Best Friends

by Gregor Hutton

**A Role-Playing Game About Girlfriends
And All Their Petty Hatreds**

Box Ninja

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 really is*.

A **role-playing game** for **four or more** friends.

Pages	**64**
System	**Diceless**
Genre	**Any**
Players	**4+**
Age	**12+**

Price
$7.50

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Legal Stuff and Nonsense

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Box Ninja

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Best Friends

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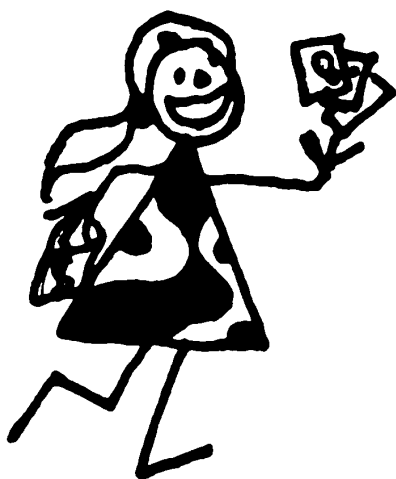
Being 'Best Friends'

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, y'know, just put Best Friends back wherever you found it and walk away. No hard feelings, eh?

So, still here? Great!

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 really 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. And it's going to be fun.

Role-Playing 101

Well, this is a 'role-playing game', but it's not about going into any dungeons and slaying dragons. Nope, not at all.

Role-playing is a social activity where you meet up with other folks and talk. Yeah, you make stuff up. You are all **players**, and you each role-play a **character**. One of you might be the **Game Master** (GM), but it's not vital.

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 players take turns to describe the world and their characters' actions, making a story with their contributions. The GM is like an interested panel-show host, and that's it. Oh, yeah, it's all about having **fun**.

Size Of The Group

You'll need four to six players and maybe a GM. I've always found five players a good number for Best Friends.

Tokens Or 'Friend-Chips'

You'll need some tokens for play—you can use poker chips, nicely coloured beads, or even wine glasses.

So, Who's The GM?

Someone might want to do it—if so, let them. They'll take on a lot of tasks that you'll see later. Without a GM you just share those reponsibilities around the group.

I prefer sharing GM tasks around and I write about it in the all-new Appendix.

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. Whatever works best for you, really.

Glossary

Here are some handy terms used in Best Friends.

Character. An imaginary persona that you play. In this game they are all female, and they're all Best Friends.

Friend-chips. Tokens, beads, poker chips, glasses of wine, etc. that are used as playing pieces. You have to *push* these to other players to do things in the game world. **You start the game with 2 each.** Oh, it's a play on words, obviously.

Game Master. A person running the game, called GM for short. They play incidental *characters* and *frame scenes*.

Gargantuan. Enormous. A high rating (3 or over); clearly above and beyond 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 in the real world playing a *character*.

Push. Giving a friend-chip to another player (specifically: *the one playing the character you hate for being better than you at whatever you are doing*). This allows you to do something far, far beyond your normal level of ability. Really.

Scene. A part of the game. A situation and place where action and conflict happen. A game is made up of a series of scenes. '**Framing**' a scene is simply describing the opening, or closure, of a scene. Best to think cinematically about this.

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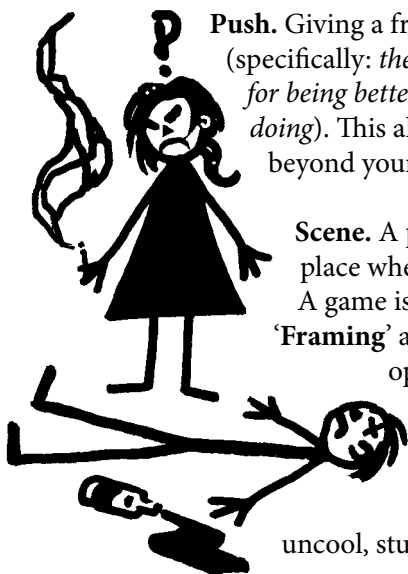
Making Friends

OK, here's how a group creates characters for *Best Friends*. Look at the character sheet that can be found at the back of the book, or the example *Best Friend* on pages 10–11.

Question: Who Are You?

First off, everyone writes down a name for their character on a character sheet. Put it in the bit that says 'I am…'

When you've all done that you need to let everyone know what your characters are called. Write it on a bit of paper and put it out in front of you, or better yet, on a sticker.

Go on, everyone needs to know. After all, they're your *Best Friends*. And in turn you'll find out what everyone else has called their characters too. Think of it as 'bonding.'

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. And you do, oh yes.

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 not five other characters then someone might get more than one hatred from you. Ouch! See page 7.

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The hatreds in *Best Friends* are as follows.

> ❧ 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.

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 Who Hates Who And Why

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

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. And ain't that a shame, it really is.

If one person hates you then write a '1' in the loveheart. 1 is a normal score, and is OK. I guess it's average.

If two have you down then write '2' in the loveheart. That is pretty good and is a distinct advantage at one thing.

Any more than 2 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.

That's how it works. You've just built a network of hatreds.

Friend-chips

Each player starts the game with 2 of them. You can end up with more (up to 5) or less (as few as 0) in game.

Make A Drawing

Now draw your character in the circle–triangle style.

And I...

Write down what your character is like, now that you know how you are viewed by your Best Friends. So something such as '*I'm always the bridesmaid*' or '*I'm the sexiest prom queen Miller High's ever seen.*'

Stuff

This is where you write in the physical Stuff you have: clothes, cars, pets, boyfriends, pom-poms, cigarettes, etc.

Nonsense

Note your relationships, problems, friends, etc. here. Husband called Brad? Always fainting? Write it down. Single guys always fall '*in wuv*' with you? *That's* Nonsense.

The issues that drive play will be rooted in your Stuff and Nonsense. So, you should share this information and link your Best Friends.

Groups With Something Other Than Six Players

If your group isn't six in number then you can't allocate only one hatred to each character. The way it works is to allocate hatreds to the character(s) sitting to your right. So every character ends up with 5 hatreds from the group.

❧ For seven players, the player to your left gets 0 hatreds and the players to your right get 1 each.
❧ For five players, the player to your right gets an extra hatred allocated to their character.
❧ For four players you have two extra hatreds to hand out. Give one to the player to your immediate right and another to the player to their right (i.e. the two players that are to the right of you). Easy.
❧ For three players, the player to your left gets 2 hatreds and the player to your right gets 3 hatreds.

Hatreds

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 as a player. No problem.

If everyone agrees, then it happens. A GM can help you interact with the game 'world' but all the other players are important in deciding what is allowed. Do they object?

What if the door was locked? Or wedged tightly shut?

Are you *smart* enough to open it? Are you *cool* enough to know how to pick the lock? Are you *tough* enough to break it? What if you need a bank card to get it open—are you *rich* enough? What if only *pretty* girls get through?

Things that are contested should be looked at in terms of the five hatreds. **Which of them is this contest about?**

- **Pretty**
- **Cool**
- **Smart**
- **Tough**
- **Rich**

What About The Ratings?

Now, that's an interesting question. They are relative and maleable, and are a **guide** for the group to decide on. But listed on the page opposite is what I think of them.

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. You look up to everyone else. That sucks.

1 – 'Average'

A **typical** rating. Look, you can do most things that an average person can do. As long as we can all agree what that is, then you can do it. Paying for decent meals and cars is something routine for you. Just an average girl.

