

# Bad Family



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## THE PITCH

Do you like animated sit-coms like *The Simpsons* or *Family Guy*?

Do you like stories about dysfunctional families, like *The Royal Tennenbaums*, or *Modern Family*, *Malcolm in the Middle*, *Married with Children*, *Breaking Bad*, or pretty much any TV show ever?

*Bad Family* is a game where everyone plays a star in an animated sit-com about the dysfunctional Jones family as they have the worst day of their lives.



## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Bad Family is a game for four to six players who are enthusiastically interested in family sitcoms and/or the relationships between family members.

To play you'll need assemble a few things:

- A copy of the list of Family Members on page 10
- A deck of cards with the Jokers removed
- A small token to pass between players (the Star token)
- A blank piece of paper for everyone to draw and write on
- Enough copies of the Star sheet on page 11 so that each player has one

## WHAT DO YOU DO?

When you play Bad Family, you'll sit down with your friends and describe what happens in a story that you'll make up together about the dysfunctional Jones family. Each player has different responsibilities and opportunities for adding things to the story. You'll be rewarded for some of your contributions to the story; based on those rewards, two of you will be the winners.

Here are some specific things you'll do as you play:

**Pretend to be a member of the Jones family.** Each of you controls a **Family Member** and is responsible for deciding what they do and say. You'll occasionally speak in-character (like an improv actor making up lines of dialogue) and tell the rest of the players what your Family Member does.

**Encourage other players.** Pay attention to them, agree with them. Enjoy and use the characters and situations they come up with.

**Invent horrible, inconvenient things that could happen to the other characters in the story.** The game depends on you coming up with worst case scenarios that stop other Family Members from getting what they want - it also rewards you for doing this.

**Accept that bad things will happen to your Family Member.** Think of the game as a TV show; we like it when bad things happen to characters on TV shows. And the bad things won't last. When your family member gets into trouble (and they will get into trouble) they'll either get what they want, and succeed, or they'll fail, and terrible things will happen. Whether your character succeeds or fails, you'll take cards from the deck (the rules for this are in the following chapters).

**Keeping the game moving at a fast pace.** You'll get rewarded for keeping the game moving and ensuring everyone gets their turn as the star of the show.

**Relax and have fun.** The way Bad Family works will hopefully make it easy for you to feel and be funny.

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You're also trying to win, but winning means something slightly different in Bad Family to what it does in some other games.

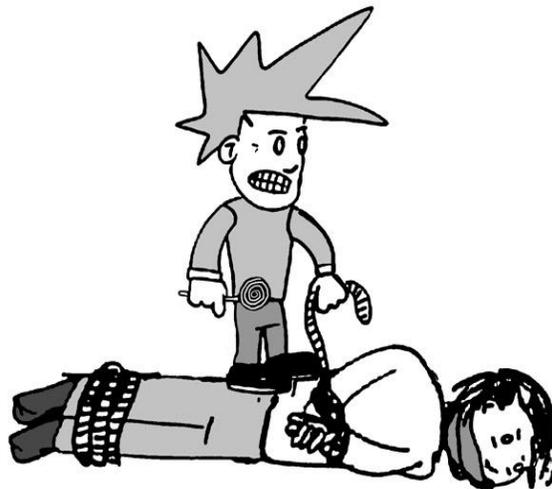
In this game, you're trying to get your Family Member what they want.

One way to do this is to be one of the first two players to collect three cards. Once you've done this, your Family Member successfully achieves whatever you initially decided they wanted out of this story.

But through playing the game you may discover that your Family Member really wants quite a few different (possibly incompatible) things. Your character will have one overriding goal, but they don't care about that at the exclusion of all else. Dick Jones might want to get a promotion at work, but does he want that at the cost of his marriage? Jamie Jones might want a date with some cute boy at school, but does he want that at the cost of getting good grades? In the end, whether your character gets what they really want is decided not just by the rules, but by the events that happen in the game. It matters not just how the characters end up, but how they got there.

This makes Bad Family a bit more complicated and a bit less black and white than other games – because what people want is messy and complicated. They want multiple things, and they want them a certain way.

That's also why in this game you'll spend a lot of time describing the various things that happen to the Jones family. Those are the things that matter to them, and those are the things that will ultimately decide whether your character gets what they really want, and whether you win or lose"



# AN OVERVIEW OF HOW TO PLAY

**Choose which Family Member you want to play.**

**Decide what each Family Member wants.** This will be their goal for the episode. All their scenes will focus around trying to achieve that goal.

**You'll all take turns being the Star of a scene.** This gives you an opportunity to try to achieve your goal.

**Everyone else (but especially the player to your left) will support you by asking leading questions about how you're trying to achieve your goal.**

**Everyone who's not the Star can do four things:**

- pretend to be guest stars who appear in the scene
- suggest things that could happen (which the Star can accept or ignore)
- play the audience, responding with laughs and 'awwws' just like a studio audience or laugh track.

But ... wait. That's only three things!

**Right. The fourth thing (and most important thing) you can do when you're not the Star is introduce something that could go horribly wrong in the Star's scene.** This 'worst-case scenario' makes it more difficult for the Star to get what they Want. It creates drama and makes the game play faster.

**The Star flips a card to see if things go horribly wrong.** If they go badly, the Star can spend a Bonus to try again. Other players can spend a Bonus to make them try again (even if things went right for the Star!)

**The game finishes when two Family Members collect three cards.**

## FOR PLAYTESTERS

Bad Family is a work-in-progress. I've playtested it with local groups about 20 times, and it seems to be working pretty well. However, while you're playing you might experience points where the rules of the game break down (meaning that you have to reassess what you need to do in order to keep playing).

If you were playing a finished game, that'd be terrible. But as you're playtesting an unfinished game, those are the moments I want to hear about.

Here are some other questions I'm curious about:

- How many players did you have?
- What sorts of conversations did the process for choosing Family Members elicit in your group? At any point, did the process stop an interesting conversation from happening?
- If you use the Introductory rounds, how do they work in play? What areas didn't make sense? What areas felt clumsy to explain? Did the introductory rounds make it easier to play the game?
- Did your guest stars seem involved in the Family Members' stories? Did their actions make things more difficult for the Family Members? Did you feel the rules helped you create interesting guest stars?
- How long did your episode(s) take to play - from the start of the first star scene (or Introductory Round) to the second person winning? How many cards did players have to collect to win?

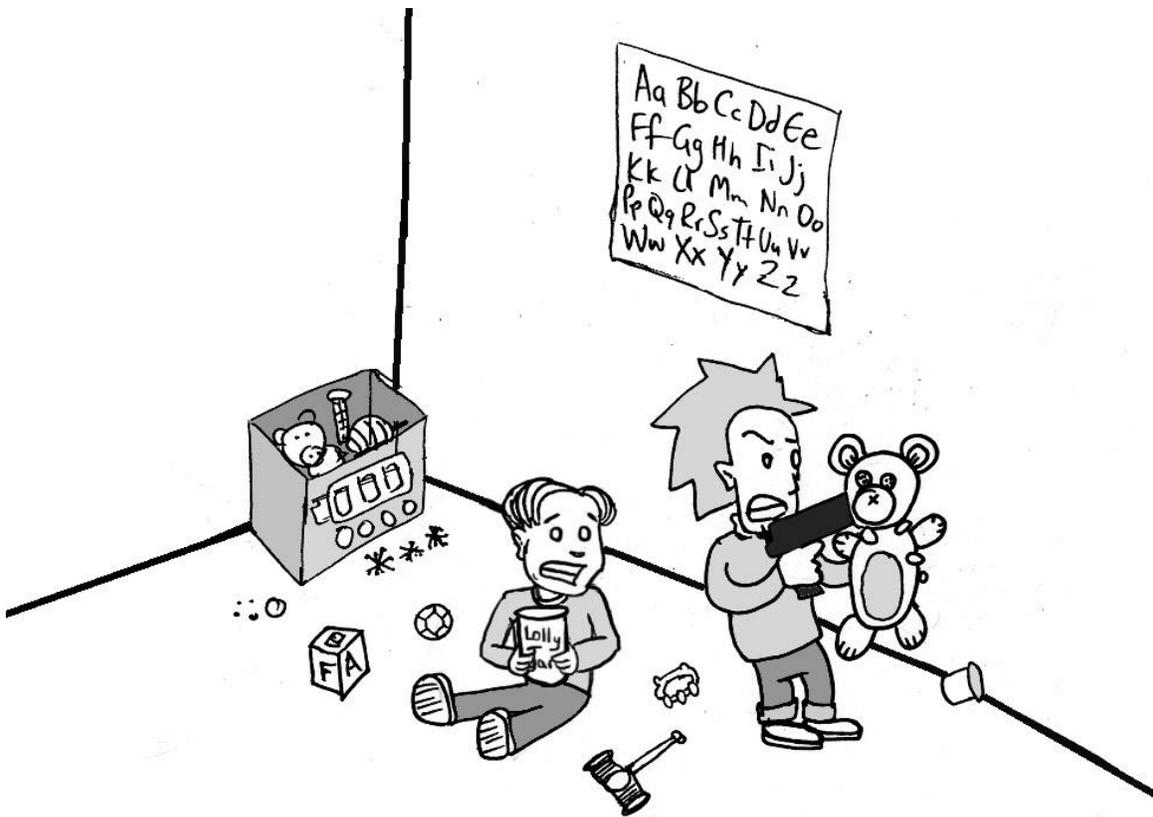
## SETTING AND TONE

The Jones family live in a modern-day small city.

