

Always Lonely

Never Alone

A role-playing horror survival game

Credits & license

Always lonely, never alone is a role-playing game
created for the 2015 24h rpg design challenge:
www.loreshapers.net, www.1km1kt.net

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Always lonely, never alone

You wake up to find yourself in a strange, eerie place. You have no recollection of getting there. Your vision is still blurry and you feel a sharp but quickly fading headache. Trying hard to think clearly, you look around for anything familiar. As your vision clears, you notice that there other people there. They seem to be anxious and confused, just as you probably appear right now...

Role-playing game

ALNA is a role-playing game in which players take the role of random people who suddenly wake up in the Cage. Their primary goal is probably to find out how they got there and escape, not necessarily in that order. Above all, though, they have to survive. To do that, they will have to work together, which may prove to be the biggest challenge.

What do I need to play?

You need some friends. One of them will be the *mastermind*, or MD for short, and will provide the details, the back-story and purpose of the Cage, the challenges the group will face, non-player characters they will meet, if any, and will be the arbiter of the game. The rest will be the players, each controlling a character who unwittingly winded up inside the Cage.

You need some dice. Of the common six-sided variety, that can be scavenged from any board game. Make sure to have several of them. In this book the abbreviation Nd is used to describe the dice to be rolled so, for example, 3d means three six-sided dice.

You need some papers and pencils. They can serve both to record character data and to take notes or draw maps.

Welcome to the Cage

The Cage. Many people have treaded its numerous halls and even more have fallen to its perils. Some survive long enough to call it home because, eventually, they realise that there is no way out. They are trapped, like animals in a big cage.

The Cage is mysterious. No one really knows its true nature. Is it what remained of civilization after it was destroyed? Is it a cruel experiment? Some twisted idea of entertainment? A prison? Or maybe just the result of an accident? Those who live long enough may uncover some of the many secrets it holds.

The Cage is big. Vast. Its halls extend in all directions; they twist and turn and form strange patterns. Exploring it completely might take years, or decades. No one can tell, because no one has seen it all.

The Cage is dangerous. It is riddled with lethal traps, meant to dissuade those hoping to explore it. It is home to dangerous creatures, who may see intruders as meal. The people

who live there tend to be gruff and unwelcoming. This attitude has kept them alive so far.

The Cage is confined. It has rooms, hallways, submerged areas, but never opens to the outside. Its inhabitants never get to see the sky. Perhaps this is one of the reasons it is called the Cage.

The specifics of the Cage are intentionally left vague. It is the role of the MD to create it. It could be an abandoned spaceship, an underwater science facility, a labyrinth, a medieval dungeon or an ancient stone pyramid. Movies like *Alien*, *The Cube*, *Event Horizon*, *Pandorum*, *The God Complex* Doctor Who episode and the *King of Thorn* anime can all provide inspiration for ALNA settings. Of course, it is the MD's responsibility to determine how a bunch of regular people ended up in the Cage.

The mood

The mood in a game set in the Cage can range from *dark horror survival* to *splatter terror comedy*. The MD should decide on the appropriate mood and try to encourage it during play. Sometimes, though, reading the mood and adjusting to it is more efficient. Although it does not directly affect the rules, it influences the theme and actions that would be considered appropriate.

Dark horror survival. The characters will try to work together, sometimes successfully. They realise that the enemy is out there, and will do anything to survive. The MD will present challenges that provide a chance for survival and a chance to slowly gain some insight on the secrets of the Cage. Movies like *Alien*, *The Cube*, *Pandorum* are all examples of this mood.

Splatter terror comedy. The characters usually end up arguing and fighting among themselves. It is not rare for them to kill each other before leaving the first room. If any manage to survive, some trap or tentacled monstrosity usually finishes the job. And over again. Most zombie apocalypse films whose title cannot be remembered are examples of this mood.

Characters

The characters are assumed to be common people. They are not supposed to have access to advanced technology or special abilities. In fact, the players could play as their actual selves. Of course, the Cage itself has no such restrictions.

Additionally, the player characters start unprepared for facing a lethal predicament. As such, they generally start with no equipment, possibly only with some clothes. This means that they will have to scavenge food, water and any items they need from within the Cage. The rules of this game are not concerned with their earthly needs, though, because they will have bigger problems to face.

Last but not least, the characters are supposed to be a bunch of random people. They may have greatly varying level of expertise and ability. The rules reflect that by allowing a character to actually be *rolled*, i.e. randomly created by rolling dice and referring to a few tables, with the player making only a minimum of decisions.

