

Virtual Frenemies

Synopsis

Two librarians get acquainted on a plane where they are travelling to attend a conference. Being similar in personality they immediately get along, much to the annoyance of the almost mute passenger sitting next to them. As they get talking, each of the librarians reveal that they are addicted to the same virtual gaming platform. They gradually learn that their online avatars have had virtual altercations with each other, leading to a real-life confrontation. However, through some mid-air mishaps the online rivalry is forgotten and the librarians forge a friendship despite their virtual animosity.

Characters

ROBYN	Female. Uptight, talkative and slightly condescending
BROOKE	Female. Similar in personality to ROBYN
BRENDAN	Male. Morose, obese and interested more in food than conversation
CHRIS	Male. Camp Flight Attendant.

Set / Props

Three seats side by side on a plane with armrests in between. Chairs have revolving tables on armrests which function as the tray tables. Seatbelts are attached to the chairs. ROBYN and BROOKE both have a carry-on bag and handbag. BRENDAN has excess carry-on baggage. ROBYN and BROOKE each carry a book in their bags and BRENDAN has a car magazine. Three dinner trays are needed as the airplane meals.

(ROBYN enters stage holding her ticket and carrying a small carry-on bag and matching handbag. She is immaculately dressed in a cardigan and tweed skirt, with mary-jane shoes. After triple checking her seat against her boarding pass she primly extracts a book from her carry-on bag and sits down, neatly tucking her carry-on bag under the seat. After ensuring her seatbelt is safely buckled and tightened she opens her book to read, although it is obvious that she is watching the other passengers on the plane over the top of her book.)

CHRIS: *(From offstage)* Seat number 16B...just to the right over here darling.

(BRENDAN enters stage grunting audibly. ROBYN recoils slightly in disgust. BRENDAN is carrying an abundance of luggage which he attempts to squash under the seat. CHRIS enters dressed pertly in a flight attendants uniform.)

CHRIS: *(To BRENDAN)* Excuse me sir but I'm afraid we're just going to have to put these things in cargo. They simply won't fit underneath there I'm sorry. Here let me take these things for you while you take a seat.

BRENDAN: *(To CHRIS)* Well, is that really necessary? I'm sure they'll be just fine underneath here.

CHRIS: *(To BRENDAN)* I'm sorry sir. As I said before we'll make sure we look after these for you. Please –

ROBYN: *(Noticing CHRIS)* CHRIS? Is that you?

CHRIS: *(Looking up at ROBYN for the first time and letting out a squeal)* Oh my God! Robyn! Fancy seeing you here! Long time no see...

ROBYN: Likewise to you CHRIS. Well, fancy that? Since when did you become a steward?

CHRIS: Oh...I think the correct term is flight attendant now honey...but I'll let you get away with that one.

ROBYN: So you've given up on being a librarian then, have you CHRIS.

CHRIS: Well, you know me darling...always wanting to travel the world.

BRENDAN: *(Grunts impatiently while trying to edge past CHRIS)* 'Scuse me. I'd like to sit down now.

CHRIS: *(Moving out of the way)* Yes, of course sir. Please take your seat. Darling, I'll just have to talk to you later. Ta-ta!

ROBYN: *(Waving coyly)* I'll speak to you soon CHRIS.

(CHRIS exits stage carrying BRENDAN's bags. ROBYN winces at the prospect that BRENDAN initially looks like he is going to sit next to her, but then she breathes a sigh of relief when he takes the seat at the end of the row. ROBYN settles back into reading her book while BRENDAN takes out a car magazine to read. After a momentary silence, BROOKE enters dressed in a similar outfit and carrying a similar carry-on bag and matching handbag to that of ROBYN. Similarly, she checks her boarding pass several times before proceeding to take her seat.)

BROOKE: *(To BRENDAN while pointing nervously)* Excuse me...hehe...I'm just in there, sorry...

(BRENDAN sluggishly starts to get out of his seat.)

BROOKE: Oh, no need to get up. I can squeeze past here. Excuse me...look that's fine. See, plenty of room.

(BROOKE attempts to squeeze past BRENDAN's seat while BRENDAN grunts appreciatively. After making it past BRENDAN's bulk BROOKE finally collapses in her chair only to almost immediately straighten herself up and place her carry-on bag under the seat. She tucks her handbag next to her and takes some lipstick out of her bag which she then starts to apply using the mirror on her lipstick case. ROBYN has been watching BROOKE in anticipation and seizes the opportunity to create conversation with her.)

ROBYN: Oh, what a coincidence. I have that exact same colour.

BROOKE: Really? You have pink lipstick as well? How bizarre! *(taking advantage of the conversation starter)* Hi, my name's BROOKE. How are you? *(extending her hand)*

ROBYN: *(Shaking hand)* Hi BROOKE...ROBYN. Nice to meet you.

BROOKE: That's a lovely bag you have there ROBYN.

ROBYN: Oh really? You like it? It's just from David Jones.

