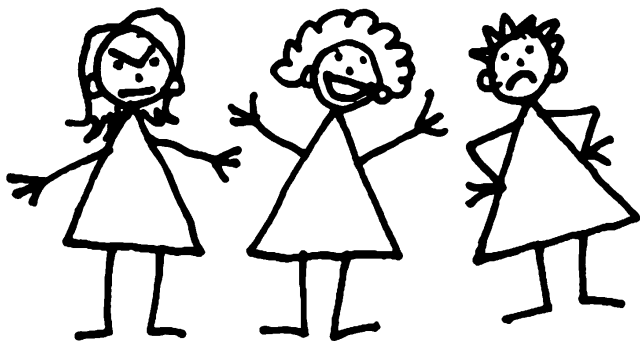


best friends



a role-playing game
about girlfriends and
all their petty hatreds

by gregor hutton

best friends



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best friends

Conceived, designed, illustrated and written in 24 hours
by **Gregor Hutton**

e: gregor@gregorhutton.com, w: gregorhutton.com

Created for a contest run by **Ron Edwards**
at <http://www.indie-rpgs.com/>

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pretty



smart



rich



cool



tough

being best friends



So, what's this book all about?

Well, it's a **role-playing game** about being a girl.

Yeah, everyone plays a girl. If you're not down with that then just put *best friends* back wherever you found it and walk away. No hard feelings, eh?

So, still here?

OK, it's a game about being *best friends* and all the little hatreds that *best friends* have for each other.

Oh, I know. You're gonna say that y'all get along just peachy. Well, that's fine too. No one said any of this was true.

But, between you and me: it probably is.

Anyway, you and some friends all play girlfriends and try to do stuff together while secretly hating each other. And getting little frissons of excitement out of getting one up on your *best friends*.

role-playing 101

Where to start? Well, this is a 'role-playing game', but it's not about going into dungeons and fighting dragons. No siree.

Role-playing a social activity where you sit around with some other folks and talk. Yeah, you make stuff up. One of the group is called the **GamesMaster** and the others are all called **players**. Each player role-plays a **character**.

In this game your character is a girl. All the other characters are your girlfriends. You're all *best friends*.

There are **rules** that help you decide what you can and can't do. The GamesMaster helps the story along, adjudicates disagreements and describes the world around the characters. Sort of like an interested panel-show host. And that's about it. Oh, yeah, it's all about having **fun**.

size of the group

You'll need a GM and three to six players.

I always found four or five players a good number, but your experience may vary.

tokens, or friend-chips

I imagine you'd use poker chips or nicely coloured beads, but wine glasses or shot glasses serve just as well.

who's the gm?

Someone will probably want to do it. It's always good to take turns and give the GM a go as a player now and then. Common courtesy and all.

convivial atmosphere

You probably want to be playing this in a friendly environment. So think about pleasant lighting, soft atmospheric music in the background, comfortable chairs and a healthy supply of spirits and other refreshments.

On the other hand, it would probably work just as well around a camp fire.

glossary

Here are some handy terms.

Character. An imaginary persona that you play. In this game they are all female.

Chips. Poker chips, or beads, etc., see *Friend-chips*.

Friend-chips. Tokens or *chips* that are the playing pieces. You have to *push* these to other players to do things. You start the game with 3.

GamesMaster. The person helping run the game, called GM for short.

Gargantuan. Enormous. A high rating, above average. You know, I've always liked that word, but so rarely have an opportunity to use it.

Hatreds. The things that you feel for your *best friends*.

Player. Someone playing a *character*.

Push. Giving a chip to another player. To do something beyond your normal level of ability.

Zero. The opposite of *gargantuan*. As a rating it represents ugly, uncool, stupid, frail or impoverished.

creating your character



OK, here's how it's done. Look at the character sheet (p. 24).

Q: who are you?

A: I am...

First off, write down a name for your character on the sheet in the bit that says 'I am...'

When you've done that you need to let everyone know what your character is called. Write it on a bit of paper and put it out in front of you.

Go on, they need to know. After all, they're your girlfriends. And in turn you'll find out what everyone else has called their characters too.

now the important bit: hatreds

Now that you have a list of all the other character names it's time to list why you hate them so.

You have five things that you hate your *best friends* for. If there are just five other characters then write each name once, i.e. each one will be against a different hate.

If there are fewer than five other characters then someone is going to get more than one thing you hate them for.

