

# **Want**

A game of suburban desperation

by Ben Lehman

For 2-7 players ages 18 and up

## Table of Contents

<b>1) Preamble</b>	<b>3</b>
a) Influences	
<b>2) Overview</b>	<b>4</b>
a) Setting	
b) Protagonists	
c) What you will need	
<b>3) Starting the Game</b>	<b>6</b>
a) Setting agreements	
b) Making a Housewife	
i) Name and Address	
ii) Things	
iii) Self-Worth and Security	
iv) Rival	
c) Insecurity Dice distribution	
<b>4) A Simple Turn</b>	<b>8</b>
a) The simplest turn	
i) Announce Plan	
ii) Roll dice	
iii) Frame the Scene	
iv) Success or Failure?	
v) Damage	
vi) End of the Turn	
b) Spending Frustration	
i) Giving up	
ii) Pressing on	
c) Wanting what she has and Hatred	
i) Another one just like it	
ii) Take it from her and make it yours	
iii) Destroying what she has	
iv) Destroy her totally	
d) If your housewife appears in someone else's scene	
<b>5) Gathering Scenes</b>	<b>13</b>
a) Basics	
b) Actions	
i) Flaunt	
ii) Gloat	
iii) Console	
iv) Snub	
v) Chat	
c) Discussion and Announcement	
<b>6) Endgame</b>	<b>15</b>
a) Breakdown	
b) Happiness and Winning	
<b>A) First Appendix: Example Characters</b>	<b>16</b>

## 1) Preamble:

I wrote *Want* as part of my participation in the first round of the Ronnies, a 24-hour RPG contest sponsored by Ron Edwards and his Adept Press. The challenge is to make a complete role-playing game in 24 hours, using as core elements exactly two of the following four terms: Suburban, Girlfriend, Hatred, and Rat. *Want* is, quite clearly, making use of Suburban and Hatred. Whether or not it is a role-playing game I leave as an exercise to the reader.

Quite honestly, the game creeps me out more than a little. I think it may be the most depressing thing I've written, and I'm the guy who wrote the game about fighting the totally unavoidable end of the world.

I'd like to play it, if I could find a group that knows the genre.

*Want* has a diverse set of inspirations, including but not limited to:

Nicotine Girls

My Life With Master

Bacchanal

Great Ork Gods

Capes

Elfs

Trollbabe

Shock

BARBAREN!

City of the Moon

Sissyfight 2000

Serial Mom

And, yeah, it's pretty much the Desperate Housewives RPG.

It is nowhere near 24 pages long. Anyone who complains can bite me.

## 2) Overview

### Setting:

Suburban America some time from 1953 to 1967 -- that timeless hazy stretch after the war and before the revolution. Do not track the date, nor pick it out. We may imagine that *Need* is set in a fantasy of "the fifties," a fantasy that lasts forever, that never ends, that only eats itself like an anorexic worm.

### Protagonists:

Protagonists are, universally, housewives. Husbands, children, grandparents, service workers, clergy, and other people may appear, but they cannot be the focus of play.

All of the characters must regularly interact socially and not be friends. It is up to the players to arrange how this is possible. An easy answer is that they are all neighbors, but other arrangements are possible: they could all serve on the same PTA, or go to the same church, or play bridge together, or could even all be relatives.

Housewives cannot do anything productive with their lives and their time. So the social group should not be a knitting circle, or a athletic group, or anything of the sort. Achievement can only be measured through status and possession, not by any metric of skill or achievement. An at-home novelist or a woman who runs a cottage industry would not be appropriate characters for a game of *Want*. Our Housewives would scorn such people as "working women," and would not associate with them socially.

A Housewife has an address and five mechanical features: Her *frustration* with her life, her *hatred* of the other housewives, the *things* she has, the *thing* she *wants*, and finally her *insecurity* measured in the three aspects of *status*, *clout* and *dignity*.

**What you will need:**

1-6 other people to play with

Pencils

Paper or housewife sheets from the back of the book.

3 dice for each player in gold, black and blue.

A healthy dose of irony, courage, or self-loathing.

### 3) Starting the game:

The group should work together to get a general feel of the group, how they get together, how often, etc. Also, if any player has certain things that they would rather not witness in the game, they should mention them in this phase of the game.

Each player should give an address to their housewife (an address includes a name.)

Each player must distribute 26 points of *value* between 5-8 *things*, and each *thing* must be attached to some aspect of *insecurity*: *status*, *clout*, or *dignity*. A housewife must have her house as a *thing*, her self as a *thing* attached to *dignity*, and must have either at least a single family member: a husband or a child. Most will have both. A housewife must also have at least one *thing* which is not her self, her house, her husband or her children. *Things* can be tangible -- like a car, a television, a fortune, or a piece of jewelry -- they can be intangible status -- like heading up the PTA or running Sunday School -- or they can be purely ephemeral -- like my American heritage or I know all 50 state capitals. No *thing* may start with a *value* less than two. No two housewives can share the same *thing*, although they may have nearly identical *things*.