The group of people you're playing with will develop a unique tone for your show.

There are two ways you can develop this tone. The first is to let the tone emerge naturally out of the collisions between what each Family Member wants (see page 13 for more details on this).

The second way is to agree, as a group, about the tone you want. For instance, perhaps you all like the idea of creating a story that feels a little bit like a Wes Anderson movie. In this case you'll all have to keep a close eye on what each Family Member wants - to make sure they all match and mesh.



## CHOOSE WHICH FAMILY MEMBER YOU'LL PLAY

Give everyone a chance to study the list of Family Members (below).

Once everyone's studied the list, you'll all get a chance to choose a Family Member you're particularly interested in.

Each player chooses one Family Member from this list – in the order they were born or adopted into their families:

- Players who are the youngest child in their family go first.
- Then players who are middle children (neither younger or oldest)
- Then oldest children.
- Then only children.
- Then children for whom none of the above really apply.

### **How to break ties**

Sometimes there will be more than one player in a category (for instance, if there are multiple players who were the youngest child in their family).

In these cases, the youngest player chooses first, then the rest of the players select a Family Member in order of increasing player age (up to the oldest player).

### **What if someone doesn't want to reveal their age or birth order?**

There could be circumstances where players are uncomfortable revealing information about themselves.

If players are reluctant to talk about their birth order, they should choose the 'none of the above really applies' option. If players are reluctant to tell people when they were born, then they should wait until everyone else who's willing to has revealed this and then either indicate where they sit in that order (or lie!).

## **THE LIST OF FAMILY MEMBERS**

River Jones: Youngest child.

Cory Sachko: Close family friend & workmate.

Dick Jones: Father.

Bry Walker: Best friend living at the Joneses.

Lee Wilson: Adopted child.

Tony Heard: Cousin.

Annabel Jones: Grandmother.

Jamie Jones: Middle Child.

Elizabeth (Liz or Beth) Jones: Mother.

Alex Jones: Oldest child.

Randolph (Randy) Jones: Grandfather.

Baby: Infant.

After choosing your Family Member, take a copy of the Star Sheet (on the next page) and fill in your Family Member's name

# The Star Sheet

**What's your name?**

**What do you Want?**

**How many cards do you need (to win)**

## The Rule of "Cut!"

If you ever feel uncomfortable with an idea another player has introduced, say **"Cut!"**

You don't have to explain why.

We'll delete what happened and figure out how to proceed.

Say **"Take 2!"** to restart the game.

## Star Scenes

**For the Star**

**For everyone else**

**Where are you? What's making it difficult for you to get what you Want?**

Answer questions

Ask the Star questions

- **Why? How? Where?**
- Stalling? **How are you trying to get what you Want? How is this related to what you Want?**
- To cause trouble, ask leading questions

Play guest stars (as necessary)

Knock when things could go wrong. Say **"Or ..."** and explain worst-case scenario

**Draw a card**

If it's red: keep card, narrate best outcome

**or**

Black: Knock takes card, narrates worst outcome

To continue, give a card to a player. They introduce their Family Member (*once per Star scene*)

'Reaction shot'.

Pass Star token left.

Everyone's been the Star? Play a Family Scene

## Family Scenes

**For each player**

Add one fact about where (or when) the Family scene is set

Will your Family Member take part? If one or no people want to, don't play a Family scene

Act out your conversation

- comment on previous events
- offer advice or criticism

Knock when it's a good end-point or there's only one Family Member left

**For the Knock**

Nominate the Family Member who's helped you the most in Bad Family

If no-one's helped you, end the scene now

**For the selected player**

Draw 2 cards. You can either:

- keep one; give one to Knock
- keep both cards for yourself

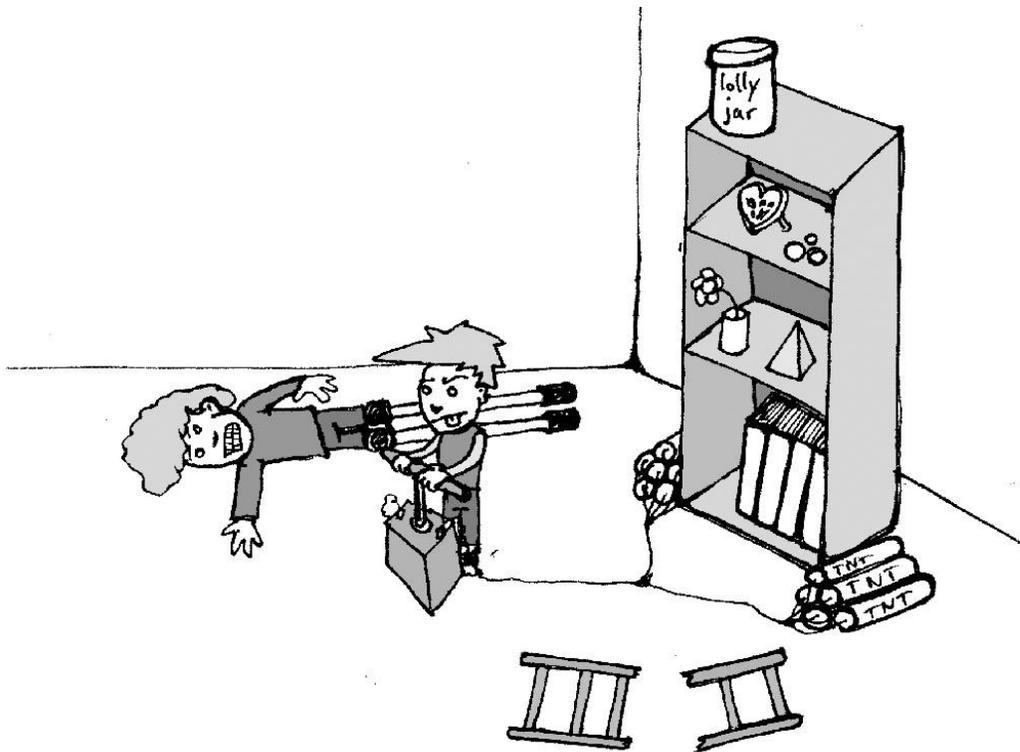
Pass Star token left. Start a new round of Star scenes.

## What about unselected characters on the Family List?

It's up to you and your friends to decide whether the characters you didn't choose from the list appear in the game.

I suggest you use the Family list as inspiration for inventing other characters. If there's someone on the list you particularly want to see, simply add them into one of your Star scenes as a 'guest star' (see below).

You don't have to make that decision right now; you can let it emerge as you're playing out the episode.



## DECIDE WHAT YOUR FAMILY MEMBER WANTS

Every player needs to select a **Want** for their Family Member. This will be their goal (and the thing they're primarily concerned about) during the episode you're about to play. Most of your Family Member's scenes will focus around trying to achieve that goal (I'll clearly indicate the scenes that don't).

Here are some example Wants that people have used in previous games:

- Frame someone for your screw-up at work
- Prove to your kids that you're hip
- See Trinity Sachko naked
- Climb the big tree in your backyard
- Get the Mafia boss to cancel your debt to him

As you can see from the examples, Wants are simple: they focus on just one thing.

The process for designing your Family Member's Want is to **Think** about it, **Discuss** it, and then to **Finalise** it.

### Think about it

Read out the following questions to the group:

- Do you have a gut instinct about what your Family Member would Want?
- If not, what inspired you to choose this Family Member?
- What's the biggest problem you think they'd face with that?
- Are you interested in playing through that for a couple of scenes?

You'll find some examples of Wants on page 15.

If you've got a Want in mind, write it down on your Star Sheet and tell it to the rest of the group. If you don't have a Want yet, go to the "Discuss it" phase and listen to other peoples' ideas.

#### The Rule of saying "Cut!"

If at any point (in the entire game) you don't feel comfortable with an idea that another player has introduced, you can yell "Cut!"

You don't have to explain why you feel uncomfortable if you don't want to. We'll simply delete that uncomfortable content and then figure out, as a group, how to proceed. You can then yell "Take 2!", and restart the game.

