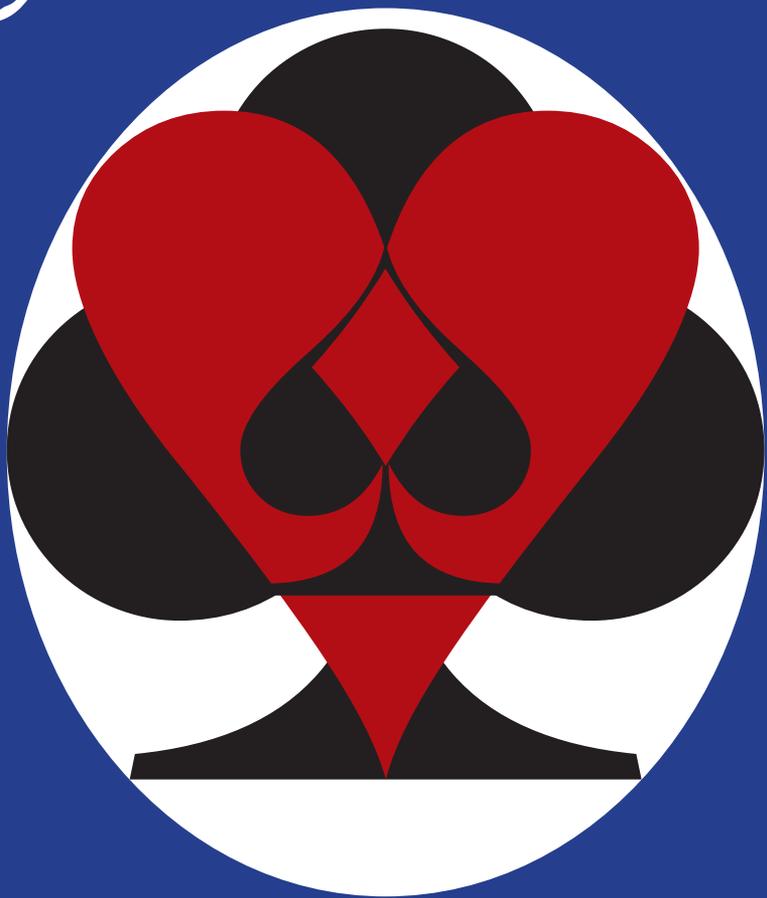


SECRET ANTE



by Aaron Vanek

Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul.

-Thomas Merton

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Secret Ante

by Aaron Vanek

Layout, design, and cover by Kirsten Hageleit

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SUMMARY

The original title of this larp was “Soul Strip Poker,” but wiser heads persuaded me to rename it for my educational larp charity. Minors should not be exposed to the words “Strip Poker.” Nevertheless, the original title is apropos.

Secret Ante investigates what it means to be a character, perhaps even a person, through a modified version of the classic strip poker game. Instead of taking off clothing and baring our skin, we bare our souls. This is not a complex larp, but it may be a difficult one. It shouldn't be traumatic—it's not intended to be, anyway. This experience could be quite enjoyable. It will be revealing, no matter what. It can be used as an introduction to the character-making aspect of larping, a standalone adventure with goals, or an exercise that is part of a larger work, such as a pre-larp workshop.

For 5-20 players

If there are more than seven players, break into groups to different tables. There should be no more than seven and no fewer than four at any one table. Players must be mature adults; trust is a key factor, as very personal secrets may be revealed.

Requirements

- ◆ Set up enough tables and chairs for everyone inside **one quiet room**. If enough are not available, everyone plays on the floor.
- ◆ Provide at least one **regular deck of playing cards (including two Jokers)** for each group.
- ◆ Please have a stack of **blank white paper**, at least three sheets per player.
- ◆ Ensure that there are enough **working pens or pencils** for everyone.
- ◆ **There is no GM.**
- ◆ Everyone should read or have this document read and explained to them.
- ◆ Everyone in the room will be expected to participate.

Timing

Allow approximately:

45 minutes of preparation

75 minutes of poker playing

75 minutes of cashing in chips

45 minutes of debriefing

You are free to adjust these durations as you must, but don't skip any section and don't reduce any time by more than 15 minutes.

