

A Little Bit Softer Now

By Jeff Dieterle

A larp about family, sobriety, and dropping quarters from your butt cheeks for 4-6 players, based loosely on my own game *Wigilia* and Alexis Rowland's perfect game *NecBromancer*.

Materials

- Speaker
- Device capable of playing "Celebration" by Kool & The Gang and "Shout, Pts. 1 & 2" by the Isley Brothers
- Name tags
- At least one cup (optionally one more cup than the number of players)
- A quarter or similarly sized coin for each player.

Safety

Normal safety rules are in effect:

- The door is always open (*i.e.*, players may leave at any time for any reason).
- Saying the word "cut" should immediately stop play.
- Using the word "brake" signals that players should reduce the intensity of the scene.
- Act in a way that prioritizes the safety and happiness of the players over the game.

Additionally, this game involves behaving in a rowdy manner. This may include semi-aggressive touch (*e.g.*, chest bumps). Please discuss any touch boundaries before the game starts; all players should limit themselves to forms of touch that all players have affirmatively consented to.

Scenario/Prep

Players will portray a group of cousins attending four consecutive family weddings. Before playing, players should write the following on their name tags: Character name and pronouns, and a one-sentence summary of their character concept. If guidance is required, assume you are all close cousins in a Polish-American family from New Jersey. After a minute or two of "character creation," introduce characters to the group.

Sequence of Play

Play consists of four "weddings," which comprise the following scenes:

1. Toast
2. Dancing/"bro-ing out"
3. Afterparty

Toast

For the first wedding, randomly determine which of the cousins is getting married. That player selects another player to give a short toast. The toast will be improvised, but should probably be a mildly embarrassing story about childhood that only tangentially relates to marriage, and then a short exhortation to the cousin and their (imagined) spouse. At the end of the toast, the characters mime drinking The Elixir, an old family traditional drink that facilitates partying, but vastly limits vocabulary and inhibition. For the remainder of the wedding, those who have imbibed the elixir can only use words or short phrases related to celebration (e.g., party, dance, celebrate, wedding, beautiful, bride) and the word "bro" (which is a gender-neutral term for the purposes of this game). Players can also use exaggerated physical gestures to enhance the celebration; think dance moves, chest bumps, high fives, low fives, and the like.

Dancing/"Bro-ing Out"

This segment lasts for as long as it takes to play the songs "Celebration" and "Shout, Pts. 1 & 2." The characters' agenda is to pump up the party, doing their best to make sure everyone is celebrating and having the most fun possible within the limitations of communication. This should be a raucous scene of celebration and dancing. If anyone uses words that deviate from the guidelines, they should be heavily encouraged to drink more elixir, but if pressed, characters should ultimately prioritize celebration over peer pressure.

Afterparty

Once the two songs are done playing, the afterparty begins. This is another raucous, celebratory scene. Afterparties are long affairs that last deep into the night, so this scene will jump directly toward the embarrassing family ritual into which all afterparties eventually devolve: the playing of "Bombs Away."

Bombs Away is a simple game: A cup is placed on the floor in an easily accessible location. Players take turns, in which a quarter is placed between the (clothed) butt cheeks, the player waddles toward the cup, and squats to release the quarter into the cup. If the player fails to get the quarter into the cup, they lose the game. The game goes on until there is only one player remaining; that player is the victor, and will be getting married during the next wedding.

The first character to lose each round stops drinking elixir in subsequent scenes. As a result, they have their full vocabulary available to them, as well as their full complement of inhibitions. As a result, they will behave very differently than the other characters.

Players should determine how they react to dancing and bro-ing out; perhaps they're shy, or embarrassed, or try to convince the other characters how foolish they are. Maybe they try their best to fit in. Regardless, it should be obvious that something is different about these characters, and they stay this way for the remainder of the game.

Note that the characters must still attend the weddings, and must definitely play future games of Bombs Away.

Once the game of Bombs Away is over the sequence begins again until four weddings have been concluded.

Special thanks to Liz Stong for much-needed inspiration.