When you say 'Cut', you can think of this as like taking a break on the set of your TV show. You're now like the actors and writers of your TV show working as a team to come up with a way to make your story better.

## Discuss it

People who have come up with a Want, say what it is.

People who haven't, either share any ideas you came up with or talk about why you're having a problem. After this everyone else, go through the 'Think about it' questions for that Family Member, and come up with some suggestions.

**NB:** You always have final say over what your own Family Member Wants.

You can also discuss the following issues:

- Do you want your game to have a sit-com feel or a more serious tone?
- Do your Wants have similar stakes? If not, are you all OK with the difference?between “defuse a nuclear bomb” and “Find friends to come to my birthday party”?
- Does the Want have a clear source of conflict?

If you're still having trouble, it's also useful to keep the following ideas in mind:

- Start with a simple Want that's grounded in the real world. Things will escalate and spin out of control as you play the game.
- It'll help if your Family Member's Want is something that you're interested in or excited by, or is a Want you think is filled with a lot of comic potential, or even that it just seems like the obvious thing your Family Member would try and do.
- When your Want involves other Family Members, remember: Wants that are active (River wants to reunite her Dad with his Grandfather) are easier to play than Wants that are reactive (River wants to hide her shameful new job from her family). It's easier to push into someone else's story than convince other players to push into yours.
- If your Want involves other Family Members, you'll spend a lot of the game hanging out with your family. If your Want has nothing to do with your family, you'll spend most of the game away from everyone else. Both options work fine.
- If two Family Members want the same thing (even if it's mutually exclusive), play the game normally. The two family members will jostle until one of them finally wins. If they both get what they Want, it's up to you to explain how that works.
- Each Want also contains a source of conflict for your Family Member (your co-worker, your kids, a tree) but you don't need decide where this conflict will come from at this point.

## Finalise it

Everyone writes down the Want they've chosen on their Star sheet.

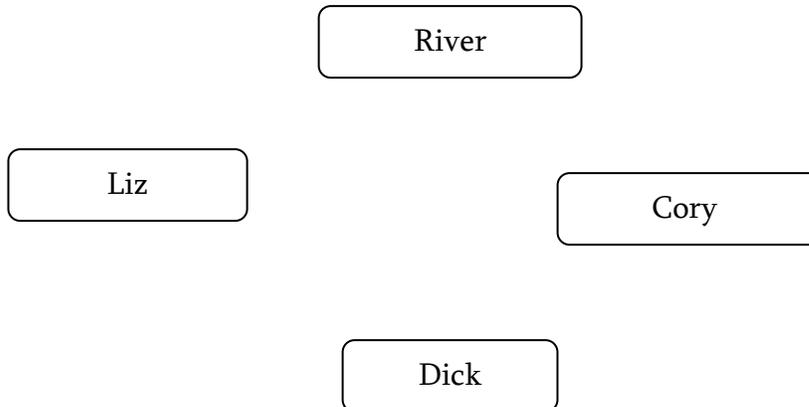
## A LIST OF EXAMPLE WANTS

- Make a good impression
- Walk a dog
- Start a business
- Babysit someone
- Pass an exam
- Have an affair
- Communicate with someone who doesn't speak your language
- Repay a loan
- Go fishing
- Have a romantic getaway
- Lose your virginity
- Win a game / tournament
- Break into somewhere forbidden
- Do something nice for someone
- Win an argument
- Make a new friend
- Take drugs
- Run away from home
- Write a book
- Win a competition
- Go on a road trip
- Defeat a bully
- Have a successful birthday party
- Save an endangered species / area of wilderness
- Cook a meal
- Celebrate your anniversary
- Get your driver's licence
- Get away with a crime

## SET UP THE STUFF TO PLAY THE GAME

Put the deck of cards (minus the Jokers) where everyone can reach them.

Put a blank sheet of paper in front of the players. Write the names of the Family Members onto it, like so:



This piece of paper is called the ‘Family Tree’ and it’s used to record information about characters your Family Members meet, places they go, and things that happen while you’re playing the game. The Family Tree makes it easier for us to reincorporate these into future scenes or episodes. Essentially, the Family Tree is the ‘world’ of your show.

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If this is your first game, or you only have a short amount of time to play (say, slightly less than an hour) set the number of cards you need to collect in order to win to three cards. Each player writes this on their Star sheet.

If you’ve got a longer period of time to play, set the number of cards you need to collect in order to win to four cards.

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The first player to start the game is the player whose Family Member is nearest the top of the Family Member list.

Take the Star token and put it in front of this player. The player with the Star token in front of them is called “the Star”.

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If this is the first time one or more of you have played Bad Family, go to the ‘Introducing the Game to new players’ section on page 35 and play through three introductory rounds of Star scenes to teach the basic skills:

If you’ve all played Bad Family before (or if you’re all experienced with games that involve you creating a story and introducing sources of conflict), go to the “Star Scenes” section (below)

## STAR SCENES

The game is played in ‘scenes’ - just like scenes in a sit-com. Scenes are bits of the story that focus on each one of your Family Members in turn as they try to get what they want. Scenes also contain moments where things can go wrong for your Family Members: that’s OK – when things go wrong, it leads to other interesting situations for them.

Each player will take a turn being the Star of a scene. When you’re the Star, the story focuses on your Family Member and gives you an opportunity to try to get what you Want.

In a scene, players have a conversation where everyone (else) asks the Star questions about what the Star’s Family Member is doing (to get what ‘she’ Wants). If you’re asking questions, your aim is to get the Star’s Family Member into situations where things could go wrong for them.

When someone identifies a moment where things could go horribly wrong for the Star (or move in an unexpected direction), the Star draws a card to determine what happens. This card is kept by either the Star or another player and can be spent to try and make things go right for the Star’s Family Member.



## How to play a Star scene

The player on the Star's left starts the Star scene by asking the Star's Family Member two questions:

- Where are you?
- What's making it difficult for you to get what you want?

The Star answers those two questions by describing where we first see their Family Member and what they're doing.

### **EXAMPLE**

Svend is playing Dick Jones, who wants to reconnect with his children. When Svend is asked where Dick is and why it's difficult to reconnect, Svend replies:

“Dick's decided to follow Lee around at the mall as Lee goes clothes shopping. It's difficult because he offered to give Lee a ride to the mall, but Lee didn't realize his dad would be sticking with him the whole time.”

### *Ask questions*

Every player who's not the Star now asks the Star questions about the Family Member with the aim of getting the Star's Family Member into situations where things could go wrong for them.

These questions can be (a) probing questions (to better understand what the Family Member is doing, why they're doing it, and how they're trying to get what they want) or (b) leading questions (to suggest things that could happen to the Star and which could get the Family Member into trouble). Here are some examples:

- How do you do that? (probing)
- What happens next? (probing)
- What do you do next? (probing)
- Do you meet anyone? (leading)
- Is anyone watching you? (leading)

The Star has two sorts of ways to answer these questions: describing things as if they are their family member, or describing things as if we're watching the TV show about your family.

When answering questions, the Star needs to keep the following in mind:

- You are responsible for describing what your Family Member does and says
- With each answer, you should move the story forward a realistic and reasonable amount. Try not to leap forward in time more than, say, a day – and try to keep what’s happening in your story roughly in sync with the other Family Members.
- It’s up to you to keep your descriptions of what your Family Member is doing consistent with what you’ve already described and with what other players have described as being true about their Family Members.
- Keep answers to questions brief. The question-and-answer dynamic of the game is like a conversation, so the Star should answer new questions if they arise before their first answer is finished; otherwise describing two or three things that a Family Member does or keeping the answer to between 30 seconds to a minute is about right.
- When someone asks a leading question the Star can accept or ignore the implications
- If the Star is uncomfortable with the implications of a question, they can use the Rule of ‘Cut’.

As things happen in the game, you may wish to record stuff on the Family Tree.

**EXAMPLE**

Svend is playing Dick Jones, who’s following Lee around at the mall (to try and reconnect with him). The other players ask Svend questions about what Dick is doing.

*Lee’s vanished into a changing room. What do you do while you’re waiting?*

“I’ll go up to the counter, get out my business card and ID myself as Lee’s dad.”

*The shop assistant recognizes you: she’s called Regina and she knows Lee. Do you ask her anything?*

“I’ll ask her what sort of things Lee enjoys buying here.”

*The group decides Regina is dating Lee, but she’s doing it in order to get closer to Dick’s other son, Alex. They write this fact down on the Family Tree.*

## *Play Guest Stars*

As a natural consequence of asking questions, the scene may create other characters who you (a) want to see a little bit more of or (b) want to see the Family Member have a conversation with at this particular point.

We call this type of character a ‘Guest Star’, which refers to any other people that the Stars meet during their scenes.

