

J.O.U.S.T.

Joint Operation Underground Spelunking for Treasure

By Navarre Fletcher

What You'll Need:

- A standard deck of playing cards
- A stack of index cards (at least two per player)
- Pens or markers (preferably ones with high contrast to the card back of the deck, like Sharpies)
- A timer
- (Optional) Food and Drinks, befitting a Football Watch Party

Number of Players: 2-10

You're a **Peasant** who moved to the big Imperial City to change your lot in life, but times are tough. Every day, it's getting harder and harder to get by. **The Emperor**, in his *unlimited* wisdom and grace, has announced another season of J.O.U.S.T.ing, to take the populace's mind off of their woes (and secure new wealth for the Imperial Treasury). Everybody celebrated (or *else*).

The JOUST offers a distraction from your troubles, but it doesn't solve your Peasant Problems. Except, it absolutely *can* solve your Peasant Problems! The city is putting together a Fantasy JOUST League, and the exorbitant cash prize on offer could lift you out of your rags and catapult you into the riches you've desired for so, so very long. Or at the very least, it could solve your Peasant Problems. But, you have your pride in your hometown's guild, too. You can't forget where you came from, and it'd be pretty great for your town if it was the winner of The Super Grail this year.

What is a JOUST?

A J.O.U.S.T. (Joint Operation Underground Spelunking for Treasure) is a form of competitive dungeon delving. Two guilds put together a team of 5 **Adventurers** and send them into an unexplored underground labyrinth, seeking to bring back more treasure to the surface than the opposing Guild and secure a win. Their efforts are broadcast to the Empire at large via the Empire Public Scrying Network (EPSN), displaying the death-defying deeds and exciting exploits to the masses via gigantic public crystal balls manned by Broadcast Wizards.

What is The Super Grail?

The Super Grail is the tournament to determine who is the JOUST champion of the year. After a grueling tournament, the final JOUST is held deep underground in the Demon King's Castle, the ultimate unconquerable dungeon with unlimited otherworldly riches. To determine who will be the final two teams facing off for the Super Grail, a tournament of JOUSTs will be held, eliminating teams until only two remain. The winning Guild takes home The Super Grail, an ornate chalice fit for a king, blessed by the Emperor himself.

Setup:

Remove the Jokers (and any other extra cards the decks may have) from the deck. It is now **The Draft Deck**. Provide each player with two index cards. One card is your **Peasant Card**, or **P-Card** for short. The other is your **Guild Card**, or **G-Card** for short.

Determine your **Peasant Name**. It can be your real name if you like, but what's important is that you're now poor and troubled (for many of us, this is not a change in circumstances). Write the name down on your P-card. Maybe give yourself a Peasant-like accent, if the spirit moves you.

Each player takes a turn drawing a card from the Draft Deck. Do not show the card to any of your fellow Peasants. This is your **Peasant Problem Value** or **PPV** - write its value on your P-Card. Face cards have ascending numeric values: Jacks = 11, Queens = 12, and Kings = 13. Once everyone has copied down their P-Card information, return all the cards to the Draft Deck. A high PPV is both a blessing and a curse, as it determines how dire the straits of your Peasant life is, but also provides opportunities for you during the tournament to come. Sometimes your problems can be the key to your solutions!

Determine your **Peasant Problem**, or **PP**. The value of your PP is equivalent to your PPV, and indicates the

severity of the issue hanging over your head, with a larger number being more dire. Where a 1 might be something as trifling as needing to replace some of your worn down peasant socks, a 13 could mean something as severe as an Imperial Warrant for your arrest for skipping out on your accumulating debts. Whatever your PP is, it should be theoretically fixable via wealth; write it and its value on your P-card. Next, name the **Hometown** you left to make it in the big city - it wasn't much, but it had a local JOUST Guild due to its proximity to the Dungeons; write it down on your P-Card. Determine a symbol to represent your Hometown's Guild (Wolf, Dagger, Crown, etc). Combine the Hometown name and the Guild symbol to create your **Local Guild** (ex: the Relmar Wolves, the Landry Daggers, the Domin Crowns). Write the name of your Local Guild down on your G-card. Draw the guild's logo. Name your **Guild Leader** or **GL**. Give them an appropriate name, the kind of name that represents how you imagine they hold themselves and lead their Guild, and write it on the G-Card. Write the guild's mascot's name on the G-Card. Lastly, go around the table introducing yourself to your fellow Peasants and declaring your Hometowns and Local Guilds. Work with each other to determine your Guild's **Rivalry**. Write down your **Rival Guild** name on the G-Card. If you have an odd number of Guilds at the table, Guilds can have multiple rivalries.