The hates are:

- I hate ... <name> ... because she is **prettier** than me.
- I hate ... <name> ... because she is **cooler** than me.
- I hate ... <name> ... because she is **smarter** than me.
- I hate ... <name> ... because she is **tougher** than me.
- I hate ... <name> ... because she is **richer** than me.

Don't show anyone what you've put though. So far it's a secret, the kind that you don't share yet.

finding out how you've done

OK, when everyone has finished putting in their hatreds it's time to 'fess up.'

For each character find out how many other characters hate them for each of the following:

- pretty
- cool
- smart
- tough
- rich

If no one has you down as pretty, say, then write a 0 in the pretty loveheart.

If one person hates you then write a 1 in the loveheart. 1 is an average score, and is OK.

If two have you down then write 2 in the loveheart. That is pretty good.

Any more is a cherry on top. Just write down how many characters hate you for each thing. It should total up to 5 across all the lovehearts.

friend-chips

Each player starts the game with 3 of them. You can end up with more or less in game.

More Control Over Your Hatreds

Maybe you want to have a little more control over what people give you to play with? Try saying something like 'Can I have a tough, smart character tonight?' and see how your fellow players respond.

7

the 'me' loveheart

The me loveheart is for drawing your character.

and I...

Write down what your character is like here, now that you know how you are viewed by your best friends.

Something like:

am the sexiest prom queen
that Miller High ever did see.

stuff

This is where you write in the stuff you have. Things like nice clothes, cars, pets, rings, iPods, pom-poms, etc.

nonsense

This is where you note relationships and that kind of stuff. Husband called Brad? Put him here. Always fainting? Put that here too.

what ya gonna do?

In *best friends* you describe what you are doing as part of a narrative.

As long as everyone agrees then it happens.

So 'I'm going to the door and opening it.' might be a typical thing that you say in game.

No problem.

If everyone agrees then it happens. The GM will help you interact with the game 'world' but the other players are also important in deciding what is allowed.

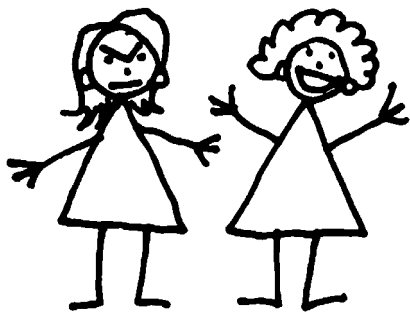
So, what if the door was locked?

Are you *smart* enough to open it? Are you *cool* enough to know how to pick it?

What if you need a valid bank card to get though the door? Are you *rich* enough?

Tasks that are contested are defined to be one of the five hatreds:

- pretty
- cool
- smart
- tough
- rich



Groups of Fewer Than Six Players

If you have a group with fewer than 6 players then you can't allocate only one hatred to each player.

The way around it is to allocate an extra hatred to the player(s) sitting to your right.

For 5 players, the player to your right gets an extra hatred allocated to them.

For 4 players you have two extra hatreds. Give one to the player to your right and another to the player to their right (i.e. the two players that are to the right of you).

For 3 players, the player to your left gets 2 hatreds and the player to your right gets 3 hatreds.

This way everyone ends up getting 5 hatreds around the group.

Choose where you sit carefully!

so what do the ratings mean?



Now, that's an interesting question. I'm not quite 100% sure since I've not play-tested this through. But here's what I think.

0 – 'Zero'

A rating so bad that you have difficulty doing things that the average person can do. Buy a decent meal? Lift a decent-sized box of books? They're all beyond you.

You can get by, don't get me wrong. It's just that you are pretty weak and can only do really easy stuff without *pushing* yourself.

1 – 'Average'

A typical rating. Look, you can do most things that an average person can do. As long as you can argue that they can do it, then so can you. Paying for decent meals and cars is something that you can do routinely.

However, there are still many things that you have to *push* to get. That nice holiday? How about a better, newer car? Or a degree? Want to run a 10K race? Then you had better *push*.

2 – 'Significant'

You are significantly better than the average person. All the things that the normal girl on the street has to *push* for comes easily to you.

That's not to say that you never have to push. Sometimes you will face challenges that require more effort and ability, but these are few and far between.

Run a marathon in under 3 hours? Buying a yacht? Get a PhD? You'll have to *push*.

3 and over – 'Gargantuan'

This level is only possible if you have 4 players or more. And it really is a case of many eggs in one basket.