Guest stars could be other family members (even ones from the Family Member list who haven’t been assigned to a player). They could be incidental characters (like people the Family Member is walking in a parade with) or more significant characters – ones who might even be opposing the Family Member (such as a traffic cop who wants to write you a ticket when you need to get somewhere urgently).

Someone who’s not the Star should volunteer to “play” this guest star. This means they have responsibility for describing what the guest star does and how they react. They can even act out a conversation between the Family Member and their guest star, if they want to.

The volunteer should be the person who will have the most fun playing the guest star or the person who it makes the most sense to play the guest star.

### **EXAMPLE**

Svend is playing Dick Jones, who’s following his son Lee around at the mall (to try and reconnect with him). Dick is currently talking to Regina, a shop assistant who the group has decided is dating Lee in order to get closer to Dick’s other son, Alex.

*Regina says, “I’ve been trying to get Lee get the same taste in clothes that Alex does.”*

“... Interesting. He does seem to have been dressing better recently.”

*Regina says, “Alex ... I mean, Lee wanted to invite me over for a family dinner at some point.”*

“Well I’m sure there won’t be any problem with that.... What does he like to eat?”

## *Introduce a Worst-case Scenario*

While everyone else is asking questions, they should be looking for opportunities to introduce a complication into the Family Member's life: these complications should make it more difficult for the Family Member to get what they Want.

### **EXAMPLES**

“If Dick Jones wants to arrange a family dinner with Lee and Regina, Lee could suspect that his girlfriend wants to sleep with his father.”

“If Jamie is looking for evidence of where River has disappeared to, Jamie could misinterpret the towel stained with red hair-dye as proof River’s been murdered by the serial killer that we captured last week.”

“If River wants to climb the tree, the tree could knock her self-confidence by singing a nasty song to her.”

When someone sees a moment where things could go horribly wrong for the Star they should knock on the table.

The player who does this is called ‘The Knock’.

**NB:** You can’t knock on the table twice in a row (for example, if you introduced the last potentially horrible complication, you can’t introduce this one as well).

The Knock explains their worst-case scenario for what happens if the Star fails, a worst case scenario that takes the Star further away from what they Want.

It’s up to the Knock to decide what level of detail to go into when describing this scenario. Based on the Knock’s personal preferences for tension, comedy, and how much they want to tease the Star, they can do any of the following (or anything in between):

- explain the worst case scenario in full
- hint at what could go wrong
- simply say that things now have the chance to go badly wrong
- say nothing.

The Knock should begin their description with the word ‘Or’, as in “Or [this] happens, instead.”

**EXAMPLE**

Through a combination of having River secretly living upstairs and Dick's loneliness at not being able to reconnect with his children, Dick has invited Father Boris over to exorcise the house. Father Boris is touring the house, looking for demonic hotspots, when he spots Dogwai, the family dog.

Wayne knocks on the table.

“Or Father Boris has really gotten it into his head that the dog is the source of all the problems, and therefore it's the dog that has to be exorcised.”

To determine whether the best-case scenario or the worst-case scenario happens, the Star flips over the top card of the deck.

If the Star reveals a red card then the best-case scenario (what the Star hopes for) happens. The Star keeps the red card and gets to describe how things go well for their Family Member. If the Star has just gained the number of cards they need to win (in the first episode this is three cards), then their Family Member gets what they wanted: describe this happening!

If the Star reveals a black card, then the worst-case scenario (what the Knock wants) happens. The Star gives the black card to the Knock. The Knock describes how things go wrong for the Family Member.



If the Knock just gained the number of cards they need to win, then this victory happens off-screen and is implied by what we see the Knock's family member doing in subsequent scenes.

**EXAMPLE**

If Dick manages to reconnect with his children (but it happens off-screen), then in future Family Scenes or in Star scenes where Dick is a guest star, it's reasonable to show him having a comfortable relationship with his kids: casual conversations, joking, and evidence of improved trust.

After this narration but before everyone else asks another question, check whether anyone (including the Star) wants to continue the scene (so that the Star has to flip again)? If so, go to the next section.

Otherwise, if everyone accepts the result, go to the section at the bottom of page 24 and end the scene with a tiny bit of description.

### *Flip again (optional)*

To justify continuing the Star scene, you need to introduce another Family Member into the scene.

The person who's decided to continue the scene chooses a card from their hand. They give this card to the player whose Family Member they want to introduce into the scene.

The selected player introduces their Family Member into the scene: it's up to them to describe how they become involved in the Star's story.

Continue the scene as normal, only this time everyone else can question both the Star and the new Family Member who's just joined the scene. The Star and the new Family Member can talk with each other, if it seems reasonable or fun. Everyone else can continue to introduce and play guest stars.

Continue the scene until the next Knock. At this point, the Star flips over another card and abides by the results (Red is good; Black is bad) as per normal

This new result (good or bad) can again be changed if someone wants to spend a card. However, each player can only spend one card from their hand per Star scene.

## *End the scene*

Take a moment to visualise how the final results of the flip will affect your Family Member. Think of this like the reaction shot at the end of a scene: What would an audience watching this at home on TV see?

Describe that close-up of your Family Member reacting to the results of the Flip (or describe a wide-shot of what's happening to them and the people around them.)

Once you've provided that final reaction shot, visual image or a line of dialogue, pass the star token to the player on your left. They are now the Star of a new Star scene: everyone works through the following aspects of the scene:

1. Ask introductory questions
2. Ask questions that lead the Star towards what they Want and towards things going wrong
3. Play guest stars (as necessary)
4. Knock when someone identifies a moment where things could go wrong
5. Flip a card to determine if things go wrong (red is good; black is bad) and narrate what happens
6. Does everyone accept this result? If so, describe the consequences of the flip on the Star's Family Member, end the scene and pass the Star token.
7. Does anyone (including the Star) want to continue the scene (so that the Star has to flip again)? If so, they spend a card (once per Star scene) to introduce a new Family Member and go to Step 2

At the end of every 'round' of scenes, once the Star token returns to the player who started this round of scenes, we'll play out a Family scene (see page 29).

### **Tricky things about Star scenes to keep in mind**

If a Family Member is in the scene already, you can't give them a card to introduce them.

A player who's already won can Knock – but after narrating the worst case outcome, they give the black card away to another (non-star) player.

## Some social advice about Star scenes

Treat this game like any other time you're hanging out with your friends telling funny stories, and encourage them to have fun and say cool, ridiculous, unpredictable things. One way to do this: when you're not the Star of the scene, respond to what's happening with laughs and 'awwws' just like a studio audience or laugh track.

---

The question “What’s making it difficult for you to get what you want?” is designed to put the Star’s Family Member into action right from the start of their first scene. This makes it easier for everyone else to ask questions about what the Star’s Family Member is doing. The thing that’s difficult doesn’t have to be epic or life-threatening.

Also, when you're asking the Star questions, you never directly say what happens; instead you ask suggestive questions. It's up to the Star whether to accept those suggestions. Don't think of yourself as a narrator; you're more of an interested observer.

---

If the Star seems to be stalling, you can ask a question that makes them take action. If the Star seems to be doing stuff that doesn't relate to getting what they Want, ask “How is this related?” or “How are you trying to get what you Want?”

---

When you're the Knock, make sure your worst-case scenario doesn't just block the action; it should advance the storyline – but in a different direction.

It also helps if your worst-case scenario is related to what is going on, and doesn't just come out of the blue. You'll develop a feel for both of these things as you play.

