

Waiting for Slenderman



A freeform game about the known, the unknown, and the imagined
Submission for the 2015 Golden Cobra Challenge

Written by Jacqueline Bryk and K.N. Granger

Cover Art by TechStephHD, permission granted by Creative Commons license. Originally posted to DeviantArt: <http://techstephd.deviantart.com/art/Slender-Man-Dark-Forest-327413320>

Should you go on?

Waiting for Slenderman is a game about the known (online personas), the unknown (what lies beneath the personas), and the imagined (what you *think* lies beneath the personas). It is also about Slenderman.

Slenderman is an internet legend born of a mysterious forum thread on SomethingAwful.com in 2009. In retrospect, it's not surprising how Slenderman grew to be such a compelling phenomenon - even the original thread is ambiguous in regards to Slenderman's reality. Ever since, a critical part of the mythos of Slenderman has remained: how much of the stories about Slenderman are fictional, and might there be any truth to them?

Playing into this liminal space between truth and tall tale, many people who contribute Slenderman content to the internet position themselves in such a way as they intentionally claim to be 'average folks' simply documenting their real-life experiences. They make forum accounts separate from their primary accounts, bearing names that are in-line with their storytelling persona, and then post periodic updates and responses with total seriousness and apparent transparency. They might provide plausible reasons for taking blurry photographs, or for not catching actual film footage of Slenderman. Some even have photoshop skills sufficiently good to provide some compelling images of Slenderman - frequently pictured hidden amongst a cluster of trees. These provide the inspiration and basis for much speculation about Slenderman - and they are integral to this game.

"[The ranger] could see what looked like a male figure. He called out to them, warning them that the paths were closed...The figure just stood there... When he was about ten yards away, the figure took, as he described, 'an impossibly long step' toward him..."

-Reddit user, SearchAndRescueWoods, August 2015
https://www.reddit.com/r/nosleep/comments/3iex1h/im_a_search_and_rescue_officer_for_the_us_forest/

Scenario

You are a group of strangers who meet up at night, at a location to be determined. You all belong to a message board online where you dedicate time to theories and speculation about Slenderman. One of you posted on the board - under an assumed username - that you had seen Slenderman here last night, and you have reason to believe that Slenderman will return again tonight. You're here to see for yourself. Is Slenderman real, and will you see Slenderman tonight?

Content note: This game plays with suspense and building tension. There is also some off-screen, implied violence, and optional mention of child abuse. Graphic descriptions of these things are not a part of the game. However, graphic descriptions of horrific situations are a part of the game. If you don't enjoy these particular elements, you probably won't enjoy this game. This game is recommended for mature teenagers and up.

Accessibility note: This game is played almost 100% in the dark. To make it more accessible, the authors encourage players to remain seated in a chair or wheelchair for the entire game if needed. For some people, such as those with hearing issues, the darkness might make the game less accessible, or even completely inaccessible. For others, like those with sight issues, it might make the game more accessible, because almost everything that happens in the game is reliant on verbal communication. Thus, players with sight issues are less likely to 'miss out' on crucial nonverbal information. Unfortunately, not every game is a good fit for every player, though in a perfect world every game would be perfectly accessible. We'd love to see more games that involve serious explorations of accessible game design. Suggestions for making this game more accessible are welcomed, and hacks would be awesome.



Art by Ray-Kanen, permission granted by Creative Commons license. Originally posted to DeviantArt:
http://img14.deviantart.net/8e11/i/2012/324/a/f/slender_man_hunt_9_by_ray_kanen-d5lkozj.jpg

Set-Up

The game should run for about **two hours**. This game is intended for **four players**, but can play with up to nine players. For this game, you will need **one facilitator** if you have five or less players. If you have six or more players, two facilitators would probably be helpful.

The facilitator's role includes: reading the game rules, guiding the players through the experience, and serving as a primary arbitrator and decision-maker as needed. The facilitator should also keep track of time, provide the necessary materials, and do their best to ensure that players have a good time.