Rules

- ♦ Players are ***not allowed to physically touch any other players*** at all during this larp.
- ♦ ***Turn off electronic devices*** so they will not distract you.
- ♦ Make a concerted effort to ***use the restroom, get a snack or a smoke before beginning***, so there will be no reason to step out of the room.
- ♦ ***Any intimate knowledge gained in Secret Ante remains with the players. Don't gossip.***

Setting

You are in Purgatory, the waiting room before Heaven. It looks exactly like the room you are in. There are tables and chairs, enough for all. It is quiet except for the noise you make. There doesn't seem to be anything outside this room; however, if you leave for any reason, you may notice a corridor, other rooms, and other people. You can interact with them as you wish. But when you are back in this room, it seems like they weren't there. Did you just imagine them, or did someone imagine them for you?

There doesn't seem to be anything to do here except play poker. You have no objects to wager, but you do have your souls.

PREPARATION

Part I

To prepare for this larp, all participants should introduce themselves to one another briefly, at least their name, where they are from, and maybe why they joined this event. Real answers by real people. No fiction yet.

Next, this document should be explained, paraphrased, read aloud, or a copy given to each participant to read, or a combination of these actions. If printed on one side, the blank backside of this document can be used for writing instead of new, fresh paper (but it has to be read first).

Part II

Now comes the hard part: *deciding whom you are going to play*. This is the biggest decision you will have to make in this event. ***You cannot change your character once you have begun.***

Are you going to play yourself? Your younger self? A friend? A relative? Another, different larp character? A fictional character like Harry Potter or Hamlet?

Spend a few minutes reflecting on who you will portray, because you will be expected to know many things about this character on a deep level: their fears, desires, hopes, dreams, etc. Introspective reflection into this person drives your experience and the experience of others in this event. Since the poker game you are about to play involves betting with qualities of the character, the more you can generate and the more aspects you can detail, the more currency you will have to bet. If you want to be a high roller, for example, playing yourself or someone intimately known to you would be the best option. If you instead want to minimize your emotional risk in the game, embody the soul of a fictionalized person. Be sure to choose a person with human qualities.

Do not reveal the character you are playing until the end. More on this below.

Players should discuss or reveal the depth they want to go to, or expect to go to, in this larp. In other words, how

serious and revealing do you want this game to be? There's no requirement either way, but all players should have forewarning about how intense the game could potentially be. Maybe someone doesn't want to venture far into his or her own psyche, but another player does. Are those two comfortable playing with each other?

There aren't safewords for this larp, but there does need to be informed consent between all the participants about what they are getting in to. Again, this could be played as a lighthearted get-to-know-you party game, or it could lend great weight to an existing larp character, perhaps as preparation for another larp, or it could be a slow boat to our Heart of Darkness.

The participants must mutually agree to the direction it will go beforehand, and set up their social contract. The game might not go that far, or it might go further. It's up to you.

This discussion should occur before, during, and even again after you decide on which character you are going to play, as it may affect your choice.

Part III

Once you have your character in mind, you need to create your "bank" to gamble with. Tear the paper into strips. Finish reading this document first if the backside will also be your paper, but make sure to keep at least one copy around.

On one side of each strip write each of the following qualities, one word per strip, with at least one strip for each:

- ♦ *Joy*
- ♦ *Fury*
- ♦ *Fear*
- ♦ *Fantasy*
- ♦ *Failure*
- ♦ *Success*
- ♦ *Sorrow*
- ♦ *Hope*
- ♦ *Dream*
- ♦ *Love*
- ♦ *Identity**

Each of these represents an aspect of the character you are going to play, and are taken from the point of view of that character.

Joy ♦ What brings happiness to the character?

Fury ♦ What enrages or makes the character angry?

Fear ♦ What is the character afraid of?

Fantasy ♦ What is this character's sexual vision?

Failure ♦ What has this character failed? This is an actual failure, not a potential one. A potential failure would be a Fear.

Success ♦ What has this character succeeded at? Again, an actual success, not a possible one.

Sorrow ♦ What saddens this character? This could be anything that the character laments, from a present situation, to a person, to their own past indiscretions.

Hope ♦ What is this character hoping for?

Dream ♦ What is an actual dream this character has had during sleep? Unlike conscious fears and fantasies, these are unconscious reveals. Or they're merely weird and mean nothing.

Love ♦ What does this character love? This may be a person, an action, or anything. It means something or someone that the character deeply cherishes and is willing to sacrifice part of themselves or themselves for.