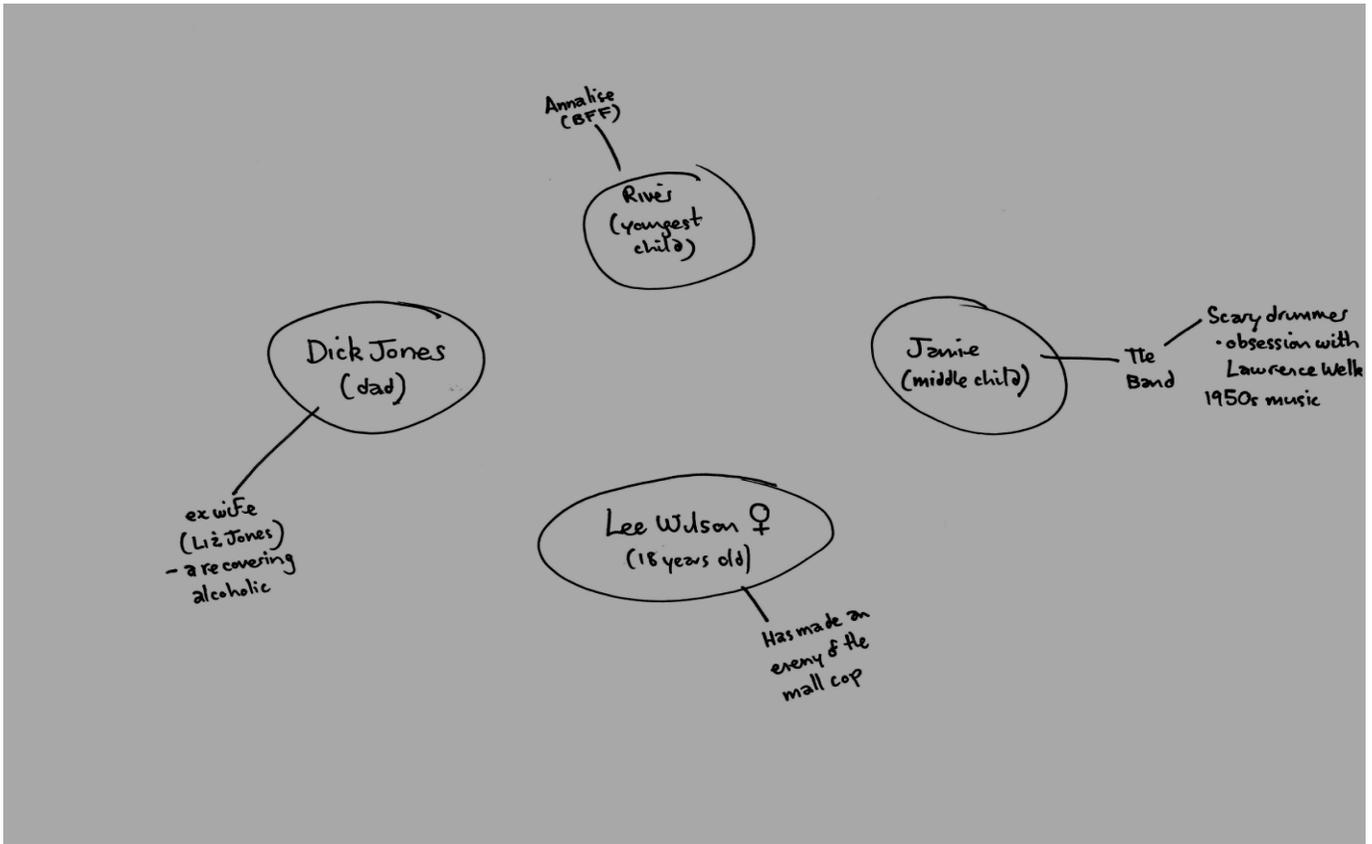
When you Knock, you don't have to have a clear idea in mind of what the worst-case scenario is. It's OK to just trust your instincts that this is the right time to knock, and invent the details of what could go wrong a moment later.

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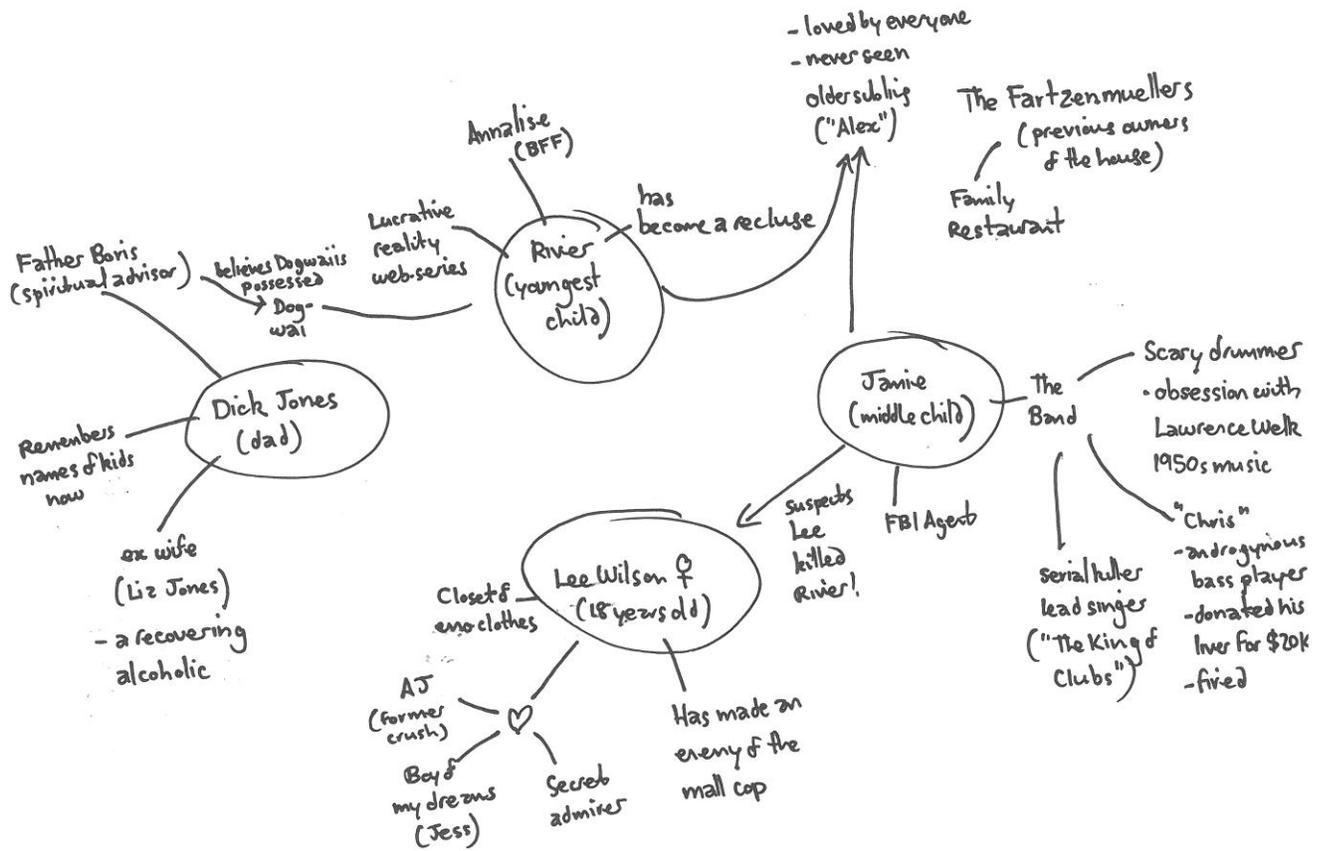
The Star's Family Member can't definitively get what they Want as the result of narration until they assemble the appropriate number of cards. Even if they do narrate getting what they Want, it can still be taken away from them by the next black card.

---

Here's what a Family Tree might look like at the start of an episode, after the group's asked each Family Member a few initial questions:



Here's what the same Family Tree could look like after three or four episodes:

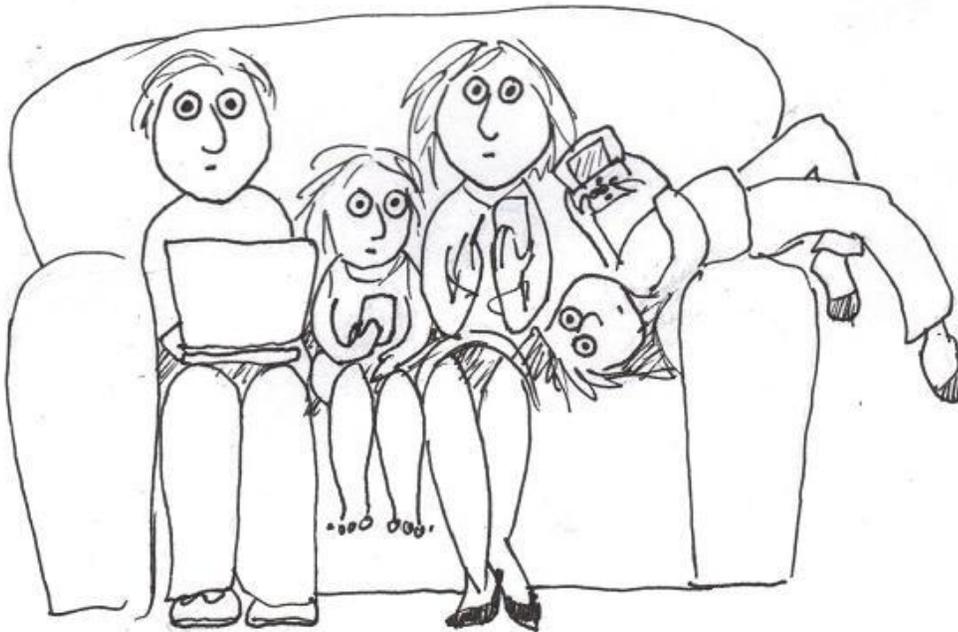


---

Sometimes things'll happen in this game that don't seem to make any sense. Family Members might be in two places at once, or one Family Member's plot might be set over a single night while another's spans a couple of weeks

My advice is to roll with it. There's an intuitive continuity to episodes of Bad Family, and when things get tricky to connect the whole table can usually figure out a way to explain it and make it work – maybe through the use of flashbacks or another TV story-telling device.