Materials needed for this game:

- Name tags
- Character sheets
- Index cards (all should be identical shape/color/size)
- Pencils
- A means of tracking time
- A flashlight
- A space that can be darkened, to the point where people are barely or not able to see
- A computer, phone, or other means of using an online sound machine. A piece of cardboard to cover it would be helpful to help keep it dark in the room.
- Almost every player should have a **phone** of some kind. The facilitator should collect these phone numbers prior to game start, to “coordinate logistics of the game.” The facilitator should prepare to send a text message during scene 3 of the game - having an accomplice outside of the space, waiting to send the text message to the players on the facilitator's mark, would definitely enhance the creepiness factor. Note that if you have an accomplice, you'll want to make sure you have players' permission to share their numbers with that person, since you want to avoid uncomfortable situations.

Optional materials to enhance the game:

- Blankets/pillows (to make sitting on the floor comfy, as appropriate to the setting)
- Chairs and/or a table (as appropriate to the setting)
- Snacks (particularly if the game is running around a mealtime)
- Additional minimalistic creepy lighting, e.g. purple or green fairy lights, a campfire, etc.

Scenes

All of the following times are approximate. As the facilitator, part of your role is to ensure that the game moves along at the pace of the players; therefore it is important to 'read the room.' Don't wait to move ahead if players seem stuck, and if players are really savoring a moment, don't force ahead for the sake of keeping to the timeline. In the latter case, you might even need to skip a scene. That's okay. The most important thing is that your players have fun!

- Character selection and creation, yarn ball exercise (30 minutes)
- Turn off the lights, set the scene, in-character introductions (15 minutes)
Suggested soundscape:
<http://mynoise.net/NoiseMachines/palmGardenAtNightSoundscapeGenerator.php>
- Hear trampling in the woods near you, but it fades away. It starts to rain. (15 minutes)
Suggested sound effect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omlX2E8o-mA>
- Hear a couple (in the distance) in an argument about having lost their child up a tree. She hasn't come down. (15 minutes). Alternate: Hear coyotes yelping in pain. (15 minutes).
Suggested sound effect: <https://youtu.be/vSNcVtvs-fs?t=32s>
- Hear sounds of distant emergency personnel, dogs barking. (15 minutes)
Suggested sound effect: <https://youtu.be/B7kcXQVydMU?t=11s>
- Messenger (e.g. text message sent to everyone's phones, or the GM's accomplice can enter wearing a black hood, with an obscured face/mask) "Slenderman will not come today, but surely will come tomorrow." It stops raining suddenly. (15 minutes).
- The sun comes up. Turn the lights on and debrief (15 minutes)

"Fuck the woods, fuck nature, fuck being alone in it, FUCK STAIRS, fuck Bigfoot, fuck having kids, fuck mountain lions, fuck the dark, fuck being alone in it, fuck strangers, in fact fuck ever being outside in a group of less than 5 capable adults, fuck abandoned anything, fuck mysterious noises, fuck animals, fuck unlocked doors, fuck windows, fuck wide open clearings, fuck crying people, fuck everything I'm staying in my house"

-Reddit user, Qwerteo14, September 2015

https://www.reddit.com/r/nosleep/comments/3iex1h/im_a_search_and_rescue_officer_for_the_us_forest/

System

- **Monologue:** At any time, a player can take the *flashlight* and place it under their chin in a classic “telling spooky stories” pose. This allows that player to do an inner monologue for thirty seconds or less. The monologue should be relevant to the situation at hand and help move the game along.
- **Combat:** Sometimes people lash out when they get spooked. While we don’t anticipate this happening in the game, combats longer than a shove should be adjudicated with a simple rock/paper/scissors throw. The winner can do a short monologue about how the fight went if they choose.
- **Cut/Brake:** The safewords. If something is too intense for a player, but they don’t want to stop the scene, a simple declaration of “brake!” lets the other players know that they should lessen up on the intensity a bit. “Cut” means that an action or scene needs to stop entirely, as it is crossing boundaries.
 - A note: while Cut and Brake are important for making players feel safe, this should not be used to completely diffuse any tension that might be building. “Waiting for Slenderman” is a game about dread and anxiety, so while the players should feel safe, the characters should not.