***Identity** ♦ Who is this character? You do not have to write the name of the character down, you can leave it blank. More notes on the Identity below.

Write something on the backside of each strip that will remind you of the answer (you can leave Identity blank if you wish). It might be a few keywords, a symbol, or a statement. Just write something to provoke your understanding of that aspect of the character.

You should be prepared, when asked, to respond to each trait with at least a minute (but no more than three) of explanation. That is, for Fear an answer of "I am afraid of snakes" isn't enough. The response must be either an explanation, an anecdote, or dwelling on the Fear's origins, circumstances, conditions, or effects. Tell the story behind it.

For example, Hamlet might write down "father" for Sorrow, and Harry Potter would probably draw a broomstick for Joy, to represent his love of Quidditch and flying. They would be

able to expound about either for at least a minute.

As you can tell by now, coming up with answers to all of those qualities for a fictional character could be very difficult. As the poker game continues, you might have to generate more of these qualities to continue playing, as they represent the betting chips.

Again, deciding whom you are going to play is the hardest decision to make. If you play yourself you have a vast wealth of experience and aspects to draw upon. On the other hand, you are wagering your own fears, fantasies, failures, etc.

- ♦ It's probably more **intellectually** challenging to play a fictional character, and more **emotionally** trying to play You.

There's no right or wrong to your responses, but be honest. You don't have to think of the best or worst of anything; it doesn't have to be your deepest fear nor your darkest fantasy. But it has to be something truthful to the character, as honest as you can make it.

Once you have your character in mind and their qualities on the slips of paper, indicate you are ready to play by sitting at the table with the papers, their title (not answer) face up in front of you. ***These slips of paper will hereafter be called chips, as in poker chips.***

Your Identity Chip

You don't need to write down the name of the character you are playing, you should know at least that much. You can leave the slip blank. The Identity chip cannot be played until the last hand or as your last bet.

Goals

You decide your own goals for this character in Purgatory. For example:

Will your character gain redemption and ascend to heaven when others have taken all of your chips, i.e., do you need to purge or confess? Or do you need to acquire as many chips as possible, all of them, to achieve omniscience? What happens if you collect all of one type of chip? Is there specific knowledge you need to gain, or need to disclose?

Each character can have different goals, and they don't need to be stated to the others. Do decide on a goal for your play. You can play to win or play to lose. It's your choice.

POKER PLAY

You are going to play the card game of poker for a little over an hour. Instead of betting for money or clothing, you are betting details about your character.

Character Role-Playing

Role-play the character you chose as you play poker. Embody that character once you sit down ready to play. Think, talk, and act like them as best you can. Assume you have been in this room for an extremely long time, and you're probably dead. Someone has explained the rules of poker to you. You all understand the same language. Play the character realistically but don't speak only in Klingon, attempt to drink another's blood, cast lightning bolt on the doors, or anything else that would distract from the exploration of that character's Hopes, Fears, Dreams, etc. There are no conflict, combat, or magic mechanics to use here. Just introspection and poker. In between hands, feel free to banter as your character. Remember the social contract established at the beginning about the level of levity for the larp.

Chip Value

- ♦ Each chip has the same value, i.e., Hopes aren't worth any more or less than Sorrows.
- ♦ However, you can ***triple the value of any chip*** once by writing "All" on it.

If you lose your chip in a poker hand, the person who has it can cash it in at any time and demand you tell them the answer, i.e., "What is your Dream?" or "What is your Fantasy?" Normally, each chip can only be revealed to one person, the person who wins it. But by writing "All" on it, you increase the value of the chip by three because it means you will reveal that aspect to everyone in the room when the owner cashes it in. Only the person who created that chip can change it to

All. More about this under Cashing Out below, but for now know that each chip is worth either one (the default), or three, for All. Every chip, including Identity, can be raised. Once raised, it can't be brought back down.

It is up to the players and characters to add extra value to the qualities if they choose. Perhaps you really want to know who a character's Love is. That chip is therefore more valuable to you than someone else's Dreams. But that's in the mind of the beholder. For the game, there are only two values to each chip—one or three. If someone bets a Love they can be matched or called with any other single chip. Raising would mean two (or more) chips or changing one chip to All.