And if that fails, ... just ignore it. Bad Family isn't a game about water-tight logic; it's about families - and nobody understands them.



## FAMILY SCENES

In a Family scene, everyone in the family meets up after the events of the previous round of Star scenes. The players get the opportunity to act out a conversation between their family members where they discuss what's happened to them recently.

It's entirely your choice whether to participate in a Family scene, but they're a great opportunity to help everyone solidify what's just happened in the story.

At the end of a Family scene, players who've helped each other during the game get a chance to earn cards.

## How to play a Family Scene

Each player adds one fact about where (or when) the Family scene is set.

### EXAMPLE

Svend says, "It's family dinner at home."

Jenni says, "The television is on, displaying the news."

Celeste says, "River is sitting in the attic in her secret room, watching the family dinner through a hidden camera."

Wayne says, "We're in the dining room, and I'm sitting as far away from Lee as possible because I suspect he might have murdered River, so I'm watching him and looking at all the sharp objects he's using to cut up his dinner."

Taking part in a Family scene is entirely optional. Each player decides if their Family Member will take part in this scene. Remember: If nobody (or only one person) wants to participate, then you don't need to play a Family scene this round.

All the Family Members in the scene act out their conversation. This is a chance for the characters to:

- say things they'd want their Family Members to say to each other
- comment on events that occurred in previous Star scenes and consolidate the group's understanding of what's going on
- offer advice or criticism
- describe things they saw happen in their Family Member's Star scenes that were the result of other Family Members' stories
- have fun, make jokes, or be a family together
- reinforce the family hierarchy (parent-child; sibling-sibling; biological family member-outsider)

Family Members don't need to stay in the scene until it finishes. If it feels natural for someone's Family Member to leave, that player should simply narrate their Family Member leaving the location.

As soon as the scene feels like it has reached a good end-point, or it feels like the family has talked long enough, or if there's only one Family Member left in the conversation, someone should Knock.

**NB:** You can still knock if you decided you didn't want to be in the Family scene.

The Knock nominates one Family Member they currently feel has helped them the most during their entire experience of playing Bad Family to date (not just the previous round; this includes in all of the previous episodes, too).

**NB:** You can still receive cards if you decided you didn't want to be in the Family scene.

If the Knock doesn't feel anyone helped has helped them, their Knock ends the scene immediately.

The selected player (who the Knock feels has helped them the most) draws two cards and looks at them. They can either:

- keep one of the cards and giving the other to the Knock, or
- keep both cards for themselves.

The player with the Star token passes it to the player on their left. Start a new round of Star scenes with the player who has just received the token as the Star of the first Star scene.

## **Some social advice about Family scenes**

Letting family members leave has the nice side-effect of focusing people's attention on the remaining characters in the scene.

## KEEP GOING UNTIL SOMEONE WINS

Now you're going to cycle through a round of Star scenes for each player followed by one Family scene for all the players until **two Family Members** collect three cards (in the first game).

If a player gets three cards, then their family member gets what they Want. Everyone else, doesn't.

As soon as the second person gets three cards, go to the 'End Credits'.

If you have three cards and it's your turn to have a Star scene, pass your turn as Star to the next player. Your Family Member can participate in Family scenes and as a guest star in other scenes, and you can contribute to other scenes as normal.

## PLAY OUT THE END CREDITS

After two players have won by assembling three cards each, the entire group plays out the End Credits of the episode.

There are two parts to the end credits:

- narrating the end credit montage: short scenes about what happened to your Family Member
- adding facts/information about other Family Members to the family tree

Players create scenes and facts by spending the cards they've assembled in their hands. Spending a red card gives you something good; spending a black card gives you something bad.

## Create the End Credit montage

First, each player decides which colour of card they want to spend on the end credit montage. Red cards will give them good, positive, and upbeat scenes in the montage; black cards will give them scenes filled with black comedy and worst-case scenarios.

After making that choice, each player groups together all the cards of that colour in their hand.

If you only have cards of one colour, you can choose whether to spend your cards here or in the next section (adding facts to the Family Tree).

To decide which player goes first in the end credit montage, the two people who won discuss and determine which of them is from the least typical family. They make this decision based on whatever standards the two of them agree on, and it can include extended family and strange family members.

The winning player from the least typical family goes first.

The winning player describes a short one-sentence scene about what happened to their own Family Member. Think of this as a brief scene over the end credits of a TV show, explaining how things turned out.

For every card you have of your selected colour, you can include one extra event in the scene. For example, with three red cards, you can describe three positive events happening to your Family Member.

**EXAMPLE**

Svend has one red card to narrate a scene about Dick Jones for the end credit montage.

The great difficulty in Dick's attempts to reconnect with his children has been his inability to remember how many children he has. Svend decides to use his red card to narrate the following scene:

Dick is going through the photo albums from under his bed and has stopped and is going back and checking – counting his children – and says ‘Great Scott! We have a girl!’.

If Svend had two red cards, he might add something else, such as “Dick realizes that the girl he ignored on the street when he was arguing with the charity worker is actually his daughter” or “Dick decides to call his ex-wife and confirm this daughter thing with her.”

Once you've finished, choose the next player to have a turn.

That selected player spends their selected cards and narrates short scenes as above:

- The content of the fact is either positive or negative, depending on the colour of the card spent
- The scenes are about what happens to their own Family Member
- Keep the description brief
- Narrations can't undercut the results of Family Members who got what they Wanted

Once everybody has narrated their scenes, go to the ‘Add to the Family Tree’ section.

## Add to the Family Tree

Players can now write facts (statements that are one sentence long) onto the Family Tree. These facts are permanent truths about how things turn out in the other Family Members' lives (not your own).

The nature of these facts depends on the colour of each player's remaining cards. Red cards mean you can create good, positive, and upbeat facts, characters, and relationships to put on the Family Tree. Black cards mean you can create facts, characters, and relationships that are filled with black comedy and worst-case scenarios.

### EXAMPLES

- Lee has a secret admirer
- River wins an award for the web-series she's secretly filming about her family
- Dick can now remember the names of his children
- Jamie makes friends with an FBI agent

The 'other' winning player (the one who didn't go first in the end credit montage) goes first now.

The player spends a card to create a fact to add to the Family Tree. They write this fact onto the Family Tree, next to the person it applies to. A fact can introduce a new supporting character, create a new relationship between characters, or introduce something new into a Family member's life.

**NB:** You can only create facts on the Family Tree about other peoples' Family Members or guest stars.

After spending a card and writing their fact onto the Family Tree, the player chooses the next player to take a turn

This continues through all the players (including the players who have already gone) until everyone has spent their cards. With each card a player spends, they can choose the same or a different Family Member to create a fact about.

Once everyone has spent all their cards, decide whether you want to end the game or play another episode (in which case, go to the 'Next Episode' section).

## **Some social advice about the End Credits**

Facts need to be related to the events of the game.

When you spend one of your cards to introduce a fact, you must accept that what's happened in the game (and what's happened in the end credits so far) has really happened (no "It was all a dream" facts, please) but otherwise feel free to undercut or twist Family Members' achievements.

The Rule of 'Cut' still applies, but otherwise it's entirely up to you what facts you want to introduce.

## **THE NEXT EPISODE**

If you want to play another episode, put all your cards back into the deck and reshuffle.

Each player redefines their Family Member's Want – either choosing a completely new one or adjusting their current Want based on what happened in the previous episode.

You then choose a new starting player. The two people who won the last episode can't be the new starting player. Out of the remaining players, check whose Family Member is nearest the top of the List of Family Members (on page 10). That person becomes the first Star.

People who have won now need to collect one additional card in order to win the next episode. (this stacks with / adds to) any additional cards they already need to collect (as the result of winning previous episodes).

Go straight to Star Scenes on page 18 and start the game.

If you decide to come back and play another session with these Family Members, reset the number of cards you need collect in order to win to three or four, depending on the group's preferences.

## INTRODUCING THE GAME TO NEW PLAYERS

We'll start your first episode with three introductory rounds so that you can familiarise yourselves with the elements of the game.

Think of these introductory rounds as the tutorial level of a video game: by the time you've finished, you'll have practiced all of the basic skills needed to play Bad Family (and you'll have started everyone's stories).

I've formatted these introductory rounds as a script, with instructions to read aloud put into boxes. During the game, each player will take on different responsibilities: the instructions in each box apply to the different types of roles. For instance, if it's something that only the Star should do, I'll preface the box by saying 'For the Star'. Here's an example.

### For the Star

*This is the part you should read aloud to the person who's playing the Star.*

After you've played through the three introductory rounds, there'll be an opportunity to review what you've learned and ask questions. Then you'll play out the remainder of the game.



