

All Fall Down

a game of playtime and deathtime



by Philip Reed

*Ring around the rosies
A pocketful of posies
Ashes, ashes
We all fall down*

All Fall Down is a group storytelling game in which the objective is to be the last player to fall victim to the plague or depression. In **All Fall Down** each player takes the role of a child living in a small village during a horrible outbreak – there is no gamemaster in this game. Throughout the course of the game the players' characters – hereinafter referred to as “the children” – will choose to either remain inside, alone, or go outside where they may play but where they also have a greater chance of contracting whatever foul disease has befallen their community.

In order to play **All Fall Down** each player will require:

A single six-sided die;
two different types of counters, 6 of each type;
a pencil and various scraps of paper.

It is recommended that **All Fall Down** be played at night, in a darkened chamber that is filled with appropriately somber music. Other than the items listed above the players will need a hat or sack (see *Voting*, below), a watch of some sort to track minutes, and these rules. **All Fall Down**, though certainly playable with as few as two or as many as twenty, is perhaps best suited to groups of four to ten. Too many players and the game slows to a frustrating pace; too few players and the game is over before it has truly begun.

THE COUNTERS

It is best that all of the players in the game use the exact same type of counters so that it is easy to keep their meanings straight. The two types of counters are:

Sickness – These counters represent the amount of sickness a child is suffering from.

Depression – These counters represent the degree to which the child is plagued by depression.

Black and white marbles, or stones, are suggested for use as counters. Coins – pennies and nickels or any other combination of coins – would also work perfectly well.

SETUP

Before playing ensure that each player has what he needs and that all of the players are seated in a circle, either around a great table or on a comfortable rug. Each player sets all of his counters to his left; as the game progresses the counters will move to the players' right – this represents the growing depression or chance of contracting the plague.

Optional Counter Placement: If some players have a problem with casually brushing counters from right to left as the game proceeds – an honest mistake, I'm sure – all of the counters could simply be placed in the center of the table or play area. Then players move counters from the center to them and vice versa instead of shifting them from left to right. It's a simple modification to the way the game is played but a good choice for those groups that include misdirection experts.

Each player now rolls his six-sided die – hoping to roll higher than any of his fellows – in order to determine which player shall begin the game. In the event of a tie the youngest player begins the game. No matter how a player is chosen, that player is now known as the storyteller.

PLAYING THE GAME

At the beginning of each turn the storyteller begins the turn by stating:

The sun has arrived, pushing back the terrors of night. Unfortunately, the daylight brings little joy as the sickness floods over the village.

At this point each child must choose to remain indoors – where he is safest from the risk of infection but subject to depression – or go outdoors and play – where he risks infection but avoids depression.

If a child elects to remain indoors he moves one of his depression counters from his left to his right *and* moves one of his sickness counters from his right to his left.

If a child chooses to go outside and play he moves one of his sickness counters from his left to his right *and* moves two of his depression counters from his right to his left.

AUTOMATIC DEATH

Any moment at which a child has exactly six depression counters or six sickness counters the child dies. If the child was the storyteller that turn no story takes place and the turn automatically ends.

The storyteller, if he has chosen to go outside and play, now tells the tale of the children playing outside, sharing with the others the stories of that day. The stories told at this time by the storyteller must take at least a minute of time to tell though they may not surpass five minutes. If the storyteller attempts to tell a story and fails to go a full minute without stumbling or pausing he must move one sickness counter from his left to his right.

At the end of the day the players of children that are outside – including the storyteller himself – secretly vote (see box) on the storyteller's performance, proclaiming simply that the story was either good or bad.

If a storyteller accumulates more bad than good votes he must move one depression counter from his left to his right.

If the storyteller accumulates more good than bad votes then he moves two depression counters *and* one sickness counter from his right to his left.

In the event of a tie all of the children that were outside and participated in the story must move one depression counter from their left to their right.

VOTING

The voting is done in secret using a hat, sack, bowl, or other container within which the players may deposit their votes. To vote each player writes good or bad on a scrap of paper and drops it in the container. The player to the current storyteller's right now empties the container and tallies the votes.

What Makes a Story Good? What Makes a Story Bad?

This is entirely the choice of the players – every player will have a different opinion on whether a story was good or bad. Even so, there are a few elements that must exist within the story or it is automatically a bad story.

A Child Was Forgotten: If the storyteller forgets to incorporate a child that was outside playing then it's a bad story.

A Story is Unhappy: The first playtest comments included the line "*Some of the stories were dark with children playing with dead bodies and other were children at play.*" Okay, I can see that some playtesters are a little more morbid than others. In my opinion a story that incorporates depressing elements is automatically bad. If the players wish, though, a story that features extremely twisted, morbid scenes may automatically give each child that is outside one more depression.

Ending the Turn

Each player now adds the depression and sickness counters at his right together and rolls the six-sided die.

If the roll is greater than the total of the child's depression and sickness counters on his right side then he has survived and continues on to the next turn.

If the roll is equal to or less than the total of the child's depression and sickness counters on his right side then he has succumbed to misfortune and died. That player is removed from the game.

The player to the left of the storyteller becomes the new storyteller and a new day – and turn – begins.

ENDING THE GAME

The game ends when only a single child remains alive. It is highly likely that that child dies within a matter of days but, for purposes of our game, we shall close the curtain on the events while the child yet lives.

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Valuable publishing advice
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OPTIONAL RULES

The following optional rules could also easily be classified as advanced rules. The inclusion of any one of these optional rules must be decided upon before the game begins.

The Funeral

When a child dies, at the players’ option, a non-turn – *The Funeral* – takes place between turns. Starting with the player to the left of the dead child each player is expected to speak a few lines in remembrance of his dead friend. After all of the players have spoken, each one rolls a die: on a roll of 1 the player accumulates a sickness counter while on a roll of 6 the player accumulates a depression counter.

Unfortunately, it is possible to die at a funeral (per Automatic Death, see above). A long string of funerals can end a game quite quickly.

Setting the Stage

If the players choose they may interweave their stories by introducing elements and building upon prior stories. A storyteller may set the scene for the next storyteller by closing his story with something as simple saying “. . . and tomorrow we’ll meet at the lighthouse.” If the next storyteller does not begin his story at the lighthouse the story is automatically bad.

A String of Elements

Playtest comments recommended a more complex version of the above in which every story adds a new element that must be included in all future stories. The exact suggestion (of which I’ve incorporated a small amount in *Setting the Stage*, above), was:

Such as when the storyteller finishes the leave a story element. “Remember, when we play tomorrow we must meet at the old lighthouse...” then the next story must include “the old lighthouse” then ends “Remember, when we play tomorrow we must meet at the old lighthouse and remember to also bring one of your dad’s bats ...” then the next story must include “the old lighthouse” and “dad’s bat” and then will add another element.

So the longer the game continues the more the elements are added so it gets harder and harder to tell the story. If a story is voted “bad” then 1 element is removed.

I would actually change things so that when a story is told that is missing an element the storyteller automatically gains one depression counter. Otherwise the idea is sound and could make longer games wackier and more difficult for the storyteller.