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? You gotta *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 come 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 than even you naturally possess, but these are few and far between.

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

3 and over – 'Gargantuan'

This level is only possible if you have four players or more. And it really is a case of putting 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. You are **gargantuan** at one hatred.

An Example Friend

So here is an example of creating characters in Best Friends. It's a group activity and I'll lead you through it.

I Am... Kate

Ruth decides that her character is called Kate, so she writes this on a sticker and puts it on her shirt. She also writes it on a bit of card and sets it out in front of herself.

Ruth looks around and sees her Best Friends are called (starting at her right) 'Alison', 'Marie', 'Amy' and 'Kristine.'

She now writes down her hatreds for the others. There are four other characters so the character to her immediate right (Alison) gets one more hatred than the others.

- **Alison** is **'Cooler'** and **'Tougher'**
- **Marie** is **'Smarter'**
- **Amy** is **'Prettier'**
- **Kristine** is **'Richer'**

Everyone finishes and the four other players have given Kate the following ratings for their Hatreds.

- **Pretty** 1
- **Cool**   0
- **Smart** 2
- **Tough** 1
- **Rich**   1

Ruth now has a good idea of her character Kate. She is smarter than average and no one thinks she's cool. She draws Kate and writes down some **Stuff** and **Nonsense**.

The finished character sheet is opposite and Ruth's character Kate and her Best Friends Alison, Marie, Amy and Kristine are now ready for *play*.

Best Friends

I am...
Kate

And I...
am a bit of a geek

Pretty	Cool	Smart	Tough	Rich
1	0	2	1	1
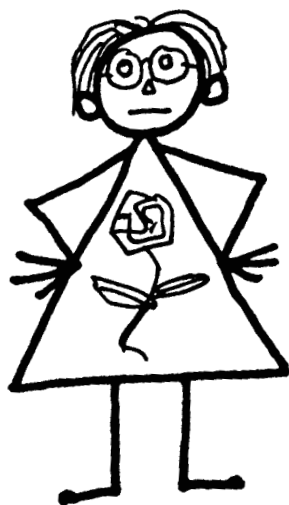
- I hate **Amy** because she is **prettier** than me.
- I hate **Alison** because she is **cooler** than me.
- I hate **Marie** because she is **smarter** than me.
- I hate **Alison** because she is **tougher** than me.
- I hate **Kristine** because she is **richer** than me.

Stuff
Reading Glasses, Denim Jacket, Sports Bag, School Books, Kristine's French Homework

Nonsense
Likes Pop Music, Nerdy Brother, Hates Maths, Does Kristine's French work

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Play

Games are all about play, so here's how to play the game.

Starting Play

OK, I'm assuming that you've got a group of people together who actually want to have a game of Best Friends. So, if we have that, then how do you get started?

First off, get everyone to sit down and speak about what they actually want to play. Seriously. Talk about it. Make a setting that you all have input on, and that you're all happy with. You'll find that the best ideas are the ones where everyone has built on all the group's contributions.

So, what is *your* game of Best Friends like? Is it serious, humourous, modern, historical, slapstick, ironic, dewey-eyed, futuristic, magical, thrilling, romantic, horrific or something else? And what about the characters in it?

What is the end condition of the game? Does it end with the last dance at the prom? Or when the *Titanic* sinks?

Creating Characters

Once everyone has a good understanding of the setting then all the players can get to work collaboratively creating the group's characters (see pages 5–7).

My best games of Best Friends have started by getting everyone to first create an agreed setting, then the characters, and then finally refining the game world with specifics of our characters, interconnections, shared friends, loves, hatreds, etc. We create a 'shared imaginary space' to play in, by answering the following big questions.

Big Questions

Who are we? Where are we? What Stuff do we have? What's our Nonsense? What are we doing? What do we care about? And what's the *rub*? You know, where's the conflicts? Why are we friends? Why these hatreds for these friends? And then we've set the scenario from that.

Stories And Initial Conflict

Stories start with an initial conflict. This is followed by a rising tension to a climax, and then a resolution to end. Best Friends can be like this, or you can establish your characters first and then find the conflicts in play.

So, find a good opening conflict and that is where to start. Base your opening scene around this conflict. Subsequent scenes should add more conflicts, support for each other, twists, revelations, developments and so on. Then reach a climactic point where all the conflicts and hatreds come to the fore. Finish with some clear, defined resolution.

Framing Scenes

Normally the GM sets, or 'frames', scenes. What can be seen, heard and felt? Who and what is there? What has just happened? Where is the conflict?

Once the scene has been set the players start describing what their characters are saying and doing in the scene.

At a suitable point the scene is closed, and a new one is framed by the GM or a player.

Narrating Character Actions

When describing what characters are doing, players should think about the ratings of those characters. If a character has a Rich rating of Zero then paint a picture of someone with little or no money, not someone swanning around with the finest trappings of life. You can, of course, go beyond the ratings, but to do so needs a *push*.

Rules For Pushing

For your character to do something above a rating you have to *push*. To do this you give a friend-chip to another player. 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 then give a friend-chip to the person playing the character you hate for being smarter than your character. Simple.

If Kate on pages 10–11 *pushes* to be Cool, then her player Ruth has to give a friend-chip to the player of Alison. Because Kate hates Alison for being cooler than her.

In conflicts in Best Friends the following rules apply.

In a conflict where two players have already *pushed*, another player can choose to *push* and make one side win. Note: they must aid one side or the other. Other players can then choose to *push* back to help the losing side, if they so wish.

> 🐾 The higher hatred in a conflict wins.
> 🐾 The lower hatred can *push* to win, but the character with the higher hatred can then *push* back over to win.
> 🐾 Conflicts between equal hatreds are initially tied. Either side can *push* over to win. The loser at that point can then choose to *push* back to tie again if they wish.

And there are a few rules about friend-chips and *pushing*.

> 🐾 Players can only hold a maximum of 5 friend-chips at any one time. Any more chips than 5 have to be narrated immediately and *pushed* on to someone else. This keeps the friend-chips moving.
> 🐾 You can't *push* more than once in a conflict.

Conflicts, Goals and Outcomes

Conflicts are at the heart of any story in Best Friends. A lot of the narrative in the game won't be conflict, but conflict is vital for a good story and, indeed, drives play. *Conflict is simply when players disagree about 'what happens next'.*

Each player in a conflict has a different goal. If a player wins a conflict then their goal is successful and they get to narrate the outcome. The loser in the conflict also gets to contribute to the narration, but they have to narrate in line with the outcome rather than their desired goal.

In a tied conflict, if the players all agree, then it's possible both goals can succeed. Otherwise they both fail and the GM will help narrate a losing outcome with the players.

A good conflict is sharply opposed, and the players are disgreeing over something important. In conflicts don't set 'impossible goals' (e.g. I destroy the planet).

Being Hurt

In Best Friends your character can be hurt as the outcome of a conflict. It's possible. If you are hurt you have to include the injury in future narration of your character.

A character dying, however, is *usually* viewed as an 'impossible goal'. Though a player may choose to narrate this for their own character if they think it appropriate.

General Advice On Playing The Game

Best Friends is about creating stories as a group. You should create stories that you enjoy, stories that are meaningful, amusing, thought provoking and dramatic.

Everyone is encouraged to make suggestions to each other about what the characters are like, or at least how they are viewed by the others. And all players should take part in framing scenes and narrating dramatic events in game.