## **INTRODUCTORY ROUND 1: Introduce your Family Members**

The first person to be the Star is the player whose Family Member is nearest to the top of the list of Family Members.

### **For the Star**

Introduce your Family Member to the rest of the players. Tell them your Family Member's name, explain what role they play in the family, and talk a little bit about why you chose them.

For example, someone who's playing Jamie Jones could say, "I'm Jamie. My best friend is Jana, she's super smart (just like me) and wants to travel the world and see things out side of this stupid town. My favorite family member is Annabel, my grandmother. She tells me stories of all the amazing things she's done and tells me that girls can do anything!"

### **For everyone else**

Ask the Star one question, each, about the Star's family member. These questions help you flesh out the Family Member's life and the world the Joneses live in.

Here are some sample questions:

- Who do you like best (or least) in the family?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- Which member of your family do you blame for failing your test?

### **For the Star**

Answer the questions. If someone asks a leading question whose implications make you uncomfortable (for example, something like, 'Which of your family members tried to kidnap you?') it's OK to use the Rule of Cut to edit it out and get them to ask you another question.

It's OK if you can't answer a question. Just say you don't know.

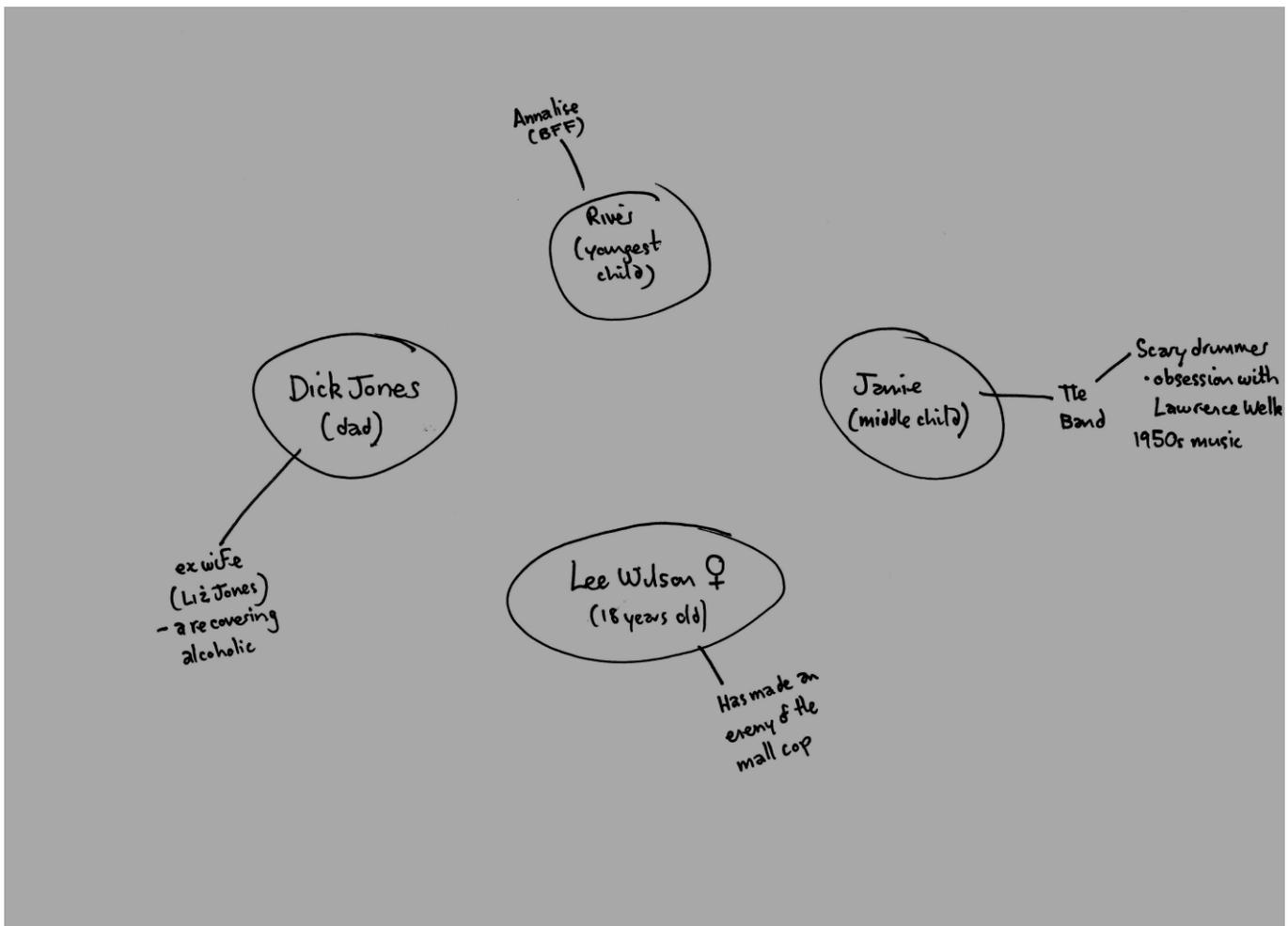
Here's an example of how these questions work: you could ask the person playing Jamie Jones, "Jamie, what's the reason you've stayed here rather than going off to have adventures?"

The person playing Jamie could say, "I want to go away, but at 14 I know that I'm still too young. Also I want to do well at school."

## For everyone else

Record everything you learn through these questions on the Family Tree. Write down all the names of new characters that are introduced, places that people hang out or work at, and any other interesting facts.

Here's an example of a Family Tree:



## For the Star

Once everyone's asked you a question, pass the Star token to the player on your left. They are now the Star.

The new Star works through the steps in Introductory Round 1:

- describing their Family Member
- answering a question from everybody
- passing the Star token to the player on their left.

Once everyone's had a turn as the Star, go to Introductory Round 2.



## **INTRODUCTORY ROUND 2: Try To Get What You Want**

Now we're going to introduce two of the basic concepts of the game. The first concept to get everyone comfortable with the idea of asking the Star questions in order to move the story along.

### **For player to Star's left**

Ask the Star, "What's happening to your Family Member when we first see them?"

### **For the Star**

Imagine that the TV show about your family has just started. Describe where we first see your Family Member and what they're doing.

For example, if someone was playing Dick Jones, they could say that Dick is following his adopted son, Lee Wilson, around the mall.

### **For player to Star's left**

Ask the Star, "What's your Want and what's making it difficult for you to try and get it?"

### **For the Star**

Answer that question briefly. By a 'brief' answer, I mean between 30 seconds to a minute: describing two or three things that your Family does is about right.

The 'difficult question' is designed to help immediately introduce a little bit of tension into the scene, to give all the players something to inspire them when they're asking questions (see below)

The Star gives an answer that feels right to them: the difficulty could be mild or extreme.

For example, if Dick Jones is trying to reconnect with his children, Dick's player could say, "Dick's decided to follow Lee around at the mall as Lee goes clothes shopping. It's difficult because he offered to give Lee a ride to the mall, but Lee didn't realize his dad would be sticking with him the whole time."

## **For someone who's not the Star**

Ask the Star a third question, to draw out more information. Ask something like "What happens next?" or "What do you do next?" Or your question could ask for more details about something the Star is already doing, or it could be a leading question that asks whether something else might happen in the future...

## **For the Star**

Describe how you think your Family Member would react to that question. What would they do, say, or feel?

Bad Family is based on this question-and-answer dynamic. Think of the game as like a conversation – where you're telling people what your Family Member is doing to achieve what they want and to live their life, and everyone else is asking you questions to make your Family Member's life more difficult and to figure out more about who they are.

For example, one of the other players could ask the Star, "What do you do when you notice that the mall security guard is watching Lee closely and suspiciously?"

The Star's player could say "I feel comfortable that the mall has good, visible security that puts a high priority on making teenagers feel uncomfortable," or she could say, "I go over to the security guard to ask him why he's watching us," or she could say, "I ignore the guard and try to talk with Lee."

---

Now we're going to introduce the second basic concept: Pretending to be guest stars in the TV show we're creating.

## **For player to Star's left**

Ask the Star to describe someone who their Family Member meets.

## For the Star

You can do any of the following, to decide who this person is:

- choose an unassigned Family Member from the list
- ask another Family Member to be in the scene
- nominate someone already described as being in the scene
- choose someone from the Family Tree
- invent someone
- ask everyone else for one suggestion each (which the Star then chooses one guest star from)

## For someone who's not the Star

Volunteer to play that character for a few seconds. Act out a short conversation between your character and the Star's Family Member ('short' means between one to three lines of dialogue each). Think of this as a very very short scene in a TV show between a main character and a completely incidental bit part.

We call this type of character a 'Guest Star': other people that the Stars meet during their scenes.