BROOKE: What a coincidence. That's where I bought my set from as well. They do have some lovely things there, don't they?

ROBYN: Oh, absolutely. It's my favourite store.

BROOKE: Mine too. You must have very good taste.

(BROOKE and ROBYN both laugh hollowly. BRENDAN remains engrossed in his magazine.)

BROOKE: *(Recovering from laughing)* I don't know what I would do if I couldn't shop -

(Voice on the loudspeaker interrupts the conversation.)

CHRIS: *(over loudspeaker)* Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for flying with us on flight UR148 to Sydney today. This plane is now ready to depart so can I ask all passengers to kindly be seated, ensure that your seatbelts are firmly buckled, tray-tables are stowed and seat is upright for take-off. The cabin lights will now be dimmed for takeoff, however if you wish to continue reading there please feel free to turn on the reading light by pressing the button on your armrest. Flight time to Sydney this morning will be approximately 45 minutes so please sit back, relax and enjoy the flight.

(ROBYN and BROOKE pertly do up their seatbelts. BRENDAN has a bit of difficulty with extending his seatbelt before being able to buckle it. Lights dim slightly. BRENDAN immediately turns on his reading light and continues reading his magazine.)

ROBYN: I hate this part of flying don't you?

BROOKE: Oh, the take-off and landings of flights are awful.

(Engine noises indicate plane is taking-off. Both ROBYN and BROOKE behave exactly the same during the take-off. Both close their eyes, grip the armrests and lean back in their chair. BRENDAN continues to calmly read his magazine during take-off. Engine noises subside as the plane begins cruising. Cabin lights come back on. Both ROBYN and BROOKE breathe a simultaneous sigh of relief and open their eyes.)

BROOKE: So, what takes you to Sydney today? I mean, apart from the lovely weather of course. *(laughs hollowly again)* –

ROBYN: Well, I'm going for a conference actually. It's a conference on –

BROOKE: Really? You're going for a conference. That's unbelievable. I'm heading to a conference too. I'm going to a conference on information management skills in the digital age. I'm an information consultant so –

ROBYN: The Information Management in the Digital Age conference? Oh my god, that's such a coincidence. I'm an information *management* consultant. So *of course* I'll be going to this

conference. I'm giving a presentation actually. Well, they had invited me to be the keynote speaker but –

BROOKE: The keynote speaker. Can you believe they managed to get Douglas Petrovsky from Oxford University to deliver the presentation? I'm sure he'll be very interesting. I've read some of his papers and they're fascinating –

ROBYN: Oh, I know. It's remarkable that he's come all this way. My speech is just after his actually. It's a hard act to follow but I'm talking about –

ROBYN: So anyway, I was talking about my presentation on the digital issues conference. When they originally asked me to deliver the presentation, the keynote presentation at that time, I couldn't imagine what to talk about. I mean, would you be able to believe it? There are just so many developments in the area at the moment –

BROOKE: Tell me about it. Why just the other day we had a situation where –

ROBYN: (*getting a bit more forceful*) Yes, so anyway. They asked me to be the keynote speaker of all things, which of course I was absolutely flattered by. I mean, could you imagine the honour. Of course I'm relieved that they got Douglas in the end. I couldn't imagine the pressure of having to deliver –

BROOKE: So what is your presentation on again?

ROBYN: Well...I gave the matter a good long think when I was asked to give the keynote presentation and at that time I decided to talk about Almost Living...you know the online virtual platform that is such a *craze* at the moment.

BROOKE: Almost Living...I love Almost Living! In fact, I have to admit that I'm absolutely addicted to that game.

ROBYN: Oh, it's not just a game. It's a new way of life!

BROOKE: You know what...that's so true...in fact I can't go a day without Almost Living. It's amazing...it's like Almost Living is my new life!

ROBYN: And you're definitely not alone on that one. Did you know that Almost Living has two-hundred-million subscribers worldwide

with another seven-hundred and fifty people joining every day, twenty-six thousand of those people in Australia alone?

BROOKE: My lord...that's incredible isn't it! It just goes to show how influential it is.

ROBYN: Absolutely true. I just hope that all these new people joining Almost Living know what they are doing really. That's what my presentation is going to be about...having some sort of policy...or a Code of Conduct or something so Almost Living players are aware of basic common courtesies. I mean simple things like –

BROOKE: *(interrupting)* You know what that's a great idea!

ROBYN: *(under her breath)*...not butting in for example...

BROOKE: *(continuing from her previous comment)* It's amazing what some people think they can get away with playing Almost Living, really. There absolutely needs to be some sort of protocol about how people behave on there.

ROBYN: I agree entirely.

BROOKE: Take for instance...just the other day...I was flying around the neighbourhood...I've given my avatar wings you see...so I can be free like a bird...so anyway I was flying around my street...as you do when you've got wings...and out of nowhere I get a nasty shout from someone telling me I shouldn't be going around snooping in people's backyards...can you believe that?

