

The Friendship Game V.2

A positive game design by Guy Shalev Copyright 2007-2010.

In this game you play a group of friends and the interactions between them. You could play a group of mutant super-heroes, a bunch of lords and ladies in the time of French Revolution, a bunch of stray cats or just neighbours living in NYC.

Sit down with the group of friends you plan to play this game. You'll play characters other than yourselves, like actors in a play, but more like actors in a daily show or a soap opera. Make sure you're comfortable with one another, get to know one another as players, become friends before you begin in portraying an imaginary group of friends.

First, come up with the location and backdrop for the game, which of the groups mentioned in the first paragraph or fictional group you'd portray, what is the setting (France, Post-Nuclear American Midwest, Time Traveling Magicians, whatever).

Next, each player will come up with a name for his character, and a profession. Take nametags or stickies and put them on your shirt, so another player could easily tell who you are in the game.

Now it's time to grab two types of tokens. Glass beads in two different colours work best, but you can also use coins, poker chips, slips of paper or whatever else floats your boat. Designate one group of tokens as "Light" and the other as "Dark".

Answer the following questions for your character, taking tokens as appropriate:

- Does your Character love one of the other characters?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.
- Does the other character knows your character loves him or her?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.
 - If Not, take a note, write on it "Hidden Love" and place one Dark token on it, this is a Secret.
- Do you make the other characters laugh?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.
- Do you lie to the other characters?
 - If Yes, take a note, write down a lie you tell the other characters and place a Dark token on it, this is a Secret.
 - If Not, take a Light token.
- Was your character romantically involved with any other characters before?
 - If Yes, take a Light token for each character he was involved with.
- Do you help the other characters when they need help?
 - If Yes, take a Light token, and come up with the ways you help them, or did before.
- Would you say your character is "innocent"?
 - If Yes, take a Light token.

Make sure your character has at least two Light Tokens by the time you finish answering the questionnaire.

Finally, introduce each character to the other characters.

Resolution:

During the game there will be situations where you're unsure what the outcome will be, where the character wants to do something and may fail, or more than one character wants opposite things to happen, we'll call these things "Conflicts", which is short for Conflicts of Interest.

Discuss those situations with your friends. As the player group, that is. Discuss what can happen if the character(s) fail or succeed, or if one character succeeds and the other fails. If only success or failure give you interesting results, then choose those interesting results, success or failure! If however, you have interesting possible results both for success and failure, it's time to roll the dice.

Yes, I forgot to mention, you also need a bunch of dice, of the 6-sided variety, which come with most board games, or can be found in hobby shops nearby.

Every time you want to roll dice, you have to spend a Light token, you then roll 2 dice, plus an additional dice for each additional Light token you choose to spend.

If you roll 7 (7 being the default "Target number") or above when adding the results on all the dice together, then you succeed, and gain two Light tokens.

Any player may describe how a lie, action or inaction on his character's part impedes the effort of the competing character, take a Dark Token and place it on one of his Secrets, and raise the target number by 2 (if needed, create a new Secret).

For example:

Rob wants to try to get a new job, and his conflict is to succeed at the job interview, if he succeeds, it will be interesting because his children rely on him, and he will then be able to sustain them, and if he fails, he'll have to look for help from other resources, which is also interesting.

Rob wants to succeed, so he spends 2 Light tokens, 1 for the conflict, and 1 for an extra die. Lisa who gave him a recommendation, didn't tell him she was fired from the position she held with the company for fraud, so her recommendation actually sheds bad Light on Rob, so he rolls 3 dice and needs to gain 9 or higher. Lisa will take another Dark token to place on her "Fraud" Secret.

Tokens (and gameplay):

Place the tokens no one owns in the middle of the table, they are the token pool.

Play goes around the table, each player, at his turn, sets up a scene, describes who is present and what is going on. Once this brief exposition ends, play begins.

The narrating player must spend one Light token to set the scene, or if the scene involves either one of his Secrets or how the Secret affects one or more of his friends, he takes a Dark token instead and places it on the appropriate Secret.

If one of the characters important to this scene is not ran by one of the players, choose a player that does not portray a character in this scene to play him or her. Some groups prefer to have one such player who doesn't play any characters of his own, but instead plays all of the non-player characters, those characters who do not belong to any one player.

Secret: Each Secret is written down on a sheet of paper in front of the player who owns it. Each Secret begins with one Dark token on it. In each scene where the issue of the Secret is brought up (two secretly in love characters kissing while their friends watch TV for example) or has consequences on another character (the above fraud example), the Secret gains another Dark token.

Once a Secret has 5 Dark Tokens it is time for Catharsis. The Secret will be revealed to one or more characters, and play will proceed from there.

Remove the Secret, and if need be replace it with a new Secret belonging to the characters now involved in the manner (a plot to kill the king, now involving two of the characters instead of just one).