Needless to say, this rating is so high that there is almost nothing that you would have to *push* for. You'll only find yourself doing that when locked in a contest and the *friend-chips* are flying.

pretty

All the things that are covered by pretty are things that rely on your looks and charm.

Things like:

- catching a boy's eye
- getting a date
- looking innocent
- getting discounts
- being helped out by boys
- first impressions
- being charming

example levels

0

You are at best plain, and at worst downright ugly.

You have a hard time getting decent dates and are viewed with suspicion when people first meet you.

Not one of the beautiful people. Nope, not at all.



1

You are pleasant and attractive in a homely kind of way. A cut above plain.

You get dates most of the time, but they are rarely with the most popular boys.

You make a decent first impression, although you are sometimes forgettable or confused with someone else equally average.

2

Wow. You are stunning.

You are likely one of the cutest and most sought after girls in your area. You are always getting offers of dates and can afford to be picky.

You make good first impressions and everyone always remembers you.

Be warned, though. If you're a nasty piece of work (and who isn't?) then they may remember you for all the wrong reasons.

3 and over

Unbelievable. You should be in Hollywood or a palace.

There is probably very little men won't do for you, even if they hate you for it.

cool



All the things that are covered by cool are things that rely on your calmness and force of personality.

Things like:

- being popular
- stealing stuff
- not getting fazed
- borrowing things
- knowing other cool people
- saying cool stuff
- persuading people



example levels

0

You are what might be called a 'nerd' or 'geek'. You are the High Queen of Uncool.

You get a hard time because of all the uncool stuff you say and do. You are always the last to get invited to something really exciting.

1

You are the average, everyday, sorta, sometimes, kinda-cool person. You have your moments but let's not pretend they are frequent or all that cool. C'mon, there are millions like you out there.

2

Heh. You are ice cold.

Who's that with the gaggle of wanabee cool people around them? Heh, that would you you!

You probably have a little band of followers or people that laugh at your jokes.

Someone's even going to name their first daughter after you.

3 and over

Chilly, chill, chill. You are without a doubt the coolest person just about anyone knows. Ice cold and popular. Almost nothing makes you bat an eyelid.

And whenever there is cool shit going down. You're right in the middle.

Word.

smart

All the things that are covered by smart are things that rely on your quick wits and education. You did listen in class?

Things like:

- looking up books
- thinking about nonsense
- looking clever
- saying clever stuff
- understanding instructions
- speaking languages
- not getting lost

example levels

0

There's no nice way of saying this. I'll type it real slow so you can understand, OK?

You ... are ... as ... stupid ... as ... a ... box ... of ... rocks.

You missed the day at school where they handed out the brains. Either that, or they put a softball in there instead.



1

You get decent grades and you're even good at some subjects, but let's be honest, you're not a rocket scientist.

You can figure stuff out with some time and a bit of help, so maybe you're not a complete embarrassment to your parents and friends.

2

A real smartie pants.

Always quick with an answer you can do sums in your head and speak a few languages, including Latin.

People always ask you things and you mostly know the answers. You're a mathlete.

And who *doesn't* know why the sky is blue? Bwa-ha-ha.

3 and over

Genius. No messing about. You're too clever for your own good sometimes, but with your vast intellect and PhD it's all probably part of a gargantuan master plan.

tough

All the things that are covered by tough are things that rely on your fitness, strength and so on.

Things like:

- fights
- avoiding injury
- going without food
- breaking things
- athletic activities
- feats of agility
- climbing trees



example levels

0

You are weak and sickly.

People ask you if you are OK even on a good day. You look brittle and frail even when at your best.

You won't be winning any races anytime soon, unless it's the one to fall over first.

1

You are as healthy as the next girl. You sometimes run and you can dance a bit too.

Doing anything more energetic than your normal daily routine is a *push* though. Just sayin'.

You won't be last out of that burning house, but you won't be first either.

2

Look at you Miss Healthy!

You could be on the school track team if you wanted. And you probably go running and swimming for fun. You eat responsibly and have a bright, healthy glow about you.

You're probably going to be first out of any burning houses around here.

3 and over

A championship-calibre athlete. You hold a few records here and there, and in different sports too.

Ever heard of Korfbal? Thought not. Never mind, you were the best player on a championship team, and you better believe it. Drop and gimme 100? No sweat.

rich

All the things that are covered by rich rely on money and status.