If you have a GM don't leave it all to them. Yes, the GM does have responsibility for keeping the story on track and making sure everyone is involved. However, it is also the responsibility of each player to be fair, helpful and collaborative. It's a group activity—your input is vital.

To help with the drama and creating stories that are interesting to all of you, all of the players should talk about where their characters might conflict with, and support, one another. Listening to your fellow players is a great way to get ideas for your own character and to come up with twists and stresses that are of interest to the whole group. Drawing a map of the relationships between everyone can help too.

Everyone should have interest in all the characters in game–after all they're Best Friends.

Play Summary

Starting Play and Defining Characters

&❧ Agree the **tone**, **setting** and **content** of the game.
&❧ Set an **end condition** for the game, if needed.

&❧ Create characters, see **Making Friends** (pp. 5–7).
&❧ Choose **Stuff** and create overlapping **Nonsense**.
&❧ Answer the **Big Questions** (p. 13).

Framing A Scene

&❧ **Who** is there? **Where** is it? **What** is it like?
&❧ What does this scene do for the game?

Conflicts, Goals and Outcomes

&❧ **Where** is the conflict? **What** is it?
&❧ **Who** is in conflict? **Why**?
&❧ **Define** the **conflict**, **goals** and **outcomes** sharply.

&❧ The higher hatred in a conflict wins.
&❧ The lower hatred can *push* to win, but the character with the higher hatred can then *push* back over to win.
&❧ Conflicts between equal hatreds are initially tied. Either side can *push* over to win. The loser at that point can then choose to *push* back to tie again if they wish.

&❧ Players can only hold a maximum of 5 friend-chips at any one time. Any more chips than 5 have to be narrated immediately and *pushed* on to someone else. This keeps the friend-chips moving.
&❧ You can't *push* more than once in a conflict.

Closing A Scene

&❧ **End the conflict** and tie up any loose ends.

Ending The Game

&❧ Has the end condition been reached?
&❧ **Wrap up** the story, allow each character an ending.

An Example Of Play

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Here are some examples of the rules of play.

Starting Play

Gregor (GM): What do we want our game to be about?

Rod: I'd like something with a bit of bite, but not really heavy or serious. Something action packed!

Jane: Yeah, I don't mind a bit of action or horror but not anything full of angst or really heavy.

Freddy: I was going to ask for something really kooky and light, but black humour and horror is OK for me too.

Rod: Something like that flick *The Descent*?

Jane: Yeah, something like that. But, please, no gore.

Gregor (GM): Well, we can tone down the gruesome descriptions but keep in the horror. So these are women in their twenties? On a caving weekend?

Freddy: Yeah, that would work for me. I think they've maybe been apart for a while and have met up again for an adventure holiday weekend.

Jane: …and all the old hatreds resurface!

Rod: Yeah, for sure. Let's go with that.

Everyone allocates hatreds and creates characters.

Defining Characters

Gregor (GM): OK, what Nonsense do you share?

Jane: Well, my husband died but he had an affair with one of the others. I'm not sure I know about that… yet.

Rod: Maybe that was my character? I'm the Pretty one. I wouldn't be so Pretty if your Tough girl finds out though!

Jane: I'm thinking it might have been Freddy's character. She's the Smart one. She'd know to keep it quiet from me. What do you think Freddy? Is that OK for you?

Freddy: I'd rather just be the loyal Smart one, really.

Jane: That's OK. Rod, looks like your Pretty girl did it.

Rod: Excellent. I've got Zero in Smart too, so I might have even forgotten I had an affair with him. It'll be this huge thing to you and nothing to me when you find out.

Framing A Scene

Rod: It's my turn to frame a scene. What do you want me to do? Do I just say what I'm doing?

Gregor (GM): Well, OK, can you describe the scene? Your card said 'cave'. So where are we? What is this cave like?

Rod: Umm, we're all in a cave, and there's a pool of water at the bottom of it. We're all just standing around.

Jane: OK, I'm going to…

Gregor (GM): Hi Jane, I'd like a bit more from Rod before we start doing things here. How big's the cave? Is it narrow or cavernous? Dark? Wet?

Jane: Sorry, no problem.

Rod: I think it's really big. A big hole in the ground and we came down into it on ropes. It's probably wet if there's a pool. It's this big old cavern with bats and so on.

Gregor (GM): What's the temperature like in here?

Rod: Outside the hole it's a real sunny and warm day. In here it's cold and wet. It's mighty chilly and a bit creepy.

Freddy: Yeah, it'd be cool if there was a big waterfall pouring into the cave. It sounds like it's a big drop.

Rod: Sure, there's a waterfall and it's so loud we can hardly hear each other unless we're shouting. And there's a rainbow forming in the misty spray over our heads.

Jane: Cool. What time did we get here. My scene finished at breakfast, so I guess that was by 9 am? Is it far from the cabin?

Rod: I think we've taken a few hours to get here and we're probably a bit behind schedule. It must be getting nearer noon by the time we've gotten down into the cave. Oh, and there's a log in the pool. We knocked it in when we were trying to climb down.

Freddy: I think that might have been your character Rod. She's always doing that kind of thing. I'm clumsy but too smart to do that I think. Or was it Jane being gung-ho?

A Conflict

Gregor (GM): I think we have a conflict here in this cave. Jane, what was your goal?

Jane: Well, I think I'm quite Tough with a rating of 2, and I've swum through this tunnel you described. It's totally filled with water and we have to hold our breath to get through. When she's (looks at Rod) following me, I maybe go just a bit further so she's really gasping for air by the time she gets out. I mean I'm gasping, but I'm OK. Rod's character, though, she's going to pass out.

Rod: I've got Tough 1.

Freddy: Ouch! Not enough. Your going to pass out!

Gregor (GM): Rod, what's your goal?

Rod: Well, my goal is that I don't pass out. I'd like to get through, but get Jane stuck in front of me. It's actually me who pushes her out from under the water and saves her.

Gregor (GM): OK. They're the goals. At the moment Jane wins as she has a higher Tough rating. So she's winning.

Pushing

Gregor (GM): Rod, do you want to *push*?

Rod: OK, I'll *push*.

Gregor (GM): Who is tougher than you?

Rod: (Sighs) Jane's character. (*Pushes* chip to Jane.)

Jane: Hmm. What's the outcome at the moment?

Gregor (GM): Rod's winning, what'll happen?

Rod: …um, Jane you're going real far and you get stuck. Then you're flailing in this watery tunnel. I'm beat, my lungs are burning, but I'll *push* as hard as I can, I really try because you've always been the tougher one, right? And I'm going to get you free, but while I'll manage to get us both out – it's you that'll be passed out, not me.

There are some useful *Actual Play* threads for Best Friends online:

http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=21070.0
http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=21406.0
http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=21531.0
http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=21835.0

There is also an MP3 file of a short demo on *boxninja.com*.

Pushing Back

Gregor (GM): That's the outcome at the moment as Rod *pushed* to win. Do you want to *push* back?

Jane: Yes, I'll *push* over.

Gregor (GM): Who is tougher than you?

Jane: Freddy's character. (*Pushes* friend-chip to Freddy.)

Freddy: I'd forgotten where I got that hatred from.

Gregor (GM): Jane, you win the conflict and you get to narrate the outcome. Rod and Freddy you can add in ideas too, but it's Jane that gets to describe what happens here. So, on you go Jane... I take it that you break free?