The relief at the exposure of this secret is palpable. The Player who revealed the secret gains 3 Light tokens, and each of the characters who partook of the Secret now has a choice: To provide empathy and support to the secret-revealer and receive two Light tokens, or to be judgmental and cold and to receive only one Light token.

If one of the people who finds out a Secret was innocent, ask the player if the character still is innocent; if the answer is yes, give that player an additional Light token.

Hope: Your character will probably have goals; things he wants to come to pass that will need some help. Some may call them goals, other will call them Hopes, regardless, they are yours.

Write what your Hope is on a piece of paper (like a secret) and place it in front of you. After every scene where your character(s) strives towards a Hope, place one Light token on it.

Most Hopes take five tokens to complete. Once you have five Light tokens on the Hope, you have achieved it. In case of complex Hopes, break them down, like in "Prisonbreak", or assassinating a king, getting guard training is a 3 successes Hope, getting hired as a guard is another 5, being placed with the king at the right time 7 more, etc.

When you complete a Hope, you gain a number of Light tokens equal to half the number on the Hope card, divided down.

When your character can choose between his friends and outsiders, or between his friends or taking the easy route, and takes the choice of sticking with his friends, he gains a Light token.

When a character/player does something that makes the other players excited, they can award him with Light tokens, for every Light token they give him, he gains another one from the pool.

When a character confides in another character, and that character gives him support, award the supporting character with a Light token from the pool.

If your character is “The funny man”, and he makes the other characters Lighten up after a tough time, award him with a Light token.

The default length of the session is two rounds: After every player had set up two scenes, the session ends. Give each player one Light token.

This is also a good place to stop for the night, if you are looking for such a moment. You can keep playing, of course!

Lacunae:

There are a couple of situations that can arise and are not covered in the rules, or appear not to be covered in the rules. We’ll address them, and dispense with some game advice here:

Competing Characters: Sometimes two characters want opposing things, such as one character tries to steal from another, and the second tries to stop the first.

Well, in such a case if the thief succeeds, the person he stole from failed to stop him, and vice versa. So we will only have the active player roll. The active player is the one whose character is taking the action, as opposed to the one who tries to stop change from occurring!

Also, only players get to roll for their characters. You do not get rolls for those characters that belong to no player, or are played by the player who plays all such characters, if you have one.

Now, what if two players want things that do not contradict one another? Such as one wants to stop the thief and one wants to calm down the robbed person? These are two conflicts, as their results do not affect the other. If one’s results would affect another’s intentions, go through the first, and see whether the second now applies.

Remember, if only one result is interesting, then there’s no conflict.

Running Out: You need a Light token in order to narrate a scene. You need a Light token in order to initiate a conflict. But what do you do when you do not have Light tokens and you wish to engage in these activities?

First, gaining Light tokens in this game is easy, most things on which you spend Light tokens yield Light tokens, and many things give you Light tokens free of charge. But it is still possible to run out. Well, if you run out when it’s not your turn, try to have your character engage in such activities, or have yourself be a valuable enough player, so you will get Light tokens from the other players!

But if that still does not work out, and you really want to initiate a conflict, or your time to narrate a scene had come, and you're still short? Time to hit the secrets. Add a dark token to a secret you own, or create a new secret and place one dark token on it. It is strongly advised that the conflict you begin, or the scene you narrate, incorporate this secret in some manner. If it does, then it does not gain an additional dark token, this time.

Setting Scenes: The key thing here is: "Don't sweat it." Narrating scenes is something that you learn as time goes along. Just as important is to know when scenes end. Don't sweat that too much either.

If the scene runs out, then end it, if a scene is interesting, but the whole group thinks it might benefit from cutting it now and seeing what happened "after", then end it, and the next scene will go either to those characters later, or better yet, different characters. Think of how things happen in a television show.

Something to think about is how the scene played out, after it ends. If no conflicts occurred, think whether no character wanted to do anything, which might require a more interesting or urgent situation to be set up next time or whether because one character did try for something they wanted and met opposition, but the group decided that only one outcome was interesting. If the latter occurs, then it's quite OK, great even.

Even if the above does not occur, so long as a scene has secrets crop up, it's ok. In the end, only players get to decide when their secrets will appear and influence a scene, and it's suggested to engage quite heavily in this. A secret that lasts a session is ok, and most should probably not occur in more than two.

You can always reach Catharsis and then create a modified secret based on the old one, now incorporating the characters you confided in!

Finally, even if the above does not occur, a scene in which hopes are resolved, or where many Light tokens exchanged hands, also shows that this was a good, dynamic scene. On that note, hopes do not require opposition in all cases, and even if they do, there may be no cause for a conflict, if only one resolution is deemed interesting.

Secrets and Situation: Each scene should have something interesting going on. Each scene should be set up with a dynamic situation, or question, at its core. Such a situation will affect the rest of the scene and move characters into action, which in this game may often be interactions between them.