- ♦ Two chips are worth more than one.
- ♦ Three regular chips are worth one All.
- ♦ Once a player loses a chip, it cannot be changed into All unless they win it back, i.e., if you lose a Fantasy chip, the new owner can't make it an All chip.
- ♦ Chips raised to All cannot be reduced to one.
- ♦ You can bet other people's chips, but you cannot change them to All.
- ♦ Players can "buy" or make more chips by simply writing down more qualities on paper. They cannot do this to raise a bet. Each has to be truthful, and cannot repeat any previous chip. Harry Potter can't have another joy of flying chip.

How big is your pool of chips?

ANTE

Before every hand of poker, everyone must ante in, which means contributing something to the pot to be able to play at the table. More about the ante in the Appendix.



- ♦ To ante in, each player must briefly reveal to everyone at the table either one of their character's **annoyances** or **tiny delights**.
- ♦ Go around the table and state something that annoys the character (not enrages them, just bothers them) or something that gives a small amount of pleasure (but not a full joy). Some examples of annoyances: traffic, body odor, or a certain celebrity. Some delights: petting a cat, cool breezes on hot days, the smell of fresh lemons. This shouldn't take long, less than 30 seconds for each person. All players must complete it if they want to play the hand. The ante isn't written down, it is stated orally to all at the table. Annoyances or tiny delights don't need to be explained like the chips, merely stated.
- ♦ Antes are always for All and they aren't kept, nor can they be used in regular betting.

The Dealer

The first person to sit down at the table ready to play is the first dealer. After each hand, the dealer switches to the person sitting to their left, rotating clockwise.

- ♦ Everyone gets to be the dealer at least once. If this means time must be cut from Cashing Out or the Debrief, so be it.
- ♦ The dealer chooses which aspect will be used for

the first round of betting for that hand. They decide if everyone must first bet a Success or a Hope, a Fantasy or Failure. If a player does not have that aspect, they either must generate one or fold.

- ♦ The dealer chooses this aspect just after dealing the cards but before she—the dealer—looks at her own hand. Others can look at their cards if they want and then decide to generate the needed chip or fold, but the dealer must pick the chip before they know their cards.

Subsequent betting and raises can be any chip of any type. Only the dealer chooses the first round. The dealer cannot pick Identity until everyone has been the dealer once. It is recommended to play Identity after an hour of poker has concluded, as it marks the end of regular play and the start of cashing out.

The dealer should be the one to shuffle and deal the cards, but if that is problematic, someone else can do it. But the dealer always chooses the chip for the first bet for everyone. Raising and the second round of betting can be any type of chip. The original chip the dealer called must be included in any betting on the first round, but raises or the second round of betting aren't dependent on the type of chip, just the value.

Poker

The rules of poker are explained in the Appendix, including the ranking of hands and cards.

- ♦ ***All hands of Secret Ante will be five-card draw.*** Thus there are only two rounds of betting for each hand: once after everyone has their cards, and then after the draw.
- ♦ ***Exception:*** A different hand of poker, or Texas Hold 'Em style, can be played only if everyone at the table agrees to it. If everyone agrees to a different type of poker, the chips and values remain the same, the order of dealers remains the same (with everyone playing the dealer at least once), and the rule about the Identity chip not being used until late in the game remain in effect.

Jokers

There needs to be two Joker cards in the deck.

Each Joker is a wild card, meaning it can duplicate any other card in the deck. If it matters, the original card outranks the wild one. Jokers also have a special ability on the chips.

- ♦ If you win a hand using a Joker, remove the Joker from the deck and place it in front of your chips. It is now out of the game. If you lose your hand that contained a Joker, it goes into the discard pile and shuffled back into the deck.
- ♦ ***At any point, you can use the Joker to turn any one of your chips into a Lie.*** Only you will know which chip it is, so be honest and only Lie about one chip (sort of an oxymoron, honest about lying). You can decide which one to Lie about ahead of time, or when someone cashes that chip out. You don't need to reveal the Joker, or indicate in any way that the chip, like the cake, is a lie**. But when you recount the story behind that chip, lie. It can be a small white lie, e.g., you say you made more money on that Success than what you really brought in, or it can be a complete fabrication: your father didn't die in a tragic auto accident, in fact, he's still alive but you haven't seen or heard from him in years. But no one needs to know that.
- ♦ You can lie about either a single-person chip or an All chip.
- ♦ What is it like to lie as a fictional character?
- ♦ If playing yourself, why did you lie about that chip?
- ♦ You don't have to use your Joker on any chip, you can remain honest if you wish.
- ♦ If you manage to win both Jokers, you can lie twice.
- ♦ ***Jokers can also be bet as a single chip.*** They can't be turned into an All, however.