ROBYN: Well really, I think that avatars shouldn't have wings to fly around with. I mean how inconsiderate is it really to be flying around getting a plain view of everybody's private business.

BROOKE: No, but of all things no one should be shouting at each other in Almost Living. That should be the first rule on any Code of Conduct.

ROBYN: Well sometimes I think when it is appropriate one is perfectly entitled to inform another that their behaviour is...well rude.

BROOKE: But surely shouting is to be considered just as...if not more...rude. I really felt that I was being verbally abused.

ROBYN: Well, let's take another example. And this is something I really would like to see in any Code of Conduct for Almost Living. The

other day I was walking my pet terrier...a gorgeous little puppy... around the lake...now I've always wanted a dog just like her so I was very excited when I finally scraped together enough Almost Living dollars to afford her and then when I went to the pet store... there she was...just what I had been hoping for...perfect! So anyway...there I was walking my gorgeous little puppy around the lake for the first time...and she was having so much fun...yapping around my heels and all...

- BROOKE: *(suspiciously)* What colour terrier do you have?
- ROBYN: She's a little fluffy white thing. Absolutely gorgeous...
- BROOKE: Hmm...
- ROBYN: Well, when I was trying to take her for a nice peaceful walk the other day...you'll never guess what someone else was walking around the lake...a dragon! Can you believe that? A huge ferocious dragon!
- BROOKE: *(under her breath)* Well, I would hardly call him ferocious.
- ROBYN: So anyway, I didn't at all think that was appropriate. First of all...I didn't even know you could get dragons in Almost Living...
- BROOKE: Sure you can...they're next to the phoenix section in the pet store.
- ROBYN: They sell phoenixes as pets?
- BROOKE: Well they did at the pet store that I picked up my dragon at...
- ROBYN: *(in disbelief)* You have a dragon?
- BROOKE: He's a friendly dragon...
- ROBYN: But why on earth would you want a dragon?
- BROOKE: Well because I can. And a dragon is much more interesting than a hyperactive, little white dog wearing a little pink outfit that won't stop barking.
- ROBYN: And...what colour is your dragon...
- BROOKE: He's purple...the colour of royalty, of course...
- ROBYN: Right...and may I ask about your avatar...

BROOKE: I'm an angel descended from the heavens whose quest upon returning to earth is to fulfil all the ambitions that I didn't have a chance to before my life was cruelly taken away from me in a savage attack by a jealous ex-boyfriend.

ROBYN: Right...and so it was you flying around the neighbourhood the other day...

BROOKE: ...and it was you shouting at me...

ROBYN: ...and it was you walking the dragon around the lake...

BROOKE: ...and it was you shouting at me...

ROBYN: I would hardly call it shouting –

BROOKE: Let me guess what your avatar is... an uptight, highly strung, ready-to-crack, deranged psychopath who feels that she needs to rant and rave at other people who just want to have fun!

ROBYN: Excuse me...how dare you!

BROOKE: Well, I'm sorry but you are the last person who should be telling people how to behave when playing Almost Living.

ROBYN: Stop saying 'playing Almost Living'...as I told you before it's not a game!

BROOKE: What are you talking about? Of course it's a game...how else do you think I can have wings? How do you think I can buy a pet dragon if it's not a game?

ROBYN: Well then it's people like you who shouldn't be on Almost Living if you're going to treat it as 'just a game'.

BROOKE: Are you insane? That's precisely the reason I play it...because it is a game!

ROBYN: It's a new way of life!

BROOKE: If it's such a new way of life then how could I earn enough Almost Living dollars to buy a magic wand so that when I break something then I can just instantly repair it or when I want to grow palm trees in my garden, all I need to do is wave my wand and poof...there they are. Nothing like that happens in real life.

ROBYN: That was you who made your garden magically change overnight?

BROOKE: Oh, don't tell me it was you who made the complaint to the virtual Council about me...why am I not surprised?

ROBYN: Well, it just wasn't right...all the other gardens on the street had hydrangeas growing in their gardens. You couldn't just make these palm trees grow out of nowhere. They just didn't belong.

BROOKE: But I wanted to grow palm trees...and the great thing about Almost Living is that if I want to grow palm trees then I can grow palm trees. In fact, it's no one else's business what I can do when I play Almost Living.

ROBYN: Agh! You don't 'play' Almost Living.

BROOKE: Of course you do. Well, what do you do then when you're on Almost Living?

ROBYN: I...I...I live on Almost Living...almost. I do what I want to do in life...but don't get a chance to.

BROOKE: Right, well maybe you would be able to do those things if you didn't spend all your time yelling at my avatar.

ROBYN: The actions of your avatar compromise the whole foundations of Almost Living.

BROOKE: Don't be ridiculous. I'm sorry but...I don't think I can sit here for the rest of the flight. (*taps on BRENDAN's shoulder*) Um...sorry to interrupt but would you mind swapping seats with me...I...I... I'm just a little claustrophobic and I'd really prefer the aisle seat.

BRENDAN: (*Grunts*) Sure.