Things like:

- buying stuff
- getting into posh eateries
- owning a car
- paying fines, posting bail
- going to the movies
- being treated with respect
- going on holiday

example levels

0

Even being kind you are 'down on your luck.' Being truthful: you're nearly always flat broke. Spark out of cash.

If buying meals were up to you everyone would be eating from tins of beans.

Always looking to borrow. That's you.



1

You have an average amount of money, whatever the hell that means. I guess you have the usual stuff that people like you have.

Not always the best and most expensive brand, but you do OK.

At a *push* you might even have some designer clothes.

2

Look who's paying?!

You have a nice car, great clothes, classy diamonds and just about anything you could want.

Sometimes you even max out the credit card and go overseas on vacation.

You are never short of respect or wealth. Pretty much 24/7.

3 and over

You are rich, rich, rich. Rich beyond your wildest dreams.

In fact you probably have a hard time contemplating anyone being really, really poor. How can that be?

Don't they just trade in some of their gold for food?

so how ya gonna do it?

When describing what you are doing, you should think about your ratings and keep them in tune with each other.

Describe your character, her actions and possessions in a way that fits her ratings.

So, if your character has Rich 0, you're painting a picture of someone with little or no money. Not someone swanning round with the finest trappings of life.

If you stay within the limit of your ratings you should be allowed to proceed.

so what if i want to go beyond the ratings?

Good question, I'm glad you asked it. Really.

If you want to do something above your rating then you have to *push* yourself.

To *push* yourself you give a *friend-chip* to someone else.

The person you give it to is the person you hate for being better than you at whatever you are doing.

So, if this is an action described by 'smart' that you are pushing, give a *friend-chip* to the person playing the character you hate for being smarter than you. Simple.

If it was a 'tough' thing then give it to the player whose character is tougher than you.

And so on.

objects and situations

Sometimes you will come across things in the game world that the GM describes.

For example, a big wall that you have to climb over. The GM says you need Tough 2 to get over it. You can get over for free if you have Tough 2 or better. If you have less than this then you must *push*.

Note that even if you have Tough 0, you only have to push 1 *friend-chip* to get over.

In a group activity you can see that *friend-chips* might get passed amongst the group if everyone climbs the wall.

That's the way it works.

running the show

Now if you're a player that's all fine and dandy. You describe what your doing, you sometimes push chips at other players and you get to giggle at all your petty hatreds. All good.

But what about the GM?

Well, help is at hand. And here it is.

other folks

As the GM you describe the world in conjunction with the players and you keep things moving along.

You also get to role-play all the incidental people that the characters bump into.

Such as...

average boy

All things at 1.

tough boy

Pretty 0
Tough 2
Others at 1



pretty boy

Smart 0
Pretty 2
Others at 1



Other inhabitants of these imaginary worlds can easily be extrapolated from that.

being hurt

In *best friends* it is possible for your character to be hurt or even killed. Shock, gasp!

However, we deal with this in a narrative way.

If you are hit by a bus, then the GM may ask for a Tough 2 or even Tough 3 challenge.

If you make it, by either having enough Tough or by *pushing* then you can describe the outcome, but you are basically unimpeded.

If you choose not to *push* then you are hurt. How bad?

Well, that's up to the players and the GM. How bad do you want it to be? And what are the possibilities? If you don't like the outcome you can *push* for your own resolution to matters.

advice on running games

Here I impart some words of wisdom on running effective games of *best friends*.

Well, that's a toughie. I haven't run it myself so please take all of this with a pinch of salt. Just warning ya.

start at the start

A good place to start is the beginning. Think of the opening and how you want to set the tone. What is the story about tonight? How do you want to go about it?

Give everyone a little time to get settled, and then start.

use scenes and keep things moving

I like to think of games in terms of scenes. Y'know, like in a movie or play.

They have a definite start and end. Try to do that in the game. Keep the narrative going and when it starts to flag draw the scene to a close or put something in to trip up the characters.

tripping up the characters

Now what do I mean by this?

OK, everything is going along just swell. Then don't trip anybody up.

If everyone is having a good time then just let everything take care of itself. Lay back and enjoy the show.

But if someone is running the table and all the *friend-chips* are being *pushed* their way? Well, you might want to throw them a little obstacle.

Put things in that play on their weaknesses and allow other players to get back into the game using their strengths.

And get that hatred flying. But not so much that no one is having a bad time.

That is un-good times 10⁶.

the end

Oh, yeah. Have an end too. Do not have one in mind at the start of play, let the players explore the scenario and find their own ending.