(If no-one volunteers to play this guest star, assign it to the player on the Star's left.)

## For the Star

Talk with the Guest Star as if you are playing your Family Member in a TV show – talk with the guest star about the things your Family Member would want to talk about.

Once you've finished that conversation, pass the Star token to the player on your left. They are now the Star.

The new Star plays through the steps in Introductory Round 2:

- answer three questions to introduce the starting situation
- introduce a guest star
- act out a conversation between their Family Member and the guest star
- pass the Star token to the player on their left.

Once everyone's had a turn as the Star, put the Knock Token in the middle of the table. You'll be competing for this in a few minutes. Then go to Introductory Round 3.

## INTRODUCTORY ROUND 3: Make Things Go Wrong for the Star

This final introductory round introduces the third basic concept of the game: introducing difficulties into the Family Member's story that could lead to worst-case scenarios for them.

Before that, though, we have to re-establish the situation that the Star's Family Member is in.

### For player to Star's left

Ask the Star, "Where are you?" and "What's your Want and what's making it difficult for you to get it?"

### For the Star

Answer these questions. Describe what your Family Member does.

### For all the non-Star players

Continue playing the scene by acknowledging what the Family Member has done, and asking questions about what they do next to get what they want.

Choose someone to play a Guest Star (if required). Act out that conversation in the way you've done before, for the guest star for as long as it seems fun or interesting or necessary.

... But you'll also all need to (at the same time) do this next thing, too...

While you're all asking questions, think about any sit-com you've ever watched: how the worst possible thing seems to happen at the worst possible moment. That's what you're looking for now: opportunities to introduce a complication into the Family Member's life so it's more difficult for them to get what they Want.

When you see the moment where things could go horribly wrong for the Star, **knock** on the table.

The player who identifies the moment where things could go wrong and who knocks on the table is called 'The Knock'.

## For the Knock

Explain your worst-case scenario for what happens if the Star fails (it should take the Star further away from what they Want).

Begin your description with the word ‘Or’, as in “Or [this] happens, instead.”

It’s up to the Knock to decide what level of detail to go into when describing this scenario. Based on the Knock’s personal preferences for tension, comedy, and how much they want to tease the Star, they can do any of the following (or anything in between):

- explain the worst case scenario in full
- hint at what could go wrong
- simply say that things now have the chance to go badly wrong
- say nothing.

**NB:** While you need to create ‘something that could go wrong for the Star’, you don’t need to have a clear idea in mind of what that worst-case scenario is when you knock. Instead, you can just trust your instinct that this is the right time to knock, and invent the details a moment later.

Now we determine whether the best-case scenario or the worst-case scenario happens.

## For the Star

Flip over the top card of the deck.

If you get a red card the best-case scenario (what the Star hopes for) happens. Keep the red card and describe how things go well for their Family Member.

If you get a black card, then the worst-case scenario (what the Knock wants) happens. Gives the black card to the Knock.

As an example, let’s say Annabel Jones wants to ride her bicycle to her weekly bridge game without having the ecstasy that her grandchildren have accidentally dosed her with having too much effect.

If the Star flips over a red card, the Star can describe Annabel cycling safely to the game, or enjoying the effects of the drug but it not altering her behavior too much.

## For the Knock

If you received a black card, describe how things go wrong for the Star's Family Member.

Using the same example as above (Annabel cycling to her bridge game under the influence of E), if the Star flips over a black card, the Knock can describe Annabel stripping off to enjoy cycling in the sun, or winding up in a fast-food drive through, or cycling into a SWAT team stand-off and trying to defuse the situation.

The Knock can be inspired by events that are happening in other Family Members' stories to come up with things that could go wrong.

## For everyone else

After this narration but before everyone else asks another question, check whether anyone (including the Star) wants to continue the scene (so that the Star has to flip again)? If so – and if that person has a card in their hand - go to the section entitled 'Flip Again (optional)'.  
  
Otherwise, if everyone accepts the result, go to the section entitled 'End the Scene'.

## Flip again (optional)

To justify continuing the Star scene, the person who wants to continue the scene (who we'll call 'the Continuer') need to introduce another Family Member into the scene.

## For the Continuer

Chooses a card from your hand. Give this card to the player whose Family Member you want to introduce into the scene. (This can't be a Family Member who is already in the scene.)

The selected player introduces their Family Member into the scene: it's up to them to describe how they become involved in the Star's story.

Sometimes the stories you're creating won't neatly match up. Family Members might be in two places at once, or one Family Member's plot might be set over a single night while another's spans a couple of weeks

My advice is to roll with it. There's an intuitive continuity to episodes of Bad Family, and when things get tricky to connect the whole table can usually figure out a way to explain it and make it work – maybe through the use of flashbacks or another TV story-telling device.

And if that fails, ... just ignore it. Bad Family isn't a game about water-tight logic; it's about families - and nobody understands them.

### **For everyone**

Continue the scene as normal, only this time everyone else can question both the Star and the new Family Member who's just joined the scene.

The Star and the new Family Member can talk with each other, if it seems reasonable or fun. Everyone else can continue to introduce and play guest stars.

Continue the scene until the next Knock.

### **For the Star**

Flip over another card and abide by the results (Red is good; Black is bad) as per normal.

### **For everyone**

This new result (good or bad) can again be changed if someone wants to spend a card. However, each player can only spend one card from their hand in a scene that focuses on a Star's Family Member.

## End the scene

### For the Star

Take a moment to visualise how the final results of the scene will affect your Family Member.

Describe how your Family Member reacts: if this were the end of the scene on a TV show, what would the audience see?

Pass the star token to the player on your left. They are now the Star.

The new Star works through the steps in Introductory Round 3:

- ask and answer questions
- play guest stars (as necessary)
- someone knocks, to introduce a worst-case scenario
- resolve whether the best- or worst-case scenario happens
- decide whether to continue or end the scene
- pass the Star token to the player on their left.

**NB:** You can't knock on the table twice in a row (for example, if you introduced the last potentially horrible complication, you can't introduce this one as well).

Once everyone's had a turn as the Star, the introduction is over and it's time to start playing the rest of the game.

In a moment, turn to the section on Family Scenes (on page 29): this is where you'll play out a scene where all the Family Members are together.

But before you do that, you should know that the game alternates between everyone getting one scene as the Star of the story (which is basically what we've just done), and then a Family scene.

From now on, when you're playing the game you can use the 'Star scene' instructions and the tips on your Star sheet.

You win the game (and your Family Member gets what they want) by collecting three cards. You can collect cards by winning the results of a knock or by participating in a Family scene.

As soon as two players collect three cards, the game is over and you should go to the Play Out the End Credits section on page 31.

Take a small break now to:

- ask and answer any questions you might have about the rules
- discuss what you'd like to see next

Now go and play a Family Scene (page 29).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Artists:**

- Gino Morretto did the cover and the illustration on page 3. If you want to contact Gino, you can email him on seraph at clear dot net dot nz.
- Matt Cowens did the illustrations on pages 5, 8, 12, and 17. If you want to contact Matt, you can email him on debzandmatt at hotmail dot com.
- Karen Hester did the illustrations on pages 22, 28, 35 and 38. If you want to contact Karen, you can email her on Karen dot hester at gmail dot com

All three have been a pleasure to work with, and were eager to help me get across the cartoon-inspired sit-com vibe of this game.

**Playtesters:** Ivan Towlson, Mike Sands, Jenni Sands, Rachel Worboys, Mallika Worboys, Mike Foster, Wayne Ulyate, Gino Moretto, Svend Andersen, Celeste Mackintosh, Vivianne Moretto, Helen Rickerby, Sean Molloy, Sophie Melchior, Sam Walker, Luke Walker, Matt Cowens, Debbie Cowens, Trish Plunkett.

**Feedback:** Simon Carryer, Svend Andersen, Wayne Ulyate.

## PROVIDING FEEDBACK

I'd love to hear about your games – how they went, anything you noticed or any problems. There are a few methods for giving me feedback on this game.

First off, you can join the Facebook page for Bad Family:

[www.facebook.com/badfamilygame](http://www.facebook.com/badfamilygame)

You can email me on wave dot goodnight at gmail dot com. Put 'Bad Family' in the subject line.

You can tweet about your game using #badfamily. You can also follow me on twitter: @stevehickeyRPG.

If you blog about your game, use the terms 'bad family' and 'steve hickey' in your post, and Google Alerts will tell me about it.

You can post on the Story Games forum ([www.story-games.com/forums](http://www.story-games.com/forums)). If you're not already a member of Story Games, you'll have to join (it's a painless process). You can also post on my local forum, New Zealand Roleplaying and Gaming ([www.nzrag.com/nzrbb](http://www.nzrag.com/nzrbb)).

Please feel free to distribute or link to this version of Bad Family as much as you want.