Identity

After everyone has had the chance to be the dealer at least once, and the group has played poker for more than an hour, it is up to the dealer to decide when the Identity chip is to be played in the first round of betting. If there is a time limit to *Secret Ante*, Identity should be played when there is roughly 10 minutes remaining to the poker phase.

Not everyone needs to put their Identity into the pot (they can fold), and if someone lost all their chips they may already have bet Identity and then, maybe, come up with more chips upon reflection to get back into the game. In that case, they don't need to put in Identity again, but will have to put something in. Players can decide to reveal their Identity to All as part of betting, as normal.

CASHING OUT

 After everyone has finished playing poker, it is time to cash in your winnings. There should be at least an hour to do this, as it will involve a lot of private one-on-one  conversations.

Note that it is possible to cash in a chip or chips at any time, including during poker play, but once cashed, it cannot be used in any more betting. It's gone. It's rude to cash in a chip during the middle of a hand, but possible.

When cashing out, it is possible to trade chips if both owners agree. This means that someone can sell your secrets to someone you don't want to reveal to; such is the nature of Lady Luck. That may be a good time to use the Joker. To trade, just negotiate it and exchange scrip. The values of the chips are whatever someone is willing to pay for them. Try to make trades before the cashing occurs.

To cash out, the All chips should be revealed first, called by whoever owns the chip. The person who wrote the paper needs to reveal the story behind what they wrote to everyone in the room.

Once the All chips have been revealed, the single chips should be spent. This will involve two people talking intimately in private corners of the room, or whispering to one another. They can go in any order that makes sense, but it is the responsibility of the owner to cash in the chip.

When revealing your trait you can provide as much detail as you like, and you can choose to retell the events as they happened, or skirt the actual details and instead dwell on how that aspect makes you feel. The choice is up to you. The only requirement is that it is honest to the character. The person cashing in the chip can ask clarifying questions or even further queries, but the owner is not compelled to reveal any more. Remember that each chip is worth at least a minute of explanation.

When revealing the contents of a chip, and listening to them, try to remain in character.

If any chip owners decide to keep their single chip to cash out later, after the game—privately—that is their purview. Once outside the room and the larp, though, the owner won't be compelled to jump back into their character to reveal that secret at a moment's notice, however. The All chips must be exposed to all in the room in this session.

- ♦ ***When a chip has been cashed, the paper should be ceremonially destroyed, e.g., torn into shreds, or, if your facility permits it, burned.***
- ♦ Courtesy, decorum, and these rules dictate that what people discover about other characters remains with the room and not shared with others.

When all exchanges are complete, destroy the remaining chips. Tear them into shreds and throw them into the air, bathing in a shower of your characteristics, or, if possible, burn them in a safe manner. Regardless, get rid of them in a ceremonial fashion.

When the strips are all gone, the game is over. Break character, go back to being yourself (you may have already been yourself the whole time), and move into the Debrief phase.

DEBRIEF

This debrief is designed to ease people back into their own skins. Or, if already buried deep in their own souls, to turn their perspective back to the outside world.

- ♦ Make sure all the chips are gone.
- ♦ You can now touch each other once again. You probably should, just to shake hands.
- ♦ Thank one another for the game. Talk to one another as players, not characters. Some questions to consider asking and discussing:
 - ♦ Was it difficult to create the chips? Why?
 - ♦ Was it difficult to reveal them? Why? Was it difficult to hear them? Why?
 - ♦ Did this exercise remind you of something you forgot? Was there something you withheld from betting?
 - ♦ If you didn't play yourself, did you learn anything about that character? Did you learn anything about yourself? How is that character similar to you?
- ♦ Come up with other questions and ask them.

This should be informal, and no one should be forced to say anything they don't want to in the debrief, i.e., don't go around the room one by one and ask if the person has more secrets they have to reveal now.

Everyone should have a chance to voice their thoughts on any of the above questions or related ones. Make sure everyone has a chance to speak.