But when you find the end in game then end it.



describing things

A vital element of the worlds you'll play in are the descriptions that the players and GM give to the places and people you meet.

These must be described in such a way as to give a vivid sensation to the players and GM listening to the narrative.

Think about the five senses, and which is strongest when describing something.

This advice is equally good for players as it is for the GM.

Try to use colourful and strong images. Think before you speak. Paint with words.

It is one thing to see, hear, smell, touch or taste something in your own mind. Try and vocalize those sensations to the other participants.

people and places

The scent of sweet maple syrup fills your nostrils. Burnt bacon and warming bread on the grill.

Chubby Checker is playing on the jukebox and, beneath your arm, the table is slick. Its formica top is covered in a thin film of sterile beaded water where the waitress has just wiped it clean.

The warm bench seat grips your jeans and the vinyl squeaks as you shift on it.

"So? What yo havin'?"

The waitress glares at you, her eyes rimmed in pastel blue make-up. Caked thick and clumsily, with black mascara lashes springing out in all directions.

...

Or do you just say:

"OK. You're all in a diner."?

The choice, as they say, is yours.



some scenario ideas

OK, I probably should give you something to do with the game other than create characters and whatnot.

Here are some scenario ideas that I thought up.

at the mall

You could spend all day at the mall. Shopping and getting coffee and all the crazy stuff that happens there. Like getting mistakenly arrested for shoplifting, or harassed by shop-fitters on their lunch break. Stuck in the elevator. Things like that.

the prom

It's only the biggest night of your life. And your friends couldn't possibly ruin it for you, could they? Try and get the best date and not have it turn into a disaster. Is that so hard? With friends like this...

crashed car

You're all on your way back from out of town and the car just plain sails off the road. Stranded in the middle of nowhere, what will you do (to each other) to get home?

secret stuff stolen

There's nothing worse than getting your stuff stolen. But what if you really need get it back? Your friends will help you for sure. They'll have to when they hear that the slumber party video is one of the things that has been stolen. No one must see that.

house party

There's a house party on. Everyone who's anyone will be there. Who's coolest, who's prettiest, who's toughest? You'll find out at the party. Just hope that it doesn't all end in tears.

sex in the city

Who said this game was just about young girls? Older women have hatreds and desires too. Just hope that your friends don't go sleeping with your ex, again.

the office

Working 9 to 5 gives you plenty of hated girlfriends. Whether it's a drunken Christmas party or a team-building course in a cave, there's role-playing there!

a list of character names



In my extensive research (so, it was Google, OK?) I pulled up the 30 most popular girl names in the last 100 years (or so the website said, I guess it means in the US).

So if you're short of ideas then here they are:

Amanda
Anna
Barbara
Betty
Carol
Deborah
Donna
Dorothy
Elizabeth
Helen
Jennifer
Jessica
Karen
Kathleen
Kimberly
Laura
Linda
Lisa
Margaret
Maria
Mary
Melissa
Michelle
Nancy
Patricia
Ruth
Sandra
Sarah
Sharon
Susan

other names

Well, while I was hitting the web to save you the trouble I figured I would throw out some other names that might be more interesting. Y'know? So here's my *own* list.

Alisynn
Apple
Cathriona
Elaine
Emilia
Gwen
Irene
Lynn
Madison
Pauline
Sheryl
Sinéad
Susanne
Tanya
Tori
Zelda



If you want more names than this then either (a) buy a book on names, there are a load of them out there, (b) use the name of someone you know, or (c) hit your favourite search engine, type in 'girls names' and away you go.

i am... katie

An example of character creation in *best friends*.

Kathleen decides that her character is called Katie, so she writes this on a bit of card and puts it out in front of herself.

The group have decided to help each other get characters types they'll want to play.

So Kathleen tells the other players, Steve and Dave, that she wants a tough, cool girl.

She then writes down her hatreds for the others.

Dave playing Gloria sits to her right, so she has to give Gloria 3 hatreds.

She picks: cooler, smarter and tougher.

Steve playing Sarah is to her left, so she has to give Sarah the 2 remaining hatreds.

These are: prettier and richer.

Having done that Kathleen waits for the others to finish.

In the ends the other players have given Katie the following ratings.

pretty 0

cool 2

smart 0

tough 2

rich 1

Kathleen now has a good idea of her character and writes down...

i am...

