

“**Best Friends** is one of the most genuinely innovative role-playing concepts I have come across in a considerable time.”

—Hendrik Little



Best Friends

by Gregor Hutton



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



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.

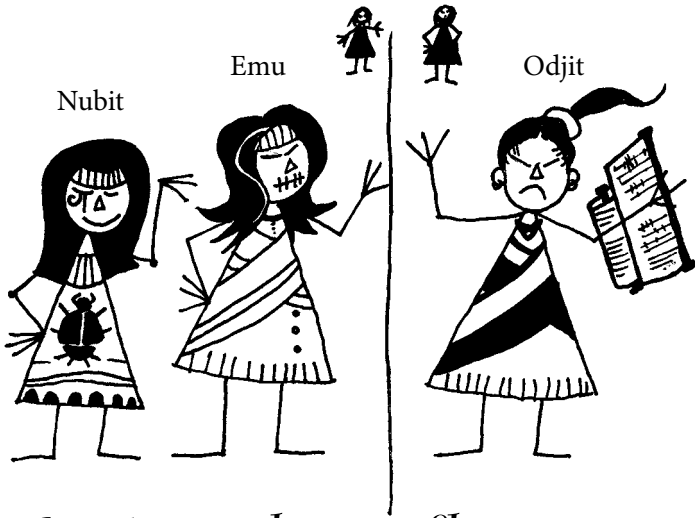
So, the first thing to do is to name our characters and *Make Friends* (pp. 5–7). Soon we have the hatreds of Emu, Odjit, Nubit and the others all sorted out. Next, we're deciding the 'hooks' for our characters. My character Emu has a high Cool and Smart, so I figure she's a Priestess.

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.



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

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 o, 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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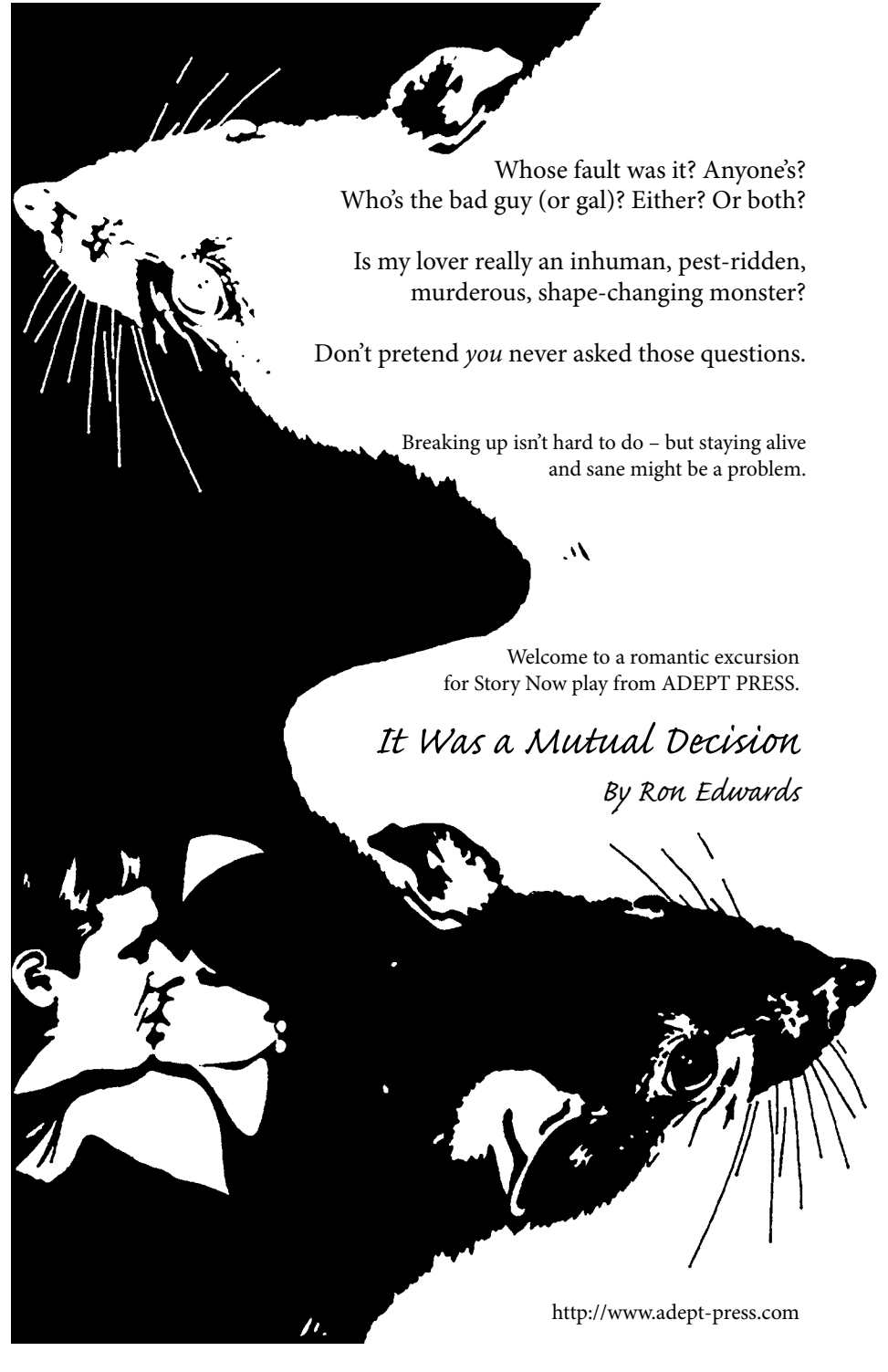
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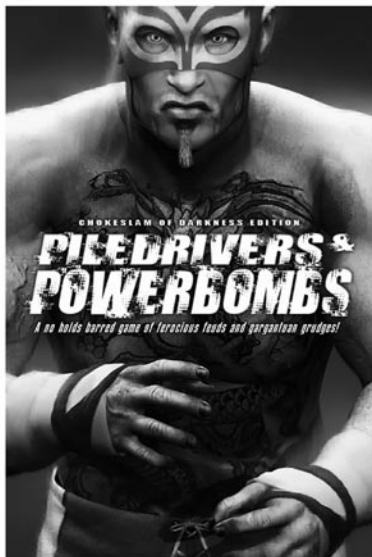
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Best Friends

I hate because she is **prettier** than me.
I am... I hate because she is **cooler** than me.
..... I hate because she is **smarter** than me.
And I... 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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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.

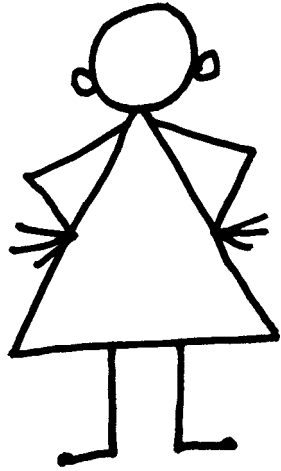
Best Friends

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.....

And I...

.....



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Tough

Rich



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Stuff

.....

Nonsense