Ending A Scene

Gregor (GM): You all collapse in a heap as the rocks cascade down through the vent. You see the last of the *things* get battered on the head by a particularly large boulder. It falls limp and more rocks pile down on top of it, sealing the cave behind you.

Rod: I'd like to go…

Gregor (GM): Well, I think I'm just going to wrap this scene up here if that's OK, Rod. I think we've got everything we wanted out of the trip to the caves.

Jane: Yup, that's OK with me.

Freddy: Yeah, me too.

Rod: That's OK with me too then.

Gregor (GM): Wearily you all get to your feet and start to walk back to the cabin. It's dawn and it looks like it'll be a four or five hour walk.

Ending The Game

Gregor (GM): And with the ambulance and police arriving at the cabin we'll draw the game to a close. So, Jane, do you want to go first telling us what happens to your character after the game?

Jane: Well, I think my character is going to have a lot of explaining to do. But in court is anyone going to testify?

And that finishes the example of play.

Game Mastering

Now if you're a player that's all fine and dandy. You describe what your character is 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? Read on.

Other Folks

As the GM you describe the world in conjunction with the players and you keep things moving along. You get to role-play all the incidental people that the characters bump into, or ask the players to role-play them with you. Some non-player characters (NPCs) might be as follows.

Average Boy

Non-descript boy that gets in the way. How very average.
All Hatreds: 1

Tough Boy

Tough boys can sometimes be handy, but are often a pain.
Pretty: 0   **Tough: 2**   **Others: 1**

Pretty Boy

When pretty boys are about… jealousy is bound to follow.
Pretty: 2   **Tough: 0**   **Others: 1**

Other inhabitants of the imaginary game world can easily be extrapolated from these examples.

Taking Turns At Framing Scenes

One idea that you might want to try is getting everyone to take a turn at framing a scene. This can lessen the burden on the GM to frame all the scenes in the game.

You can do this by progressing around the table one-by-one, or by getting everyone to write an idea for a scene on a card and then picking them out as necessary. Or you could say that the last player to receive a pushed chip in one scene has the responsibility to frame the next one.

I've written some notes on this in the Appendix too.

Probing Questions

As GM you should be asking open questions of the players: **How? Why? Where? What? When?**

You should help them describe what they are doing in detail and with vigour. Help define their goals in conflicts clearly and create a vivid and fun story. Encourage with constructive feedback too.
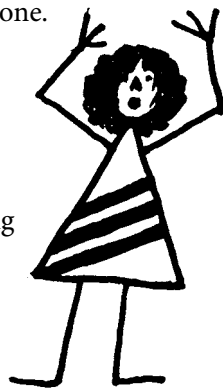
It is also your responsibility to give them a hand when they are lost for words, or stuck about what they want to do. Of course, every player can help, but as GM you should especially take an interest in this and ensuring that everyone gets a fair share of the spotlight.

Calling The Game Off

If it looks like someone isn't enjoying the game, or is uncomfortable with the direction it's taking then you should step in and help resolve the problem. Sometimes you might have to steer a player away from a topic that you'd all agreed not to bring into the game.

And, if players aren't really enjoying the experience, you should step up and call a time out. If you can't get the game back on track to everyone's satisfaction then really the best thing to do is call it off. It really is better to have no game than one that people aren't enjoying.

Keeping An Eye On The Bigger Picture

As GM you should aim to start strongly and end decisively. Try to keep the game moving along at all times. During scenes you should be watching closely to see if the story, characters and drama are developing.

If a scene becomes stuck you should either help to get it moving again or close the scene and frame a new one.

In evaluating conflicts within scenes you should be critical of ones that are loosely defined. Try to get well-defined goals from all the players involved in the conflict.

If a game starts to get out of control you will need to bring everyone together. Help develop the story in a more focused way, alert everyone to the main conflicts and find a sharp end. Conversely, if a game slows down and begins to drag you need to close scenes and stimulate conflicts. What are the issues that matter? Where is the end?

You should also keep in mind the sort of game that everyone wants to play. If one player tries to take the game in a wildly different direction you should be the one to point this out and pull them back to the group. Ask the player to reflect on the goals of the group as a whole and see if they can adjust their ideas to better fit the game.

Scenario Ideas

Here are some situations for games of Best Friends. Ideally you should be able to come up with something collaborative between the members of your group that strikes a chord for you—the most creative people in gaming are those playing the games, not the folks writing books. But, for inspiration perhaps, I present these ideas.

At The Mall

You could spend all day at the mall, from open till close, just shopping and getting coffee, and all the other crazy stuff that happens there. Like getting mistakenly arrested for shoplifting, harassed by builders on their lunch break, stuck in the elevator, or getting locked in. Things like that.

The Prom

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

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, really need get it back? Your friends will help you for sure. Won't they? Well, 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 tape…

House Party

There's a house party on, it's the buzz of your social circle. Everyone who's anyone will be there. Who's coolest, who's prettiest, who's toughest? Well, you'll find out at the party. And just hope that it doesn't all end in tears…

Scenario: Cabin Fever

26

This scenario is about a group of friends meeting up and going on an adventure break together. It's up to the players whether they are at school together, whether this is a reunion some years later, or if they are work colleagues.

Whatever the case, they are all Best Friends and have bubbling hatreds for each other. They should also have overlapping Nonsense and points of conflict that will drive the story. The end condition is the end of the trip.

The scenario takes place in a remote area, which could be the wilds of Scotland, Siberia, Antarctica, or a jungle on the equator. The key element is that the characters are together and their conflicts will surface until a climactic ending is reached. Do they survive the whole weekend?

Character Creation

Get everyone together and discuss the setting.

- What ages are the characters?
- What are their backgrounds?
- Where is the game set? Scotland? Somewhere else?
- Are there any elements you'd like to bring in? Comic book? Supernatural? Fantasy?
- What elements should not be touched upon? What are you uncomfortable with?

Now that everyone is on the same page about the setting they can create characters together and start to write in their Nonsense.

Basics ❧ Play ❧ **Games** ❧ Extras ❧ Commentary   Best Friends

The key points here are the following.

- ❧ The basis is that you're all 𝔅𝔢𝔰𝔱 𝔉𝔯𝔦𝔢𝔫𝔡𝔰 and you're together on holiday here.
- ❧ But why here?
- ❧ Who organized the trip?
- ❧ Who was reluctant to go?
- ❧ Who isn't here? Why not?
- ❧ Where does your Nonsense overlap?
- ❧ Are any of you related?
- ❧ Are, or were, any of you in a relationship? With each other? Or with a common love interest?
- ❧ What role do you have in the group?
- ❧ Who is the leader? And who's a follower?
- ❧ What are your character's problems?

Starting Conflict/Opening Scene

Find a conflict to start the game, this should come from the characters' hatreds and Nonsense that they've just fleshed out. It should be something that the characters have an interest or investment in. Examples are as follows.

- ❧ An argument has broken out over breakfast. Who? Why? How? What is the argument *really* about?
- ❧ Everyone has just descended into a cave only for a rockfall to block everyone in. How are you going to get out? Whose idea was this? Who knows you are here?
- ❧ The cabin that you're staying in has just burnt down along with all your clothes, maps and car keys. Who is to blame? What, or who, was inside the cabin?
- ❧ One character has just broken her leg. Which character? And who was at fault? Who does she blame? How did it happen? Why?
- ❧ Betty, a non-player character, has just fallen off a mountain while climbing. What are you going to do? And are you all roped together?
- ❧ Kayaking down a tricky river the toughest of the group is going too far ahead and some can't keep up.