Katie

and i...

am a tough karate student

stuff

keys to someone else's car,
leather jacket, sports clothes,
lockpick

nonsense

no boyfriend, failing French,
school sports champion

...and we're ready to play.

example of play, or how it will probably play



Well, since I haven't had time to play-test this game I feel a bit of a cheat for putting an 'example of play' in here.

But, you know what? Forget I said that. This is an example of play, honest. Straight from a play-test session. Uh-huh. Just like all those other real examples in those other books.

The players are Steve, Kathleen and Dave. The GM is Gregor.

Steve is playing Sarah, a prom queen who is a bit ditzy. Kathleen is playing Katie, a tough karate student. Dave is playing Gloria, a sort of bookish, mousy figure.

Katie has just crashed Sarah's dad's car...

Gregor: Bang! How bad does Katie make it?

Kathleen: Real bad. I'm looking at a 2. *Katie* can take it...

Steve: I've got Zero for tough (Tough 0). Arse!

Dave: I'm better by 1 but it's not enough (Tough 1). Arghhh.

Gregor: OK, you need a 2 to avoid being hurt bad in this crash, do you (looks at Steve and Dave) want to *push*?

Steve: It's bad enough that Katie's crashed my dad's car. I'm not going to give her the satisfaction of getting a *friend-chip* out of me for it. I'll take the injury. Do your worst!

Dave: I had my seat belt on and manage to avoid injury. I'm not going to hospital for this. (Pushes a *friend-chip* to Kathleen. Gloria hates Katie since she is tougher than her.)

Gregor: The car has careened across the road and struck a fire hydrant. Water sprays around the car, its horn blaring, and there is a huge dent in the front passenger door. Hanging out the window is a woozy and bleeding Sarah.

Steve: It's almost like you did that on purpose.

Kathleen: (Adjusts her chips.) Heh, I'm your *best friend*!

so, how'd this come about and what's it like?

There's a website for indie roleplaying games called 'the Forge' (<http://www.indie-rpgs.com/>) and one of the guys that runs the site is called Ron Edwards. Anyway, Ron said he was going to give out awards dubbed 'Ronnies' to deserving games that were completed in a 24-hour window.

Well, that's a challenge! I figured I wouldn't have anything to write about. I looked at the words you had to base the games on: any two of *suburban*, *hatred*, *girlfriend* and *rats*.

Hmm, nothing brewing I'm afraid and then ... this idea.

So, apologies for the lack of polish and play-testing on this game but I only had one 24-hour stint.

What's it like? Who knows?

I think it will be OK to play but I agree that there are likely to be some gaping holes that didn't occur to me when I was doing this. I'll be glad to get feedback on it. What works, what doesn't? What I've been lazy on and where I could have gone further? Is it all just sizzle and no steak? Breaks?

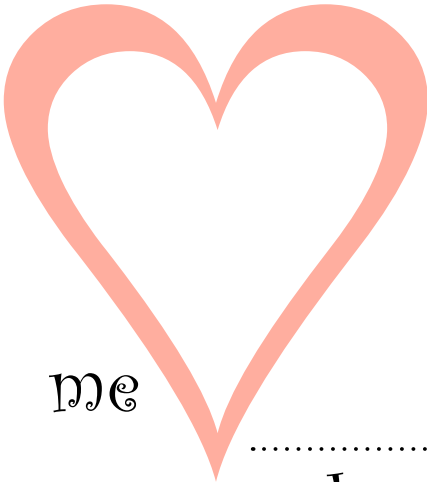
For me, the character creation thing is something that I quite like. Heh, you create everyone else's character in collaboration, but you also mark yourself relative to other characters too. Hmm, that's *different*.

I haven't seen this before. Don't get me wrong, someone may well have done this already but it's just not something I've seen. Any thoughts on this way of creating characters would be greatly appreciated. Is it good, or is it a false premise? And has it been done before?

Anyway, I plugged in 24 pages to InDesign for this, putting in art as there was no way in high heaven I could have filled 24 pages with text. I just don't write that fast. And I'm *done*.

Gregor Hutton, Edinburgh, UK.

PS. Yeah, there's probably a bigger concept under the hood.



I am...

.....

and I...

me

.....

hate

I hate because she is **PRETTIER** than me

I hate because she is **COOLER** than me

I hate because she is **SMARTER** than me

I hate because she is **TOUGHER** than me

I hate because she is **RICHER** than me

stuff

nonsense

pretty

cool

smart

tough

rich