Starting with the woman with the most children (oldest woman if no women have children, youngest man if no women are present), each player must assign their dice in their housewife's *insecurity* -- a single d4, d6, or maybe d8 to each of *status*, *clout* and *dignity*. The lower die means that she is more secure with regard to that thing. Assign one die at a time. For more about this step, see below.

Each player must pick a *thing* that their housewife *wants*, and must pick a *value* for that *thing* greater than two. This cannot be a *thing* that the housewife could obtain normally. It must be especially unobtainable in some way.

Each player must have a single *rival*, and must be a *rival* for someone else. Arrange this as you see fit. While the housewives may have such rivalries between each other, the *rival* is also an important mechanical role.

**A note on *insecurity* dice:**

There should be 3 *insecurity* dice available for selection per player. *Status* dice are gold, *clout* dice are black, and *dignity* dice should be blue.

Available dice are shown by the chart below.

# of players	d4	d6	d6	d8
	Status	Dignity	Clout	
2	Clout	Status	Dignity	
3	-----	Clout	Status	Dignity
4	-----	Dignity	Clout	Status
5	-----	Status	Dignity	Clout
6	Dignity	Clout	Status	
7	Status	Dignity	Clout	

Changing the available dice can change the tone of game drastically, and is recommended only for experienced players.

#### 4) A Simple Turn

Play starts with the woman at the table who has had the most children (the oldest woman if none have, the youngest man if there are no women) and proceeds to the left. During a turn, a housewife will come up with a *scheme* to get what she Wants, and execute it. She will either succeed or fail, and regardless her turn will be over.

##### **The Simplest Turn:**

First, the player describes, step by step, her *scheme*. Provided that what she *wants* is something that no other housewife *has*, the *scheme* must have a number of steps equal to the *value* of whatever she *wants* divided by three, rounded up.

Once she has described her *scheme*, she passes her *insecurity* dice to her *rival*, who rolls them and keeps the results a secret. Any die that shows three or lower is a *success*. Any die showing higher than three indicates that the associated *insecurity* will be jeopardized sometime in the scene. The *rival* is free to reveal the dice to anyone, including the player of the active housewife, and to solicit advice for the scene from anyone.

The players then play out the scene, with the housewife attempting to carry out her *scheme* and with the *rival* playing all other characters involved or giving them to other players to portray. At any time during the scene, the rival can say "But is it worth your [Status / Clout / Dignity]?", reveal the appropriate die showing more than three, and await the housewife's decision. If she backs down, her plan is foiled. If she accepts the blow, the plan continues and the die is considered a *success*, but she must explain how one *thing* supporting to the appropriate *insecurity* has been *damaged*. Reduce its *value* by



one, and it cannot be *damaged* again in the course of this *scheme*. Further, the scene must visibly demonstrate aggravation to the housewife's *insecurity* -- she must suffer some drop in status, some embarrassment before her peers, or some damage to her self-respect.

If every *thing* supporting to a particular *insecurity* has been *damaged* this turn, the housewife cannot turn failures into success through damage. If she has damaged every *thing* she has in executing this *scheme*, she must give it up immediately. Likewise, if only one or two more *successes* must be rolled to complete the *scheme*, the *rival* selects which dice to roll and neglects the others.

When the housewife accumulates as many *successes* as the *value* of the *thing* that she *wants*, she gets it. If the housewife accepts defeat or has it forced upon her, she instead gains *frustration* equal to the number of steps she has undertaken so far.

Once she has gotten what she *wants*, she must pick a new *thing* to *want*, assigning it a *value* and so on. If she has failed, she still *wants* what she *wanted* before. Next time she must come up with a new *scheme*, which must be an escalation from her old *scheme*.

Once the success or failure of her *scheme* is established, you have the option of playing a single denouement scene which shows the aftermath of the *scheme*. After that, or if you choose to skip it, the turn passes to the player on the left.

### ***Frustration:***

You cannot *want* something with less *value* than you *frustration*. If this is the case, you must spend *frustration* to abandon what you *want*. Simply spend a number of *frustration* equal to its

*value* and pick a new thing to *want*. You may do this at the beginning or end of your turn. You can *want* the same thing that you *wanted* before, but you have to *value* it more highly.

You may also spend *frustration* to push yourself for what you *want*. Spend a single *frustration* when you *damage* a *thing* for a success. That *thing* may be *damaged* again in this *scheme*, although it still loses one from its *value*.

### ***Wanting what she has and hatred***

If you choose to *want* something that someone else already *has*, certain restrictions must apply, depending on the nature of the thing and your *scheme* to get it.

If you simply *want another thing just like it*, then the following restrictions apply. You must *value* it equally or more than the other housewife *values* it. Your *scheme* must involve one more die roll than normal, totalling your *value* for the *thing* plus one. If you fail, you not only gain *frustration*, but also an equal amount of *hatred*. In addition, your target gains the same amount of *hatred*.