Frame The Scene

So now, someone 'frames', i.e. describes, the scene. It is usually the GM, but players can do this, or contribute if everyone is happy with that.

- So where are you?
- What does it look like?
- Smell?
- Sounds?
- Taste?
- What is everyone doing?
- What has just happened?
- Be vivid in your description and encourage the players to be colourful too.

And then play begins.

Sharply define conflicts and think of them in terms of the five hatreds. Is this something that involves…

- **Pretty**
- **Cool**
- **Smart**
- **Tough**
- **Rich**

Who is involved in the conflict? What are they conflicting with or about?

String the events together and then the scene will come to an end. The GM can bring it to an end if it starts to flag or get out of hand.

So, when the scene comes to a conclusion, end it by tying up all the points succinctly. Then move on to the next scene.

Further Scenes

Further scenes lead on from the first, feeding on the points that came out of it. Increase the tension and throw in twists and developments. If some characters were less involved the GM should try and involve them more in the next scene, which could be like these.

❧ Late at night in the woods, a dense fog rolls in and a howling can be heard in the distance. It seems to be getting closer.

❧ A walking expedition has been arranged and the tour guide turns up. He is very handsome and tough. What effect does this new addition have on the group?

❧ The characters wander into a remote village which seems to be largely abandoned. Strange sounds can be heard and weird things start to happen.

❧ Bad weather sets in and the characters are trapped outdoors. Will everyone help each other or will cracks begin to form between these Best Friends?

❧ The characters find Betty at the bottom of the cliff. Is she dead? Or is she strangely unaffected by her fall? What does she say? How can you help her?

❧ The characters pass through a spooky cemetery where they are attacked by vampires or zombies. And what effect does the full moon have on any of the characters?

Ending The Game

At some point a climactic conflict will result between many of the characters. Go for it! Work those hatreds. When it is resolved it is time to end the story.

When the story ends everyone in the group gets to say what happens to their character in the aftermath and how it ends for them. How has the weekend changed them? Are they still Best Friends?

Pushing Boundaries

OK. So you've been playing Best Friends and it's light and fluffy. Great. But what if you want to take it up a notch?

Ron Edwards said the following.

> *Basically, these women are in crisis. They are not running their lives well. Situations during play must reveal and highlight every detail about that, and develop them further into consequences – whether funny and satirical, or dramatic and gripping, that's up to you.*

Does this switch a light on for you? If you want to play that sort of game then you should go right ahead. And really go for it! If you're interested in pushing boundaries, and yourself, in that way then I also heartily recommend that you check out Ron's book *It Was A Mutual Decision* too (see p. 45).

More Control Over Your Hatreds

Now, here is something that was in the 24-hour version and I chopped it out from the main part of the game.

I think it's perhaps weak to do this. We should be bold and embrace the character creation presented earlier in the book. I feel that it's liberating to have our characters collaboratively defined by our peers. On the other hand…

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

Changing The Number Of Friend-Chips

One of the variables in the game is the number of friend-chips that players have. I've now said 'start with 2' but you can vary this. A different number of friend-chips, or a different limit on the maximum will affect play for sure. Try using 3 friend-chips each if 2 is too sharp for you.

Do you want to have more or less opportunity to *push*?

Boundary Pushed Scenarios

Here are some scenario ideas that might fit in better with a sharper, harsher spotlight for the game.

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. And what will you do to each other as years of festering hatreds come to the boil. Best Friends? Better enemies…

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 plenty of role-playing. Yeah, sure, you all smile at each other and say the nicest things day-to-day at work, but deep down you remember all the slights and put-downs over the years.

All This Talk Of Wine Glasses?

Push by drinking, then pass the empty glass. The new owner refills it and gains the friend-chip. Simple.

Is Death The End?

No. Just because a character dies doesn't put the player out of the game. Whether playing a ghost (like Banquo in *Macbeth*), or a haunting guilt, you can still take part in the game from beyond the grave.
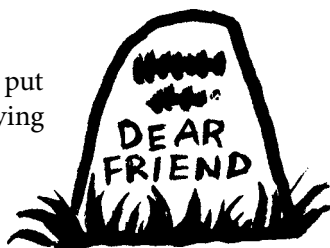
Detailing 'Pretty'

All the things that are covered by Pretty rely on your **looks**, **charm** and **perceived social order**.

Things like the following.

- **Catching a boy's eye**
- **Getting a date**
- **Looking innocent**
- **Getting discounts**
- **Being helped out by boys**
- **First impressions**
- **Being charming**
- **Knowing other beautiful people**
- **Being given the benefit of the doubt**
- **Influencing crowds**
- **Offers of dinner and holidays**
- **Winning beauty contests**
- **Popularity with people who don't know you**

"You would do anything for me now, wouldn't you sweetie? You know what it means to me."

Level 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.

Level 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.

Level 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, in this game, who isn't?) then they may remember you for all the wrong reasons. But, by God, you'll be remembered.

Level 3 and over

Unbelievable.

You should be in Hollywood or a palace. There's very little men won't do for you, even if they hate you for it. Divine.

Detailing 'Cool'

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

Things like the following.

- **Being popular**
- **Stealing Stuff**
- **Not getting fazed**
- **Borrowing things**
- **Knowing other cool people**
- **Saying cool stuff**
- **Persuading people**
- **Staying calm and focused**
- **Mental toughness**
- **Being streetwise**
- **Having followers**
- **Wearing the coolest clothes**
- **Knowing all the latest gadgets**

"Do I look like the sort of girl who worries about Nonsense like that? No, I really don't."

Level 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.

Level 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. One of the masses, you know when to blend in though.

Level 2

Hey! You are ice cold.

Who's that with the gaggle of wannabe cool people around them? Hey, that would be you!

You probably have a little band of followers that laugh at your jokes and everything that you do. They even give others a hard time on your behalf. One of them's even going to name their first daughter after you.

But you're not the only one this cool in your neighbourhood. You've got a rival somewhere that's almost as cool as you are. And they've got followers too.

Level 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.

Whenever cool stuff is going down you're right in the middle. You're a James Dean or Steve McQueen for sure.

Detailing 'Smart'

All the things that are covered by Smart are things that rely on your **quick wits**, **reason** and **education**.

Things like the following.

- **Looking up books**
- **Thinking about Nonsense**
- **Looking clever**
- **Saying clever things**
- **Understanding instructions**
- **Speaking languages**
- **Not getting lost**
- **Arguing and debating**
- **Thinking on your feet**
- **Spotting clues**
- **Understanding technology**
- **Planning ahead**
- **Working gadgets and computers**

"Anyone know what this is? Class? Anyone? Anyone? Anyone seen this before?"

Level 0

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

YOU … ARE … AS … STUPID … AS … A … BOX … OF … ROCKS … — … A … REALLY … BIG … BOX.

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

Level 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. Not one of life's great thinkers.

Level 2

A real smartie pants. You're computer literate and up on all the latest science news and theories.

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 could be a mathlete for sure.

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

Level 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.

There isn't much you don't know or can't figure out for yourself. The downside might be finding stimulating conversation, or anyone that understands your arguments.

Detailing 'Tough'

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

Things like the following.