When time is up, you may all leave the room...but have you left the larp? Are you keeping any chips as you walk away? Are you going to make more to play again?

GM REFLECTIONS

People are collections of many experiences, some actualized for better or worse, some are only wishes, proto-experiences. There are good things and bad things to us all. But whether good or bad, every part of us has value. We are all worth something for being alive and human. Everything we experience, or want to experience, adds to our soul. It doesn't have to be tortured or ecstatic to gain value. Even silly dreams are currency in Purgatory. The characters we choose to play are enhanced upon consideration of their many facets. The more we know the character, the richer the role-playing. Even if you consciously chose not to play yourself, did you subconsciously pick an aspect of yourself that has been neglected?

It's important to realize how deep our souls go, yes, but also important to know that everyone else, everyone on planet Earth, has as much complexity, as many tears and smiles, as you. It's too bad we almost never get to know them all. Maybe in Eternity we will.

Other Uses for *Secret Ante*

With a different emphasis, this larp can be used to prepare or flesh out another larp character. It can also be used as a resurrection mechanic for a boffer larp: any chips the character loses are memories lost when they return to the living, and any they gain is knowledge they may be able to use. Maybe other powers could be gained depending on how they perform in the poker game. The exact details are left to the GM.

INSPIRATION AND THANKS

I would like to thank Mike Tice for inspiring not only this entry to the 2013 Larpwriter Challenge, but for inventing the *Casino Arcana* larp, which subtly influenced me. I didn't plan on submitting something for the Challenge, but one night while trying to sleep this game popped out of my head almost fully formed. I wrote it down on the notepad by my bed with my little light pen, one of the best birthday presents I ever received—one of my tiny delights.

Special thanks to Kender Kidd for encouraging and believing in me.

Mike's entry for the Challenge, *Exodus 22:18* made it into the top three finalists. Mine did not, so this is one of my Failures. I hope you enjoy it anyways.

APPENDIX

THE RULES OF FIVE-CARD DRAW

If you are already familiar with the rules of poker, you do not need to read this Appendix.

Shuffle the deck of cards. Be sure that the two Jokers are included.

After everyone has paid the ante, the dealer deals five cards face down to every player, one at a time, starting with the person on their left.

Players look at their cards and the first round of betting occurs, starting with the person to the left of the dealer. More on betting, below.

A player can Fold, or quit that hand, when it is their turn to bet. They do this by placing all their cards face down on the table and saying “Fold.” They cannot rejoin the hand, and anything they bet cannot be retrieved from the pot (the pot is the center of the table, where the chips are held and wagered).

Once betting has concluded, players decide if they wish to exchange zero to four of the cards in their hands. They can keep what they have or they can trade 1-4 other cards by putting the ones they don't want face down in front of them. In *Secret Ante*, it is not needed to reveal an Ace to put down four cards, but if the players wish to make that a house rule, that is acceptable.

Any cards placed down by a player are immediately replaced by the dealer, face down, from the deck, and the next player on the left decides if they are going to replace any cards, and so on, until the trade comes back to the dealer. If there are not enough cards in the deck to replace (a highly improbable, but not impossible occurrence with six or seven players), the discarded cards must be shuffled and used to deal to those who need them.

After the cards are exchanged, a second round of betting occurs. Players can fold here as well when it is their turn to bet.

After the second round of betting is concluded and there are at least two people who have not folded, everyone still in must reveal their cards. If everyone folds before the end, the winner does not need to reveal cards.

The one with the highest hand wins everything in the pot.

A new hand is begun with the deck being shuffled by the new dealer (person to the left of the previous dealer) and everyone antes in again.

BETTING

Players can bet their own chips or the chips they won from others. The value of the chips remains the same, that is, a new possessor of someone else's chip cannot change it to All.

The first bettor can call Check, which means they are still in the hand but they aren't betting. Others can check as well until someone until someone bets or everyone at the table checks, in which case play proceeds.

Whenever someone bets something, they state what they are betting and put their chip (or chips) into the pot. They can put in any number of chips that they are currently holding. They can triple the value of any chip they made and still own by changing it to an All reveal.

The dealer decides the aspect for the first round of betting. The first bet of that hand must match or include the chip type declared by the dealer.