There is no knowledge players hide from one another in this game. All players know all the secrets the characters hide from one another. This, in turn, makes secrets a great source of tension and interest in the game. Just like when watching a play or a soap on TV, and you can't wait for the secret to be revealed, or exclaim at another narrow miss.

As such, it might be best if there's at least one Secret in play at all times, that is, if at least one character has a Secret at any point in the game.

If each character has a secret, or if each character has 2-3 secrets, the game might gain quite a soap-opera-esque feel to it. Well, don't start with too many, but let more develop as the game progresses. One character having a secret regarding each of the other characters might make for an interesting setup.

If players really want to “push” for a driven game in a short amount of time, try to get a Secret to play a role in each and every scene. This does not necessarily mean a Secret will gain a Dark Token in each scene (for “showing”), because it might show up in its absence, where a character carefully acts so the issue will *not* come up.

Appendix 1: Summary:

This section will summarize the rules, where necessary.

Character Generation:

1. Come up with a name and profession of each character, wear a name-tag.
2. Answer the questions at the bottom of page 1.
3. Make sure each character has at least two Light tokens.
4. Introduce the characters to one another.
5. Optional: Your group might want to make sure there's at least one Secret going around.

Game-play:

1. Going around the table, each player narrates a scene. Narrating a scene costs one Light token.
2. Should players' characters face opposition, discuss what happens if they succeed or fail. If only one option is interesting, go with that.
3. If both options are interesting, initiate a conflict, with the player whose character is trying to do something spending a Light token.
4. The player gets to roll two six-sided dice, and then adds their results together. If they gain a result of 7 or higher, the character succeeds.
5. Each Light token spent in addition, adds another die. Each Dark token placed on a secret, raises the target number (by default 7) by 2.
6. If a player reaches step #1 or #3 and has no Light tokens, they get to add a Dark token to an existing Secret, or start a new Secret and place one Dark token on it.

Acquiring Light Tokens:

1. When you win a conflict roll, gain two Light tokens.
2. When a character undergoes Catharsis (Secret reaches 5 Dark Tokens), his player gains 3 Light tokens.
3. When a character undergoes Catharsis, each character confided in gains 1 Light token of judgmental, 2 if supportive, and an additional one if they were innocent and remain innocent after the secret was exposed.
4. When a Hope reaches its goal, the player of the character that had that Hope gains Light tokens equal to half the goal-number, rounded down.
5. When a character chooses their friends over outsiders or the easy road, they gain a Light token.
6. When a character or player does something that excites other players, they can award him for a Light token. For each Light token they award him, he also gains an additional one.
7. When another character confides in your character, and your character is supportive, gain a Light token.
8. If your character is "the funny man", and he makes the other characters lighten up after they are down, gain a Light token.
9. After a "session", which is two rounds of each player setting a scene, passes, each player gains a Light token.

Secrets:

1. Each Secret is written on a small note of paper, describing it, and one Dark token is placed on it.
2. When a player uses a Secret to raise the difficulty of a roll by two, describe how the Secret makes things harder, and add a Dark token to the Secret.
3. For each scene in which a Secret is brought up or affects other characters, place a Dark token on the character. Unless one was already placed for a character starting the scene or initiating a conflict when they do not have a Light token to spend.
4. When a Secret has 5 Dark tokens on it, the character whose Secret it is undergoes Catharsis, and reveals the Secret to one or more characters. The Secret is removed, but it's also a good time to replace it with another Secret.
5. A character undergoing Catharsis gains 3 Light tokens. The characters the Secret was shared with gain 1 Light token, an additional one if they were supportive, and an additional one if they were innocent (from the character creation questionnaire) and had retained their innocence.

Hopes:

1. A Hope is a goal a character has. Write it down on a small sheet of paper, like a Secret.
2. In every scene a character strives towards a Hope, place a Light token on the Hope. There is no conflict or even opposition required for this, but it may be appropriate.
3. Decide how hard the Hope is to accomplish, the default is 5. Small tasks might take 3, while harder and longer ones might take 7.
4. If the character has a goal that'd take a long time to accomplish, break it up into multiple Hopes. It might be best to go at them one after the other, or they could be done concurrently.
5. When you've placed a number of Light tokens on a Hope equal to the number on it, you accomplish the Hope, and gain Light tokens equal to half the number on it, rounded down.

Appendix 2: Copyright stuff.

Ok, so this game is mine, right? Well, yes, but you can use it too.

My email is tundranocaps@gmail.com and if you fire me an email and ask to use this game, and this text, you can. You can take it and add art to it, you can take it and put it into your own game.

You can publish products, which also include this text, for money.

What you need to do is attribute me, clarify which part of the texts are mine (and they will remain mine, you basically acquire a free license), and ask my permission. I will almost assuredly say yes. After I die, assume I've said yes.

If you'll want to give me some beer money, I won't say no. Though I don't drink beer.

To all the people who are thinking of playing it, feel free to make as many copies as you want, email and distribute it in whatever way you wish. And then send me an email and tell me how it went ☺

Guy Shalev, 2010.