- **Fights**
- **Avoiding injury and illness**
- **Going without food**
- **Breaking things**
- **Athletic activities**
- **Feats of agility**
- **Climbing trees**
- **Running**
- **Swimming against a strong current**
- **Staying awake when tired**
- **Dancing energetically**
- **Looking healthy**
- **Throwing things a fair distance**

"You're going to have to hit me with something a lot harder than that to get me down."

Level 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.

Level 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.

Level 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.

Level 3 and over

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

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

You're the toughest of the tough. Harder than hard.

Detailing 'Rich'

All the things that are covered by Rich rely on **money** and **status**. This is the land of the 'have's and 'have not's.

Things like the following.

- **Buying Stuff**
- **Getting into expensive eateries, bars and clubs**
- **Owning a car**
- **Paying fines and posting bail**
- **Going to the movies**
- **Being treated with respect**
- **Going on holiday**
- **Knowing other rich people**
- **Etiquette and *savoir faire***
- **Political influence**
- **Social status**
- **Bribing and corrupting**
- **Hiring the very best lawyers**

"If you have to ask the price then I'm sorry to say that you simply can't afford."

Level 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.

Level 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.

Your Stuff is not always the best and most expensive brand, but you do OK.

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

Level 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, friends or wealth. Pretty much 24/7 you are fawned over by sycophants.

Level 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?

A List Of Character Names

In my extensive research (so, it was Google, OK?) I pulled up the 30 most popular female 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.

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.

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, Becca, Cathriona, Claire, Desiree, Elaine, Emily, Fiona, Gwen, Irene, Joan, Kirsten, Lynn, Madison, Pauline, Shannon, Sheryl, Sinéad, Susanne, Tanya, Tori, Wanda, Zelda.

Yet More Names

I've also put together a list of somewhat 'exotic', at least for me, names. These are perhaps useful for games that have a fantasy or SF feel—something off-beat or other worldly.

Afet, Aiko, Akasma, Akela, Aysel, Belere, Behira, Beret, Capeka, Cari, Chandra, Dea, Dina, Erna, Eurydice, Freya, Gerda, Greta, Hecuba, Hertha, Iolanthe, Irma, Juanita, Karli, Korë, Lana, Melek, Mortigern, Myra, Naomi, Nerine, Octavia, Olwen, Parthenia, Piper, Rose, Ruta, Selima, Siân, Tansy, Theodesia, Ulva, Usha, Valdís, Vena, Waltraud, Wynne, Xara, Xixili, Xylia, Yağmur, Zenobia, Zillah.

Commentary: The Ronnies

This game came about because of the 'Ronnies' game design competition run by Ron Edwards. The competition was organized via the Forge, a website for indie roleplaying games at http://www.indie-rpgs.com/.

Ron said he was going to give out awards to deserving games that were completed in a 24-hour window. I took up the challenge and looked at the words to base a game on: any two of *suburb*, *hatred*, *girlfriend* and *rats*.

The original game was planned, written and illustrated in one 24-hour stint, and, no, it didn't win a 'Ronny' (they're hard to get). However, it was put in the 'Unbaked but Tasty So Far' category along with some other solid entries and I was encouraged enough to do this version.

The 24-hour version of Best Friends is available online for free.
pdf: http://www.1km1kt.net/rpg/Best_Friends.php
review: http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=17121.0

The 'High Ronny' winners for September 2005 were, and I salute them graciously, the following games: *Rats in the Walls, The Suburban Crucible, Alien Angels, Space Rat*.

Ron also then awarded the following games a 'Lower Ronny' award as second-tier winners: *One Can Have Her, Cutthroat, Untitled*.

The other 'Unbaked But Tasty So Far' games were: *Attack of the Giant Rats, Black Widows, The Rat-God's Girlfriend, All Growed Up, Sloat & Larkin, Vendetta, Want*.

Take a look at all the Ronnies entries. There are many fine games and ideas in these free PDFs.

The Ronnies are a competition for 24-hour games at the Forge.
thread: http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=19156.0

A Role-Playing Game About Girlfriends And All Their Petty Hatreds

Commentary: Thanks, etc.

I feel that I should say all my 'thank you's here, so I will.

First, *Ron Edwards* for the whole Ronnies competition and for his feedback on the original version. Chapeau, Ron!

My sister, *Ruth*, for actually reading the game, and laughing. Oh, and all her Best Friends for the inspiration, naturally.

Cat Tobin, for being straight ahead, and giving the very first feedback and encouragement on the game.

Steve Bassett, for kicking me when it needed to be done.

Locally, thanks to *Malcolm Craig, David Dolman, Shevaun Frazier, Hendrik Little, Sara-Sinéad Mulholland, Liam O'Connor, Janet Pashley, Fergus* and *Padmini Ray-Murray, Kathleen Reedy, Myles Stenhouse* and *John Wilson*.

And from much further afield, *considerable* thanks to: *Emily Care Boss, Morgan Davie, Rob Donoghue, Andy Kitkowski, Warren Merrifield* and *James Wallis*. Thanks also to *Ken Whitman* and *Beth Ditto*, and *Brennan Taylor* for printing and overseas sales.

Playtesters: *Matthew Barrowcliffe, Steve Bassett, David Dolman, David Neil* and *Anna Pearce* (GEAS); *Douglas Calder, Malcolm Craig, Ross MacKenzie* and *Alasdair MacLeod* (ORC).

Of course, *my parents* for all their time, patience and love. Finally, my thanks go out to *you* for buying this game.

Gregor Hutton, August 2006, Edinburgh, UK.

About The Author

Gregor Hutton is from Scotland. He was born in 1972 and started gaming in the early 1980s. His first published work was **Frenzy**, a 'roleplaying game of fast action' released by Venture Press in 1995. Look out for his next roleplaying game '**3:16 Carnage Amongst The Stars**.'

Other Games You Should Take A Look At

Breaking The Ice, by Emily Care Boss (*Black & Green Games*)
A Game about Love, for Two. An easy, fun game of dating and disasters.
http://www.blackgreengames.com/

It Was A Mutual Decision, by Ron Edwards (*Adept Press*)
A game about a relationship breaking up in three parts. Very, very dark.
http://www.indiepressrevolution.com/

Black Widows, by Clinton R. Nixon
'Spurned lovers' facing up to a Bond-style nemesis in this 24-hour game.
pdf: http://www.1km1kt.net/rpg/Black_Widows.php
review: http://www.indie-rpgs.com/forum/index.php?topic=17124.0

A 'Mean Girls' game called 'I Know, Right?', by Jenni Dowsett
Unpublished game about teenage girls, their cliques and traumas.
review: http://www.additiverich.com/morgue/archives/001250.html

Fonts Used In This Book

Minion (Body Text)
http://store.adobe.com/type/browser/P/P_1719.html

Minion Pro is an Adobe Original typeface designed by Robert Slimbach.

The first version of Minion was released in 1990. Minion Pro is inspired by classical, old style typefaces of the late Renaissance, a period of elegant, beautiful, and highly readable type designs.

Curlz (Header Font)
http://www.ascendercorp.com/msfonts/curlz_regular.html

Curlz was originally designed for the Microsoft Publisher software font set by Steve Matteson and Carl Crossgrove in 1995.

Curlz is designed to look like bent, twisted metal. The Curlz font is best used for impudent, carefree titles.

Online Edition. BOX0001
Third version, July 2007.

Appendix: Some Friendly Words

Well, it's been almost a year since Best Friends was first released in August 2006 and after three printings I figured it was time for a new look for the cover, and for me to write something else for the inside. I wondered: should I revise the whole book, or leave it untouched? What to do?