If betting comes back to someone on the first round, they can raise it with a different quality. Other bettors can also raise the bet with other qualities, as long as the one stated by the dealer is included. Example: The dealer declares Hope as the required quality, so Person A bets one Hope on their turn. The person next to them bets Hope and raises a Joy. Person C raises again and makes their Hope chip All (as an All is worth three other chips).

A person can bet the same amount or raise it.

Each person must either:

- put the same amount of chips into the pot
- put the same amount in, plus an additional raise
- fold – leave the hand, sacrificing any other chips they already put in

If players check but someone else at the table puts in a bet, the person or persons who checked must also bet or fold.

In other words, everyone who wishes to remain in the hand must contribute an equal or higher amount to the pot. When betting finally rotates back to the person whose bet was highest, and everything is equal (everyone who remained in has contributed that amount), if they decide to raise it no further, they Call, and betting ends. Hands are then revealed.

Example, continued: After Person C raised to an All Hope, Person D folds and Person E also puts in an All Hope. Person A, who put in the first Hope, folds, and Person B, who raised a Joy, needs to put one more chip in to stay in. They put in one Fear. Thus everyone remaining in the hand has contributed chips worth three. Person C calls (they don't raise any further), and hands are exposed for Players B, C, and E. Person E has the highest hand, and takes the Hopes, a Joy, and a Fear.

Note: If a player needs to contribute a chip they don't have to remain in the hand; that is, they have to match a raise, they can generate more chips by writing some up. A player cannot themselves raise the bet by making more chips. You can only match a raise (Call) with fresh chips. In other words, a player cannot say "I raise you ten Fantasies," and then they start scribbling furiously.

You can bet your own chips or those of other people as long as they are the proper type or value.

THE HANDS OF POKER AND THEIR RANKINGS

The highest hand wins. In the event of a tie, e.g., two players with a pair, the higher card value wins, i.e., a pair of nines beats a pair of sevens. If you get into the situation of matching numbers, say, a pair of eights against a pair of eights, the suit rankings are from the cover: clubs highest, then hearts, spades, diamonds. If that still doesn't settle it, the next highest card in the hand, again to suit rank, and so on until a higher hand is determined.

Note that for *Secret Ante*, Jokers are wild cards and can be used to duplicate any other card in the deck when used in a hand. In the event of a tie, the actual card beats the Joker, e.g., a real Ace beats a Joker impersonating an Ace. There are two Jokers in the deck. See "Joker" above for special rules on using Jokers.

Poker hands from highest to lowest:

Royal Flush ♦ A straight from a ten to an ace with all five cards of the same suit. Example: Ace, King, Queen, Jack, Ten, and all are Clubs.

Straight Flush ♦ Any straight with all five cards of the same suit. Example: Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, all are Hearts.

Four of a Kind ♦ Any four cards of the same rank. Example: four Sixes.

Full House ♦ Any three cards of the same rank together with any two cards of the same rank. When comparing two Full Houses, the higher ranking three cards wins, e.g., three Queens and two Fours beats three Jacks and two Fives. Example: Three Threes, two Eights

Flush ♦ Any five cards of the same suit (not consecutive). The highest card of the five determines the rank of the flush. Example: Two, Five, Seven, Nine, Jack, all Spades.

Straight ♦ Any five consecutive cards of different suits. Aces can count as either a high or a low card. Example: the lowest straight is Ace-Two-Three-Four-Five.

Three of a Kind ♦ Any three cards of the same rank. Example: Three Kings

Two Pair ♦ Any two cards of the same rank together with another two cards of the same rank. The highest pair of the two determines the rank of the two-pair. Example: Two Fours, Two Tens

Pair ♦ Any two cards of the same rank. Example: Two Jacks

High Card ♦ Any hand not mentioned above. The highest-ranking card determines the rank of the hand.

Card ranks, from highest to lowest, are:

Ace, King, Queen, Jack, Ten, Nine, Eight, Seven,
Six, Five, Four, Three, Two, Ace
Aces can be low or high, whatever benefits the player.

There are **four suits** for each card, two black, two red. The suits are ranked Clubs, Hearts, Spades, Diamonds, as the cover displays from biggest to smallest.

There are two Jokers that can function as any other card, i.e., it is possible to have two Spade Aces: one real one and one Joker. Jokers do not have rank.

** “The cake is a lie” is a line from the video game *Portal*.