Start

To start the game, the facilitator should go over the basic premise of the game (pages 2 and 3) and make sure to review aloud the **content note** and **accessibility note**.

Then, go over emotional safety. Typical LARP mechanics for emotional safety include “Cut” and “Brake.” For more details about these, check out this resource here:

<http://nordiclarp.org/w/index.php?title=Safewords&redirect=no>

In addition to these, it's important to remind players that **The Door Is Always Open**. As described by Sara Williamson in her Golden Cobra 2014 game, *Group Date*, “the players should feel comfortable stepping out or leaving entirely for any reason; perhaps something comes up in play that makes them uncomfortable, perhaps they're feeling sick or tired, or maybe they just need to use the restroom or get a drink of water. The players should know that leaving won't break the game or ruin anyone's experience. They should feel free to leave at any time, or ask to speak to you/your co-facilitator in private if they have any questions.”

Remind players they should keep their phones out and on as sources of light, to refer to their character sheets as needed.

At this point, you are ready to start character creation.

Sections of Life

Players publically choose one of the following character concepts. There are a total of nine concepts, which provides a lot to choose from. Gather around in a circle, at a table, or in some other logical configuration. The person most recently to have been in the woods gets first pick of characters, and then character selection should continue on from that person's right.

1. The Teacher (A skeptic, interested in unveiling Slenderman)
2. The Champion (A skeptic, interested in conquering Slenderman)
3. The Inspector (A skeptic, interested in protecting Slenderman)
4. The Promoter (Agnostic, interested in unveiling Slenderman)
5. The Crafter (Agnostic, interested in conquering Slenderman)
6. The Healer (Agnostic, interested in protecting Slenderman)
7. The Counselor (A believer, interested in unveiling Slenderman)
8. The Fieldmarshal (A believer, interested in conquering Slenderman)
9. The Protector (A believer, interested in protecting Slenderman)

Once all of the players have chosen their preferred character type, pass out the character sheets. There is one for every character type.

Players should then collaboratively decide where the game's setting will take place in the narrative. Encourage the players to play close to home, for maximum creep factor. Also note that Slenderman's mythos largely depends on being outdoors, in a rural, woodsy, realistic setting with lots of trees. In other words, the game requires this kind of setting, at least as written in this booklet. Other than that, the setting is open to the players' choice. Do you play adjacent to a local cemetery? In a deserted spot along route 69? In the woods out back the creepy old abandoned mansion? A hiking trail near a local playground?

Players should fill out their character sheets, starting with the basics: A real first name, and a forum username. Also include age, where they're from, racial identity, abilities, disabilities, and more. See the character sheets section for more info.

Once your players have a rough sense of who they are, they should complete the **yarn ball exercise**:

- At the beginning, all eleven players should sit in a circle. The player on the GM's left has a yarn ball (or other object) which is passed to another player. The two players between whom the yarn ball is passed develop a relationship. Then the second player passes the ball to someone else and they develop a relationship. This should go on until everybody has a relationship with someone else. If desired, players can each have a thirty-second scene to establish the way their most important relationship works.

Then, and only then, should the players write down the sensitive information. They should do so in this order:

1. Privately, on one notecard, each player should write down one "light secret."
Examples might include:

- Slenderman is more than just a mere curiosity to me
 - I despair because my family is all dead due to Slenderman
 - I actually have a completely different goal than I said
 - I want to find Slenderman to get my child back
2. Privately, on a separate notecard, each player should write down one “dark secret.”
- Examples might include:
- I am Slenderman
 - I am a fraud, and actually don’t believe/believe in Slenderman
 - I am the person who posted this invitation on the forum
 - I am actually a troll and I publish on 19 different accounts on the forum
 - I want to find Slenderman to sell my neighbor’s child to Slenderman
3. Then the players will answer the following question on a separate notecard, which they show briefly to the facilitator, and keep: ***What do you fear most about Slenderman?***
- Examples might include:
- Being eaten alive
 - Losing my child
 - Never having a moment of peace
 - Death
 - Not dying
4. Take five seconds to show the player to your left the light secret, and the player to the right your dark secret. These people now have this information about you, and it may be brought up in game.
5. After sharing your secrets, and reading other people’s, write down **who you think posted the original forum topic** (suggesting you all meet tonight) on a notecard. Keep all your notecards with your character sheet in a safe place.