In the end it was **events** that led me to the decision I've made. And events that, for me anyway, bring into strong relief the underlying point to Best Friends.

> **How *strong*, *deep*, *long-lasting* and *forgiving* the friendships between women are.**

A Personal Story

A few months ago my 96-year-old Grandmother became quite seriously ill. She was recovering when she took a very bad turn during visiting time. I was the only one there and I felt helpless. Hours later it looked bleaker, and I dejectedly left the hospital to visit my father in another hospital. My mother, her cousins, and my sister were all now at my Gran's side and they sang, and they laughed, and told stories, and recalled fond memories, and found strength. Against this adversity she rallied and pulled back from the brink. She wasn't ready to go. Not yet.

My grandmother died peacefully over a week later, on her own terms, with my mother at her side. Soon after I was talking with my mother, a welcome break from the frantic trips back and forth to varying hospitals many miles apart. We talked, amongst many things, about this book. She pointed out that life had been too busy recently and what more did I really have to say in it? Sweet clarity.

All I had to say was what I tell anyone at a games convention when talking about the game. So here it is.

Changes?

So, what have I changed? Here's a bulleted list.

❤ I have made the default number of friend-chips to be 2 rather than 3. I've found that it gives the currency more value and stops players from using them when they don't strongly disagree with the current outcome.

Related to this I've changed the text on page 31 to say you can try playing with 3 for a different feel. The early games I played had worked well with 3 but people rarely were put in the position of being short-stacked, something that is interesting to have in play.

❤ I note here that when I play the game with friends I like to play a character too. So when I play the game we do away with the GM (call it 'GM-ful' or 'GMless' play as suits your outlook). We take turns to frame scenes and we co-operate as a group about where the story is going and what it means to us.

To help with this you really need some formalised agreement about framing the scenes, so I added some points in this Appendix about framing scenes.

❤ The important wording change on p. 14. 'The lower hatred can *push* to win.' It's just clearer that way.

❤ An Index, on pp. 54 and 55, which should be useful.

❤ I also put in this Appendix a (hopefully) clear conflict with *pushing*, and not-*pushing*, to show how friend-chips are used. Pretty much this is what I show in short demos at conventions.

❤ Some minor changes here and there: I've merged side bars into the main text, changed the odd word too, and added boxes around things to highlight them.

Advice: Scene Framing

Choose one of the following options for framing scenes. Don't stay in a scene if it has served its purpose, y'know? Close scenes when you're done with them and move on. And when framing a scene remember the points on p. 28.

(1) If you have a GM, and you're all comfortable with them usually presenting the scenes for you, then having the GM open and close your scenes is the way to go. You all can make suggestions to the GM, but ultimately they have the authority to frame the scenes for play.

(2) Either with or without a GM it can be dynamic to give the scene framing authority to the last person who received a Friend-chip. If you get *pushed* to and the scene then closes you're responsible for framing the next scene.

(3) You can ensure that you all have a chance to frame a scene by going around the group in order or randomly.

Stuff, Nonsense and Adversity

Stuff and Nonsense are the possessions and problems that you have right now. They are the *issues* at hand.

Nonsense is important, because without it, the only source of adversity is between the characters (and while funny and true this only carries you so far). Make sure that external adversity is real in play. To discover the strength of female friendship, that potential strength must be invoked by something outside worth fighting, or surviving, or recovering from. It can be good to *push* on behalf of the external adversity so it has meaning, but you have to know when to let it be beaten.

Love

There are no rules for 'Friendship' or 'Love.' You must choose when to support, or oppose, your Best Friends. It is the moment-to-moment choice you make when playing.

Example: Ancient Egypt

It's worth me showing how you might set up a game. It's already there on pages 12 and 13, but here it is again in an example. The *Play Summary* is also on pages 17 and 61.

We've decided to play a game set in **Ancient Egypt**. We're all excited about playing in an imagined world heavily influenced by our innacurate impressions of Cleopatra and Anthony, Julius Caesar and so on. This isn't history.

You can decide settings at the start of play or beforehand like we did, whatever works best for you. I've arrived with a list of Ancient Egyptian names from the internet.

So, the first thing to do is to name our characters and *Make Friends* (pp. 5–7). Soon we have the hatreds of Emu, Odjit, Nubit and the others all sorted out. Next, we're deciding the 'hooks' for our characters. My character Emu has a high Cool and Smart, so I figure she's a Priestess.

I am **Emu**. And I… **make poisons and know magic.**

We all do this and then write down Stuff and Nonsense. We've put a piece of paper on the table and mapped out our inter-related Nonsense on it as an *aide-mémoire*. Some Nonsense is that I've cast a spell on Caesar so he loves me, but Nubit is in league with General Maximus to overthrow my enthralled Roman Emperor. And so on.

When this is done and we've talked about how and why our characters are Best Friends it's time to start Play. If someone has a good idea for an opening scene let them frame it, or if you have a GM they might want to do that.

I have a good idea to open: Caesar has sent me a love letter that contains plans for a secret trip to Egypt. And so I frame the first scene. It's not all about big conflicts all the time—we're going to build these relationships first.

Nubit

Emu

Odjit
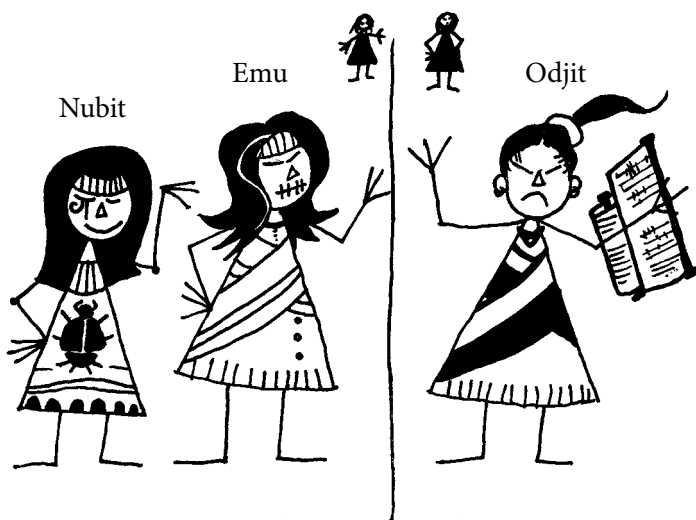
An Example Conflict

Who Picks Up The Letter On The Table?

I want to pick up the letter, you want to pick up the letter, John thinks it's not the love letter from Caesar at all.

What happens next?

First we would establish whether it is, or isn't, *that* love letter from Caesar. After all, would we want to pick it up if it wasn't? So, is it? Who introduced the love letter from Caesar in the first place, or framed the scene? They brought this into the story and so it's good to ask them.

If we have a GM then they're a good person to decide these kind of things too. In general, don't bring something in that everyone in the group objects to. But be cooperative, and don't block the story, y'know?

So I framed the scene and I'm sure that it really is the letter, and now's a great time for it to turn up. We also have to decide exactly what we're conflicting over: who picks the letter up? And note that when we're declaring

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our intended actions we can amend them based on what the other players say. So, 'Oh, I don't object to you grabbing the letter first, but I then snatch it out of your hand.' or 'Oh, I'm only interested in reading it first.' are perfectly valid amendments or clarifications. We work out what we're actually conflicting about before going on. So, if everyone is happy we get into resolving the conflict.