If you want to *take something that is hers and make it yours*, you must spend *hatred* equal to your *value* for it at the beginning of each *scheme*. However, when you win, the other housewife loses the *thing* just as you gain it. If, at the beginning of your turn, you do not have enough *hatred* to attempt a *scheme*, and you cannot spend *frustration* to change what you want, double your *hatred* and skip the rest of your turn.

All of the rules for *wanting another thing just like it* also apply. If you succeed, your target gains *hatred* equal to the *value* of what she lost.

If you are trying to take her self, you must spend *hatred* equal to thrice the *value* of her *self*.

If you simply want to *destroy what she has*, and don't care to take it, you simply must make a *scheme* that involves a number of die rolls equal to the *value* of the targeted *thing*. If you succeed, she loses the *thing*. Further, you may spend *hatred* to reduce the number of die rolls required, one for one. If you fail, you gain *hatred* equal to the number of *successes* you have accumulated. If you succeed, your target gains *hatred* equal to the value of what was destroyed.

If you want to *destroy everything she has*, you may target any number of *things* by spending an extra *hatred* for each *thing* past the first. The required successes is equal to the sum *value* of *things* that you want to destroy.

If you want to *destroy her totally*, that's even more difficult. Spend *hatred* equal to twice the *value* of *self*, and your plan must have a *successes* required to her *value* plus one. If you succeed, she is broken, and may no longer take her turn. See Endgame.

### **Some Notes:**

If your housewife is involved in someone else's *scheme*, you play her just as a character in the scene. Unless the other housewife wants to *take some thing that is yours and make it hers* or *destroy what you have*, nothing can hurt the *value* of your *things*, and you cannot gain new *things*.

If you want to improve the *value* of a *thing* you have, write it down with its new *value* under what you *want*. Your plan need only have a number of *successes* required equal to the difference between

the new and old *values* plus one. You do not gain *hatred* if you fail, only *frustration*, unless you are trying to make your *thing* more like someone else's.

## **5) Gathering scenes**

Once every player at the table has had a scene, it is time for a gathering. All of the housewives have gathered on some pretense or another (a child's birthday, the PTA meeting, a tea party, dinner, bridge, whatever.) Other characters may be present, or not, but they are unimportant to the true purpose of the gathering, which is for the housewives to brag and gossip with each other.

### **Actions:**

During each scene, a housewife may take one of the following actions.

**Flaunt:** A housewife who has gained a new Thing may opt to flaunt it, which gives every other housewife 1 Frustration.

**Gloat:** A housewife with a new Thing may gloat about her achievements to one other housewife, giving her target 1 Frustration. If it was stolen from the target, the target gains 2 Frustration.

**Console:** A housewife may console another housewife on her problems. The consoler gains one Frustration, the consoled loses one Frustration.

Snub: Any housewife may snub any other housewife, not listening to her boasting. If the targeted housewife has a new Thing, it loses Value according to the number of other housewives that snubbed her.

Snubs	Value lost
1	0
2-3	1
4+	2

Chat: Meaningless chatter that has no game effect.

**Announcement of Actions:**

Actions can be discussed beforehand (let's all snub Jessica!), but each must be noted privately and revealed simultaneously.

## 6) Endgame

What would be the point of playing a game without an end, or a game without a winner? Each game of *Want* has a clear winner and a clear end.

### Breakdowns:

A housewife whose *self* has no *value* has had a *breakdown*. She is insane, or dead, or moved away, or some such, at the discretion of her player and the player that brought about her *breakdown*. She cannot *scheme*, nor can she take any other actions, although she is still present at the *gathering* (if she is dead, for instance, it must be her funeral or at her grave or some such.)

If a housewife would have a turn, but has had a *breakdown*, the game ends, and *happiness* is tallied.

### Happiness and Winning:

*Happiness* is calculated by a simple formula.

$$\text{Happiness} = (\text{total value of things not your own self}) + \\ (\text{total number of things not your own self}) - (\text{current Frustration})$$

The *happiest* housewife wins the game, and everyone should be envious of her blissful, carefree life.

## Appendix 1: Example Characters

**Grace Alexander**  
**37 Oak Drive**  
**Urbana, IL**

**Status: d4**

My rich husband, Bob	3
My oldest son, Bob Jr. (17)	4
The Rolls	4

**Clout: d6**

My House, just like everyone's	3
Excellent Tuna Casserole	5

**Dignity: d6**

Myself	4
My daughter, Jennifer (15)	5
My youngest son, Tom (11)	2

**What I want:** Good sex 6

Frustration: 0      Hatred: 0



**Helen Vance**  
**39 Oak Drive**  
**Urbana, IL**

**Status: d6**

Jim runs the local Masons	3
My house	2
which has a pool	3

**Clout: d4**

I run the PTA with an iron fist	8
My fun husband, Jim	3

**Dignity: d6**

Myself	5
My son, Harold (16)	2

**What I want:** A new car, that doesn't break down every ten minutes 4

Frustration: 0      Hatred: 0