Character Sheet: The Teacher

A skeptic interested in unveiling Slenderman

My child, my Lars... he is gone. Taken, from his bed. The only thing that we found was a scrap of black clothing. It feels like cotton, but it is softer... thicker. Lars came into my bedroom yesterday, screaming at the top of his lungs that "The angel is outside!" I asked him what he was talking about, and he told me some nonsense fairy story about Der Großmann.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

☐ Obsessive, because you have more than an academic interest in Slenderman

☐ Intrigued, because you're developing some unique theories about Slenderman

☐ Fascinated, because you want to use Slenderman to educate people about urban legends

Character Sheet: The Champion

A skeptic, interested in conquering Slenderman

Having seen him, I acted without even knowing what was going on. Punches were thrown. Long black tendrils whipped all around. The last thing I remember was being held tightly above the ground and thrown against a wall. That's when I blacked out. When I came to, my wife was in tears. I had three cracked ribs. My son was gone. The slender man had my son and there was nothing I could do. But I knew he was going to come back, and that was when I would get him.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

☐ Embarrassed, because you don't actually have a clue of how to conquer Slenderman

☐ Delighted, because you have a thirst for adventure

☐ Enthusiastic, because you have a plot to debunk Slenderman in order to advance skeptical thought

Character Sheet: The Inspector

A skeptic, interested in protecting Slenderman

Throughout the rest of the night, the "slender" man was everywhere within my dreams. He was a bit curious though. He only ever seemed to cautiously hide behind trees. Only in the original photo was he completely exposed. Even subconsciously I wished I hadn't moved next to a forest knowing he could be lurking. Watching me. Analyzing me.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

☐ Satisfied; you're sure that while Slenderman doesn't exist, you want the mythos to continue to grow.

☐ Bored; you don't believe in Slenderman, and you're content to let sleeping dogs lie.

☐ Important; if Slenderman exists, you will do what is necessary to prevent Slenderman from becoming a sideshow spectacle

Character Sheet: The Promoter

Agnostic, interested in unveiling Slenderman

"We don't know what he is exactly, but we know for sure he isn't human. People who have seen him describe him just as you saw him, but he is sometimes seen with black tentacles emerged from his back. He is a fearsome creature, and kills most likely for the fun of it. Now, let me give you a little backstory on the Slender Man. One of the first recorded instances of him was back in the mid-1500s in Germany. A woodcut artist by the name of Hans Frekenberg created a piece that displayed a creature that looks not unlike the Slender Man. It was discovered in Halstburgh Castle in 1883. Here's what it looks like." He slid one of the pictures over to me, one that depicted a knight dueling with a strange, humanoid creature with multiple arms and legs.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

☐ Irritated; you don't really want to be here, but you'll make the best of it

☐ Annoyed, but don't want to miss out

☐ Enthusiastic, because either way, you're likely to make some money out of this.

Character Sheet: The Crafter

Agnostic, interested in conquering Slenderman

Suddenly, trapped in his grasp so tight, / You struggle to break yourself free. / He laughs and he gurgles and he screeches with glee, / He turns your head for you to see. / Your children are crying though their eyes are removed, / They collapse, still and silent.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

___ Serene; you feel like you won't be ruffled by anything you see here tonight.

___ Helpless; you feel as if the tide of your life has forced you here.

___ Aware; whether or not Slenderman exists, you want to use what you find in an art project.

Character Sheet: The Healer

Agnostic, interested in protecting Slenderman

As Nicole walked into her sister's hospital room the first time, she thought she had spied the silhouette of a man in the window. That, she knew, was impossible. Her sister's room was on the third story of the hospital...It was a tall man wearing a black suit, with a blank face.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

___ Cheerful; you little doubt everyone here is on the same page with you as regards to Slenderman.

___ Insignificant; you feel as if your colleagues here tonight are all on board against Slenderman.

___ Trusting; you know Slenderman is sentient and thoughtful, and has a plan.

Character Sheet: The Counselor

Believer, interested in unveiling Slenderman

He saw the kids sitting next to the tree and the same man standing in front of them as he seen in the woods. Chris turned around to see the kids and the smaller tree missing. He backed up, tripping over a fallen branch. He remembered that there was no tree by the slide. Chris looked up to see a blank face staring back down at him. He went to scream but nothing came out. He tried to run but the man's branch-like hand was grasping his foot. There was no escaping...

