

Our Friday Night: A Game for Best Friends

By Carrie Deal

Materials: 3-5 people who are close friends, or are willing to act as close friends. A room or area to get cozy in. Ideally, a television or other large screen. Electricity is not needed for this game. Something to write with, something to write on, a timer.

Scenario: You're somewhere between 19 and 40. You're with two to four of your friends. These are some of your best friends in the world. You all love each other. You're watching a movie none of you have ever seen before. It turns out to be perfect for your group.

Time: ~1.5-2 hours

Establishing characters:

If you're not playing this game as yourself with your real life best friends, you'll need to invent characters and their relationships. Come up with something loose to start (name, gender, age, education, profession) and allow the process of developing your relationships with your fellow players to also develop your character.

Here are some questions to guide the development of your relationships. Remember that this is a joyful experience had between friends who love each other. It is not necessary to discuss or explore conflicts you've had or what keeps you apart. It is most useful to focus on what brings you together.

- Is there something you all do together as a group?
- How long have you known each other?
- Is there anyone you met in a special or unusually memorable way?
- What specific special thing do you have in common with each of your friends? (examples: hobby, work, experience, college, high school, niche interest, the same support group, you're lovers, you're siblings, you have friends in common)
- Is anyone in a romantic relationship with anyone else? Maybe multiple people? (If so, are the relationship(s): unusually old for your age cohort, old, stable (~3 years), new and promising (1-2 years), new and exciting, on again after being off again for a time, long-awaited or expected?)
- What significant emotional experience(s) do you share with each of your friends?
- Are there significant emotional experiences you've had as a group?
- How have these experiences brought you closer together?
- What other movies do you all like/have you enjoyed watching together?

Your character also needs Interests. What unusual and specific things do you know about? Pick three. Examples might include: Kung fu movies, professional wrestling, dog training, Brazilian history, radiation, classic video games, Shakespeare, Hitchcock, baseball, gnosticism, Noh theater.

Don't limit your character to yourself by forcing them to have the same Interests as you, but do play someone whose Interests you're capable of holding forth on.

Write your three Interests on something and attach that to your person or otherwise place it near yourself so your fellow players can see it. In a three player game, up to two Interests may be shared between different players (e.g. Carrie and Wednesday both like shojo anime and Wednesday and Hugh both like the X-Men). In a four player game, three Interests may be shared, and with five players, four.

As you develop your character and set up for the game, it's important to establish boundaries. Also be aware that out-of-character boundaries can exist in-character, too. You're close friends. A consequence of closeness is that there are many limits, boundaries, likes, and dislikes that friends know about each other. Use your own boundaries *and* invented ones to texture the character you're building, to respect your own limits, and to shape the experience you want to have.

Examples:

- "You're all aware that I don't like to be touched unexpectedly."
- "We've had some long conversations about how much I dislike depictions of sexual assault in movies."
- "I've always hated media that makes light of war."

Pre-play:

Now that you know who you are, you don't have to get all the way into character yet. Instead, take a moment to figure out some details about the movie you're watching. Using one of the playbooks at the end or picking an outline of your own is advised so that everyone knows approximately where you are in the plot of your movie (and, therefore, where you are in your game) at all times, but you can also wing it. In any case, remember your Interests as you get started. Answer these questions :

- How did this movie come to your attention?
- What's its genre?
- What general structure (playbook or otherwise) are you using?
- What about the movie made it irresistible to your group?
- What's it called?

Choose one player to keep an eye on the time. Limit play to slightly less than the amount of time an actual film would take to watch (90 minutes should be perfect). During play the timekeeper has a special duty to push the plot of the film forward in accordance with how much time is left. Other players should follow the timekeeper's lead in this matter.

Now you're ready to begin. Sit down in the living room, turn the TV on, and start the movie.