Understandably, it is not rare for a character to die. This does not mean that the player cannot continue playing. On the contrary, after a character death the player is encouraged to resume playing with a new character. Not just that, but with each death, the next character will gain the knowledge about some secret of the Cage. So, it usually pays off to have some extra pre-generated characters around, although rolling a new one does not take that long. Remember, though, that death takes its toll, even if it provides some benefits.

Character creation

Characters in ALNA are defined by two kinds of attributes, *stats* and *props*. The stats are quantified attributes. These are the prowess, karma and fatalities. The props are not quantified, and describe the character's experience, attitude and current status. These are the personality, background, occupation, perk, flaw, interests and conditions.

To create a character follow these steps:

1. Roll prowess/karma
2. Record fatalities, if any
3. Roll six props
4. Determine the name, sex and age
5. Mark the spooked condition

Stats

Prowess is the stat that determines the ability of the character to do things. This includes everything, from attacking enemies to solving differential equations. To determine the

character's prowess, roll 1d, re-rolling any result of 1 or 6. The result, in the range of 2 to 5, is the character's prowess score.

Karma is the stat that represents the character's luck. The character starts with a karma score of 2, increased by 2 for each point of prowess below 5. So a character with a high prowess will have low karma and vice versa.

Fatalities is the number of deaths met by the player. Every time a player's character dies the fatalities stat is increased by 1 for the same player's replacement character. Obviously, the first character starts with zero fatalities.

Props

To roll a prop, consult Table 1. First roll 1d. The result selects a column in the table, which determines the type of the prop (flaw, background, interest, etc.). Then roll 2d. The second result selects the row to determine the actual prop. If the result does not fit with the previously rolled props, re-roll it.

Personality describes the most prominent personality traits of the character. They represent the character's attitude and world view.

Background describes something significant in the character's past.

Occupation is the character's profession from before ending up in the Cage.

Perk is the character's special talent, something that sets him apart from most people.

Flaw is something that usually hinders the character.

Interests are hobbies; things the character usually practices in his spare time.

Conditions represent the current status of the character. The conditions are generally temporary; they persist until the MD decides that they don't apply any more. All characters start with the *spooked* condition checked and all other conditions cleared.

Fluff

Name, **sex** and **age** are the only attributes that the player needs to actually choose, instead of rolling. Perhaps it is for the best to choose them after all randomly-determined attributes have been rolled.

Death toll

The death of previous characters takes its toll on the survivors. For every 3 fatalities the character gains one specific phobia or insanity, decided by the MD. Treat these as *flaws*, when they come into play.

Table 1: Character props

	 Flaws	 Backgrounds	 Interests	 Attitudes	 Occupations	 Perks
	Illiterate	Murderer	Martial arts	Brave	Criminal	Polyglot
	Alcoholic	Raised by servants	Video games	Cheerful	Cheerleader	Photographic memory
	Near-deaf	Well-travelled	Music	Patient	Student	High-pitch hearing
	Loud voice	National minority	Guns	Carefree	Idol	Being unnoticed
	Easily lost	Prison time	Photography	Cowardly	Stylist	Direction sense
	Mute	University degree	Gambling	Lazy	Actor/Actress	Silver-tongued
	Cruel	Dropped out of school	Scale modelling	Bossy	Politician	Empathy
	Clumsy	Won beauty contest	Amateur radio	Reckless	Journalist	Agile
	Feeble	Never truly loved	Drawing	Curious	Nurse	Muscular
	Limping	Won writing contest	Computers	Paranoid	Professor	Swift-footed
	Disfigured	Falsely accused of a crime	Cooking	Greedy	Soldier	Stunning beauty
	Gluttonous	Survived a plane crash	Dancing	Gloomy	Police officer	Flexible body
	Tone deaf	Has a sworn enemy	Cryptography	Impatient	Hacker	Whistling
	Impulsive liar	Won athletic tournament	Athletics	Leader	Secret agent	Sense lies
	Heavy sleeper	Wanted criminal	Electronics	Sentimental	Stuntman	Light sleeper
	Sickly	Abandoned child	Homebrewing	Selfish	Judge	Fast healer
	Mentally challenged	Never left home	Juggling	Honest	Archaeologist	Clever
	All thumbs	Only child	Comedy	Loyal	Athlete	Sleight of hand
	Myopic	Burned parents' house	Cosplaying	Forgiving	Architect	Excellent vision
	Bleeder	Poor family	Riding	Naive	Doctor	Fists of iron
	Dyscalculic	Kidnapped when young	Fencing	Trusting	Fire-fighter	Mathematical prodigy

Playing the game

Dice rolls

When an action needs to be resolved, the MD calls for a dice roll. This should happen only when there is a meaning to failure. As it turns out, in ALNA, failure can always have meaning because a failure means that some kind of complication happens that puts the characters in a difficult situation. Also note that the players always roll the dice, never the MD.