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

___ Anxious; Slenderman is an entity not to be trifled with

___ Thoughtful; you are curious to see what Slenderman is like in the cold harsh light of day

___ Amused, because all these skeptics are so silly. You'll show them.

Character Sheet: The Fieldmarshal

Believer, interested in conquering Slenderman

The tall man stood in a clearing, dressed as a nobleman, all in black. Shadows lay over him, dark as a cloudy midnight. He had many arms, all long and boneless as snakes, all sharp as swords, and they writhed like worms on nails. He did not speak, but made his intentions known.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

___ Confident; conquering monsters is your primary goal in life, and this will be another that bites the dust

___ Sexy; you find it strangely alluring to exert your power over the unknown

___ Hostile; you find the disbelief of the skeptics impedes the accomplishment of your goals.

Character Sheet: The Protector

Believer, interested in protecting Slenderman

If I learned anything from that ordeal, it's that we may never know who, or what the Slender Man is exactly, and where he's going to show up next. But I give this warning to you, dear reader. Beware the Slender Man, for the Slender Man watches us all.

First name: _____

Username: _____

Time on forum: _____

Age & Gender: _____

Where are you from?: _____

Choose 1: How do you feel about this adventure?

☐ Depressed; Slenderman's enemies and detractors are arming against him, and I wish there was something I could do about it

☐ Rage; I want to right the wrongs committed against Slenderman

☐ Energetic; I want to see if there's a way that Slenderman can be less frightening through therapy

So, what now?

So you've gone through all of the scenes and your players are sufficiently creeped out. Time to wind down! Debrief for this game consists of three parts: the epilogue, the deep breath, and the conversation

- The Epilogue: Each player gets a thirty-second monologue about what happened after the night they all met at the playground. Did Slenderman show the next night? Was one of them found with their intestines wrapped around their throat like a noose? Did they catch the prankster? It's ok if accounts differ, but all monologues should include who each player thought was the original poster.
- The Deep Breath: Pretty self-explanatory. Players take three seven-eleven count deep breaths to relax.
- The Conversation: This is the time to go around the table and cheer on your fellow players. Was there a particularly intense moment? Did someone have an awesome monologue? Do you like your GM's face? Talk about it for a couple of minutes and take some time to come back to a world where Slenderman isn't real and sending creepy texts to lure you to a playground. Probably.

Sharing Slenderman

This is the standard version of this game. A large-text version of this game for low-vision persons is available here: <http://tinyurl.com/largetextWFS>.

An audio version of this game is also available. Click here to download all the audio files:
<http://tinyurl.com/audioWFS>

So Long: Credits

For the game's inspiration, our source material was the Slender Man meme (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slender_Man) as well as the Samuel Beckett Play, *Waiting for Godot* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waiting_for_Godot).

For the character types, our source material was the Keirsey Temperament Sorter - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keirsey_Temperament_Sorter

Character Flavor Text came from a variety of different sources. Each is listed below.

Text for "The Teacher": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/Der_Gro%C3%9Fmann

Text for "The Champion": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/Tall,_Thin_and_Faceless?action=render

Text for "The Inspector": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/Tall,_Thin_and_Faceless?action=render

Text for "The Promoter": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/The_Slenderman_Cometh?action=render

Text for "The Crafter": <https://www.tumblr.com/tagged/schlankwald?page=3>

Text for "The Healer": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/The_Blank_Face?action=render

Text for "The Counselor": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/Follow_the_Leader?action=render

Text for "The Fieldmarshal": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/The_Tall_Man

Text for "The Protector": http://creepypasta.wikia.com/wiki/The_Slenderman_Cometh