Formally, the first person to do something in the fiction that we disagree with gets to say what it is exactly that they are doing, and what Hatred they are doing it with. We can then say, either 'OK, I actually agree with that but disagree about this…' or 'Yes! I disagree about that.'

So, let's go back to the letter. You were talking and you said 'I pick up the letter!' and I said 'No you don't'. In this case I'm disagreeing with you, so you get to say what the conflict is based on.

You say it's a Tough conflict. Even if someone else says 'Oh, it's *got* to be Cool, you won't *dare* take the letter!', you are allowed to say 'No, it's a Tough conflict'. If you have a GM they can declare for NPCs and help you decide what hatreds conflicts are about too.

My character, Emu, has Tough 0, your character, Odjit, has Tough 2. Look, we're in the diagram over there.

So as we stand you win: the rules say the higher hatred wins. You get to narrate swiftly reaching for the letter, perhaps elbowing past me and snatching at the letter on the table? Or maybe just effortlessly getting there before me? Up to you. You get to say it.

But… you don't have the letter just yet, because the conflict isn't over. Do I still disagree? If I do, then I can *push* and win. Or I can give in and say 'yeah, OK, you get the letter' and that ends the conflict, with you winning.

Say in this case that I still disagree. I really want to pick up that letter – it means something to me, so much so that I'll *push*. So, I say 'No! You don't get the letter. I *push*!' I send 1 friend-chip to the Best Friend I hate for being Tougher than me, it's John's character Nubit.

I then narrate the *push*: 'For once I'm not as slow as you think and I get there first. My hand swings down and I grab the letter!' Not so fast, not so fast. I don't have the letter yet either – I got a bit carried away there – because the conflict isn't over yet. It's only over when we've all *pushed* once or we agree.

So, do *you* disagree? You can either *push* and re-assert that you are Tougher than me, but you'll need to send a friend-chip to someone (the person you hate for being tougher than you), or you can live with it and let me get the letter.

Say you *push* back, and funnily the chip also goes to Nubit, it just happens that way. Turns out we both hate her for being Tougher than us. You say 'As ever, you think you're quicker than you actually are, Emu. But whose hand is on the letter already? Mine!' And you're back winning, I've lost a chip, you've lost a chip and Nubit has gained two friend-chips through our *pushing*.

Over? Not quite, what about our Best Friends? Does anyone disagree? Or is everyone happy with Odjit getting the letter? Look around the group, anyone object?

John disagrees, and so he *pushes* one of the friend-chips he gained to whoever Nubit hates for being Tougher than her. It turns out that's you, Odjit. You both have Tough 2 too. Petty hatreds often work that way. And John gets to narrate on my behalf with Nubit's *push*: 'Nubit clears her throat. Odjit, whose hand is under yours? I think Emu got the letter first. And she's normally *so* slow, are you feeling OK? Maybe the heat has slowed *you* down…'

Anyone else object and want to *push* on *your* behalf? Turns out that the other players decide they're happy with their friend-chips and decide not to *push* for Odjit.

So Emu, Tough 0, wins and gets the letter. Perhaps the GM narrates this, or I do since I now have it in my hand. But the conflict is now over and we move on. I *pushed* for me to win and so did John. Only you *pushed* against that.

In terms of friend-chips I've lost one, John has gained one and you are back where you started having *pushed* one away but then had one *pushed* back to you.

Two Key Points

(1) The conflict has been won and so the conflict has to be respected. You can't just start a new conflict to invalidate this conflict. Emu got the letter and that's been decided. So no follow-up conflicts with Odjit or Nubit snatching it off Emu.

(2) When Nubit *pushed* to help Emu, she couldn't get the letter for herself. The conflict was between Emu and Odjit for the letter. The outcome had to be one or the other. If Nubit had wanted the letter she should have conflicted with Odjit at the start.

Actual Play

On the BoxNinja website I have links to forum threads and examples of actual play. If you have an example of actual play that you'd like me to link to then please send me an e-mail. I'd be delighted to share it with other players of the game.

Many thanks to the Sons of Kryos podcast who made an MP3 of a 15-minute demo at GenCon 2006. It is available on my site (http://boxninja.com) and theirs (http://www.sonsofkryos.com under the 'Other Recordings' area). I hope at some point to have movies of play online too.

More Thanks

And to end I include some new 'thank you's.

To both my grandmothers, my mother and my sister.

Many thanks to Graham Walmsley and Joe Prince for reading the updated text and this Appendix. Their feedback and comments were invaluable to me. Cheers!

Locally, thanks to: John Wilson, Rose Lindgren, Shannon East, Paula and Steve Dempsey, Will Howliston, Warren Philips, Angus Abranson, Matt Machell, Andy Kenrick.

Further afield: Dro, Jenni Dowsett, Fred Hicks, Paul Tevis, John Kim, Robin Laws, Jason Morningstar, Tim Kleinert, Nathan D. Paoletta, Meguey Baker and Emily Care Boss.

For the *wilder* games… 'Frat Boys': Alexander, Iain, Jeff, Julie (GenCon 2006). 'Atlanta': Brian, Dave, John, Julia, Lucy, Malcolm, Paul, Shannon (GEAS, Edinburgh).

Brian Nisbet. For spending €500 (i.e. $675) on a copy of the first printing for charity in the auction at GaelCon 2006 in Clontarf Castle, Dublin. That's class.

Websites: GamerChicksRule.com, SonsofKryos.com, HaveGamesWillTravel, TheDurham3 and RPGMP3.com.

—Gregor Hutton, Edinburgh, July 2007.

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Best Friends

I am...

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And I...

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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.

Pretty **Cool** **Smart** **Tough** **Rich**

Stuff

Nonsense

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Best Friends

Play Summary

Starting Play and Defining Characters

- Agree the **tone**, **setting** and **content** of the game.
- Set an **end condition** for the game, if needed.

- Create characters, see **Making Friends** (pp. 5–7).
- Choose **Stuff** and create overlapping **Nonsense**.
- Answer the **Big Questions** (p. 13).

Framing A Scene

- **Who** is there? **Where** is it? **What** is it like?
- What does this scene do for the game?

Conflicts, Goals and Outcomes

- **Where** is the conflict? **What** is it?
- **Who** is in conflict? **Why**?
- **Define** the **conflict**, **goals** and **outcomes** sharply.

- The higher hatred in a conflict wins.
- The lower hatred can *push* to win, but the character with the higher hatred can then *push* back over to win.
- Conflicts between equal hatreds are initially tied. Either side can *push* over to win. The loser at that point can then choose to *push* back to tie again if they wish.

- Players can only hold a maximum of 5 friend-chips at any one time. Any more chips than 5 have to be narrated immediately and *pushed* on to someone else. This keeps the friend-chips moving.
- You can't *push* more than once in a conflict.

Closing A Scene

- **End the conflict** and tie up any loose ends.

Ending The Game

- Has the end condition been reached?
- **Wrap up** the story, allow each character an ending.

Best Friends

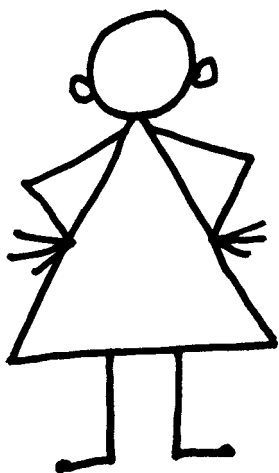## I am...

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Nonsense