Before calling the roll, the MD determines the difficulty of the action. As a rule of thumb, the difficulty is 1 for most simple actions. For each factor that hinders the action or makes it more complex the difficulty is increased by 1. For some examples, see Table 2.

Table 2: Roll difficulties

Difficulty	Description	Examples
0	Very easy, no roll necessary	Tying your shoes, opening an unlocked door, making silly jokes, getting monsters angry
1	Easy	Scaring a nerd, outrunning the fat guy who is trying to flee, knocking down a shaken schoolgirl
2	Moderate	Breaking down a locked wooden door after a few attempts, convincing the tough guy to hold the monsters while you escape, hacking an unsecured computer terminal
3	Hard	Falling from a two-story building and not getting seriously hurt, disarming a simple bomb/trap, holding the monsters while the rest escape, unlocking a mundane lock
4	Very hard	Hacking a secure network, unlocking an electronic lock, wounding a monster with a club, carrying the unconscious ally while fleeing from the monsters
5	Legendary	Holding the monsters while the rest escape and living to tell the tale
6	Impossible	Carrying the unconscious ally when running on a tightrope while avoiding debris and fleeing from monsters

When rolling the dice, the player has a pool of 2d. An extra 1d is added to the pool for each helpful prop, and 1d is removed from the pool for each hindering prop, including any temporary conditions imposed upon the character. Likewise, if the character has any equipment that helps, add 1d to the pool. If the pool ends up empty, the roll fails automatically. If he lacks necessary equipment, subtract 1d from the pool. Finally, the player may spend karma to add 1d for each point of karma spent.

After the pool is determined, the player rolls the dice. Each die that is equal to or less than the character's prowess is considered a success. If the successes are more than the difficulty the action succeeds. For each extra success the result is more spectacular. If the

successes are equal to the difficulty, the action succeeds but some complication is introduced. However, if the number of successes is less than the difficulty, the action fails and the MD introduces a complication. The greater the margin of failure, the graver the complication. Usually, failure means that some condition is imposed upon the character.

Opposed rolls

Sometimes, two or more player characters will attempt actions that are opposed. For example, the group finds a gun, and two characters both attempt to grab it. In this case, each of them rolls normally and the one with the higher number of successes wins. If both have the same number of successes, then none of them clearly succeeds, but the action advances and they are allowed to roll again if they want. In our example, if both players rolled the same number of successes, both characters would be holding the gun and they might continue struggling to pry it from each other's hands.

Cooperative rolls

Rarely, two or more people will cooperate to achieve success. In this case, one of the characters will make the roll, normally the one with the greatest pool, and the rest may contribute one helpful prop, expanding the pool.

Conditions

The MD can impose any kind of condition on a character, usually after a failed roll. Conditions work like temporary props. This means that they may add or remove dice from the roll pool by helping or hindering the character's actions. More often than not, conditions are hindrances. Some possible conditions are: bruised, injured, maimed, dying, dead, angry, spooked, shaken, panicked, insane, aloof

Dying

A character dies when the MD imposes the *dead* condition on the character. When this occurs the player has the option to learn a secret. The player asks the MD a question about the cause. Preferably, the question should be relevant to the events that led to the character's death. The MD must answer the question truthfully and secretly to that player. However, the question might be answered in such a way that only little actual information is revealed, if the MD so desires. The next character that the player introduces will come into play knowing that secret and all the previous character's secrets, if any, and with the *fatalities* stat increased by 1.

Refreshing karma

The karma spent to boost dice rolls is replenished when the character has a non-violent

role-playing scene with another character, in which part of the character's background or other aspect is revealed. This may mean telling a story about the past or role-playing the character's personality or other props. This is also a good time to remove hurtful conditions, if appropriate.

Advancement

Every time the characters overcome danger or gain knowledge of one of the secrets of the Cage, with the exception of the secrets learned through character death, they gain 1 XP. They may spend XP in the following ways:

- By spending 1 XP the player may re-roll a single rolled die after making a roll. This can only be used once per roll.
- By spending 5 XP the character gains an advance. He may select a prop appropriate for the situation, with the MD's approval.
- By spending 10 XP the character can increase the prowess score, to a maximum of 5. The maximum and current karma is reduced by 2 with each increase.