Play:

The game ends when the movie is over. By the end of the film, your goal is to know most of the following things about the movie you've just seen:

- Its nation of origin.
- Who 2-5 of its primary characters are.
- Its protagonist's motivations
- Its villains' motivations
- The overall beats of its plot
- How the film surprised you
- How it catered to your collective Interests or, in other words: how it was perfect for this specific group of friends

If you want something exciting to happen in the movie but don't have ideas of your own, solicit ideas by saying something like "Holy shit!" or "I didn't expect that!" If no one picks up on this, or they do but can't think of anything brilliant on the spot, let it pass. It was just an awkward moment. That happens to everyone and your friends will pay it no mind.

During the film, ask questions like, "What did they just say?" or "wait, what?" or "what just happened?" to request that another player provide details of the scene. Remember, though, sometimes literally everyone in

the room misses or can't quite explain a moment in a film. It's another one of those things that happens and probably won't impact your enjoyment of the movie.

Watching a movie like this is a collaborative experience, so make sure your friends are included. During the film, invite at least one friend to share how the film incorporates one of their Interests. You can do this by saying something like "Hugh, isn't this part ripped out of a James Bond movie?" or "Charles, I feel like this character is someone Ayn Rand would right. Am I right?" They should then use their interest to elaborate on the film and enrich it.

When you receive a solicitation to include one of your interests, make sure to engage with the solicitation. Say "Yes, you're right," and then elaborate, or say "No, not quite," and explain why. When a player solicits you, they're telling you that you have information about the movie. Provide that information.

You may work *one* of your own Interests into the film by by saying something like, "This is a reference to..." or "This reminds me of..." or even "they've stolen this from..." Your other Interests must be invited in by a friend.

If the movie ends and someone wasn't able to include at least two of their Interests, then you've left one of your friends out and they won't remember the evening as fondly as you do!

Playbooks:

You can use any myth, fairy tale, legend, piece of classic fiction, or other archetypal story you're all familiar with as a playbook. Consider playing with settings and twists if you do this. Remember, the film must surprise you! The playbooks are intended only as basic outlines of the structure of various kinds of film. If your film goes off these rails, or swerves on and off them, or ends differently, that just means it was for you.

The Revenge Movie

- Things are going well for the Protagonist.
- The Villain is in a position to ruin everything.
- So they do.
- The Protagonist experiences a great loss at the Villain's hands.
- The Protagonist discovers that Someone Did This.
- A training montage, a *complex* plan or revenge.
- The Protagonist enacts their plan.
- A hitch!! (or is it?)
- Victory, but at what cost?
- What's next when you can't go home?

The Horror Movie:

- A normal life...
- ...not without its problems.
- A disturbing event.
- An escalation of the Protagonist's personal problems.
- Hints that something strange is happening here.
- A violent event.
- No one can reasonably deny it... Something strange is happening.
- Shit gets real.
- The nature of the Threat is revealed.
- And somehow the Threat is put to rest.
- (OR IS IT!?)

The Slasher Movie:

- A group of carefree youths
- ...with problematic entanglements.
- A grand trip
- ...to a cursed location.
- An Omen ignored. Night falls.
- The first death.
- The second death.
- The "final girl" begins to catch on
- "She" scrambles to consolidate power
- More deaths
- The struggle of the "final girl"
- The sun rises! The "final girl" is triumphant
- (OR IS IT!?)

The Superhero Movie: (With credit to Robert Jewett)

- A Community in distress
- Our Hero, alienated from that Community
- A direct, visceral connection with the Community's distress
- The attainment of Special Skills
- The Hero's first trial against a weak opponent
- More successes
- The Villain's plans disturbed...
- The Community rejects or complicates the Hero
- The Hero has personal trouble, which highlights their Community alienation
- The relationship between the Hero and Villain gets Personal
- The Hero is relentless.
- The final conflict!
- An uneasy resolution of the Hero's personal troubles
- Sequel bait

The Teen Movie:

- An outcast teen Protagonist
- The unattainable object of their desire
- The Protagonist's good, oddball pals
- The teen Villain between the hero and their goal
- She personally crosses the Protagonist
- The Protagonist's desire for their unattainable object is truly inflamed
- With their friends, they develop a Plan
- As the plan is enacted, the Villain's arrogance fails
- The Protagonist is victorious.
- The school is on their side.
- Happily Ever After!