Preseason

Deal out the cards of the Draft Deck evenly among the Peasants (due to the number of Peasants, some may have more than others). Do not show each other the faces of the cards, but you may look at the faces of the ones in your possession. Take turns going in a circle talking about Adventurers that you should all be on the look out for in the upcoming draft. Take one of the cards dealt to you, write on the back of the card the name of the Adventurer, their **Adventuring Class** or **AC** (what role they play in a Dungeon), and their **Uniform Number** (an easy way to refer to the Adventurer). Someone else at the table should butt in to your description to detail the Adventurer's **Greatest Strength** or **GS** (this should be a one or two word attribute or ability), and a different Peasant should note their **Fatal Weakness**, or **FW** (this should also be one or two words). Write down all of this info on the back of the card. Discuss it with the others, talking them up as an Adventurer to watch out for or as one to disregard for the coming season. The next person in the circle should do the same, comparing the Adventurer they're describing to the one previously brought up in a natural, conversational display, to show they also know what they're talking about concerning the JOUSTs this year. Note that each Adventurer should have a different Uniform Number, but aside from that, anything goes. Do this in turn until all the cards of the Draft Deck have been turned into bonafide Adventurers. There is no need to be honest in your evaluation of the Adventurers you're creating - whether your Peasant is honest to a fault, a sly schemer, or just plain bad at evaluating, it's up to your fellow Peasants to consider your words and decide if they should pay attention to your information for the upcoming drafts.

Guild Draft

Collect all the Adventurer cards to reform the Draft Deck, then spread them all out, face down, so that the names and Uniform Numbers of the Adventurers are visible for everyone. During this phase, you are not a Peasant. Instead, you must embody the Guild Leader of your Local Guild, and today is Draft Day. Each of you must now take turns picking a card and adding it to your **Guild Roster** (do not look at the face of the card before making your choice and do not show the other GLs once chosen). Randomly decide who picks first, and continue in a clockwise motion from there. As you draft Adventurers, place the card face down next to your G-Card. Each time you pick an Adventurer, embody your GL and make a solemn declaration of your choice, as if giving a press conference. As an example, a draft choice might sound like: "I, Rebar Stoutguarder, am proud to announce the first round draft pick for the Relmar Wolves is Percival Winwright." Take turns doing this until each guild has 5 cards to form its Roster. Return any remaining undrafted Adventurers back to the Draft Deck and set it aside. Conclude with the final GL declaring: "And that concludes this year's J.O.U.S.T. draft. Glory to all Adventurers, Glory to the Guilds, and Eternal Glory to the Emperor!."

Fantasy Draft

Now that the Guilds are set for the oncoming season, it's time for the Peasants to decide who looks impressive for the season using their prior hometown knowledge and whatever they've gleaned from their fellow Peasants and draft Adventurers to their **Fantasy Roster**. In the opposite order of the Guild Draft, each Peasant takes turns declaring a choice of Adventurer in any Guild and writing their Uniform Number number down on their P-Card. Once an Adventurer is taken, other Peasants cannot choose that Adventurer - separate the drafted and undrafted Adventurers to keep it clear who is still available. Do this until each Peasant has 5 Adventurers on their Roster.

The Super Grail Tournament

Now that the stage is set, it's time to begin The Super Grail playoffs. Collect all of the G-Cards and randomly (via such methods as pulling them from a bucket or hat) draw two of them to face each other in the tournament. Set a timer for 1 minute. The table (except for the two Peasants whose LGs are playing), as Peasants, must now discuss the JOUST match before them, as if they were watching it live, and decide on who will win the match. Peasants can make their point however they like - referencing stats like Adventurer's AC, GS, and FW are *especially* convincing to like-minded JOUST enthusiasts. A Peasant can declare that an Adventurer has grabbed a particularly valuable-looking piece of loot, and a fellow Peasant can just as easily declare that the Adventurer dropped the piece when they got spear-tackled by a Minotaur. Peasants can't talk about who they *want* to win, just who looks like they're *going* to win. If the Peasants can all come to a consensus about who will win before the timer runs out, it becomes obvious who will win, and that Guild becomes the winner. If an agreement can't be reached by the end of the timer, then the two Peasants who serve as GLs secretly compare the **Poker Hands** created by their Guild Rosters - whichever hand has the higher value is the winner.

The Peasants whose Local Guilds are facing off may not speak during the JOUST, as they're busy cheering for their Guild and embodying the GL of that Guild. However, they can enact a **Substitution** during the match by drawing a card from the remaining Draft Deck and returning a card from their Guild's current Roster to the deck. They may enact as many Substitutions as there have been previous rounds in the tournament + 1 (ex: in the first round of the tournament, they can enact one Substitution. In the second round of the tournament, they can enact two Substitutions, and so on). If the two teams are Rivals, the GLs get one extra Substitution, as they'll do *anything* to beat their bitter rival.

During the entire tournament, Peasants are able to **Trade** members of their Fantasy Roster freely. To trade with another Peasant, simply agree to do so via shaking hands, cross out the number of the Adventurer you're trading, and write down the number of the Adventurer you received in exchange. You can also incentivize a trade, to make it more worthwhile to both parties: you can offer to reduce the value of their PP by a number of points, the maximum value being your PPV, aka a **PP Reduction**. If this is agreed upon, the Peasant receiving the PP Reduction marks how much their PP is reduced on their P-Card, while the Peasant spending PPV on their behalf keeps track of how much of their PPV they've spent on their P-card. Once one has spent their total PPV in Trades, they can no longer offer PP Reduction as part of a trade. Only one half of the trade can offer a PP Reduction; two parties cannot reduce each other's PP in the same trade. Frame this PP Reduction as a favor from one Peasant to another, to ease the burden of their PP. You may not have money, but maybe you have skills, or experience, or know somebody who can help them, or are just willing to spend some time, as long as they'll give up an Adventurer that'll help you out. While you both may be poor, you can rely on each other to ease your burdens. This is the only circumstance where a Peasant can feel safe enough to reveal their PP to another, so they can describe how they'll help you solve it.

After the winner of the JOUST is determined, the GL of the winning team picks an Adventurer in their Guild to be the **MVA (Most Valuable Adventurer)**, and the GL of the losing team picks one of their Adventurers to be an MVA as well. The GLs then flip over the MVA's card to reveal its face value to the table before flipping it back down. Any Peasant who has drafted an Adventurer for their Fantasy Roster that is on the winning team gains a **Fantasy Point (or FP)** for each one - keep track of that tally on your P-Card. Any Peasant who has drafted an MVA (for either team) gains two FP for that Adventurer instead of one. The losing team is now eliminated from the tournament - return that team's Adventurers to the Draft Deck and shuffle it.

Play continues this way until all Guilds have JOUSTed. If there is a Guild leftover due to an odd number of total Guilds, that Guild won against an unremarkable Guild. All Peasants who had drafted Adventures from that guild gain FP as normal, but there are no MVAs from that match.

Reshuffle the remaining Guilds and continue this play pattern until there are only two Guilds remaining. Those two Guilds now compete for The Super Grail Championship, using the same rules for the previous rounds of the tournament, except with a timer of 5 minutes.

The Super Grail Victory Ceremony and Fantasy League Victory

After the Championship Guild has been decided, it's time for the winning GL to accept the Super Grail. The other Peasants are now reporters, rushing the Dungeon to ask the GL questions about how they feel and what comes next for them. After asking their questions, take one of the two Jokers you set aside at the beginning and provide it to the winner. The winner writes the names of their winning Guild, the GL, and the Adventurers who won the final match of the Super Grail on that Joker. They are now immortalized as victors, etched directly into history and received the Glory of the Empire for all time.

Now that the tournament has been settled, it's time to find out which Peasant won the Fantasy League. Each Peasant totals up their FP and compares to each other. The Peasant with the most FP is the winner of the League. If there is a tie for the biggest number, compare PPV spent: whoever has spent less PPV wins. If there's still a tie, everybody who tied wins the Fantasy League. On the other Joker, write the name(s) of the Peasant(s) who won the Fantasy League. The Peasant who won the Fantasy League subtracts 10 points from their PP. However, if there is a tie, divide the subtracted points equally among the winners (ie if two Peasants won, they each subtract 5 points, if 5 Peasants won, they subtract 2 points, etc). If there are an odd number of winners, divide the points subtracted by the number of winners, and the remainder go to no one (ie 3 winners subtract 3 points).

Resolving Peasant Problems

After the payout from the Fantasy League, the Peasants can evaluate their status. If the Peasant's PP is reduced to zero, they've solved their problem! Huzzah! Describe how you're freed from the shackles of your overbearing issues (for now). If your PP is negative, you even have some winnings left over! The Emperor be praised!

If the Peasant's PP is above zero but below 11, the problem isn't solved, but it hasn't come to bear yet.

There's still time! If you can hold out until next year's JOUST, maybe you can fix it then, the Emperor willing. Or maybe hard work and some luck somewhere else will get you out of this situation. Only the Emperor knows.

However, if your PP is above 10, your Problem has reared its head. You've run from your problem for too long - you're out of time, and it's time to pay the piper. Let your fellow Peasants know just how bad things have now gotten for you. May the Emperor have mercy on you.

With that done, it's time to pay your bar tabs and head on home. Finish your drinks and snacks, pack up the cards, and wish your fellow competitors well before leaving to face what tomorrow brings. Your season will remain immortalized in the deck you all crafted together, and with time, hopefully you can look back on these troublesome Peasant days and laugh, whether the league went your way or not.