

Calling Down: A Phone LARP

By Peter Hagmann

1 - 1.5 Hours

Two Players

It's late. You are meant to be somewhere else. Instead you're spending the night at this rundown motel, staring at a damp popcorn ceiling. You can't sleep. Can't concentrate. Maybe you're feeling guilty, or scared, or angry. You need someone to talk to. There's something heavy in your chest and you need to offload it on someone else, anyone else. The only light in the room is coming from the telephone sitting on the bedside table, a single red light blinking in the dark.

“Hello, this is concierge speaking. How can I help you tonight?”

What you will need: This game is an audio-only LARP between two people. It can happen **over the phone or over Discord**, depending on your needs. You will need either a smartphone (ideal) or a computer with a microphone.

Between scenes you will create voice messages. You can do this by either calling the other player and leaving a voicemail (remind them not to pickup) or by using the voice memo function on your phone or computer. Either way, you should be able to share the voice message with the other player either through text message or over Discord— if you're unsure how to share voicemails or voice memos on your device, look it up before you start playing. Make sure to test this function before starting.

Additionally, the player of the Guest will need a **deck of cards with the Joker, two, three, and four cards of each suit removed**. If the players would like to, they can remove additional numbers to make it more likely the Concierge guesses correctly— this will speed up the game and add more scares, versus a slow build of tension.

You might want to print the last three pages, with the reference guide and worksheets.

Content and Safety: This game can include triggering themes of alienation, loss of control, and personal horror. The Concierge's actions will include gaslighting and possibly other abusive behavior. Please check with each other before playing and talk about possible triggers or subjects to avoid. If gameplay becomes too much, either person can end the scene by hanging up. Players can then reconvene and decide if they would like to keep playing. Before players start, they should agree either verbally or by text that hanging up at any time to leave the game is always an option.

Characters: Players play either the Concierge and the Guest. The Guest is stuck in a dark hotel room at midnight, and the Concierge is a ghost or something similar that haunts the hotel and wishes to keep the Guest here forever. Neither are good people. Before scene one there is a

worksheet that must be completed by each player, alone. These worksheets should be used to inform their roleplay, and should not be shared out of game before playing.

Keep Talking: Both characters, no matter how unpleasant the conversation gets, want to stay on the line. The Guest will always prefer to have the company of the Concierge to the silence and darkness of an empty hotel room. The Concierge wants the Guest to keep talking so they can gain influence over them through Pulls, so they keep them here forever. Similarly, the Guest cannot leave the hotel room.

The Pull: When the Concierge wants to change reality, he asks the Guest to pull a card from the deck and guesses what that card is. There are three pulls per scene. It's suggested that the Concierge spreads the Pulls out by several minutes, so as to not speed through the game.

If the Concierge guesses and gets the **Color** right, then they get to make up one **thought** that the Guest is, quite suddenly, thinking. Whatever this thought is, the Guest will become fixated upon it.

Concierge: I know what you're thinking, but you can't fixate on how much George probably hates you for sleeping with his father. Or the fact that you probably destroyed their relationship.

Guest: Yeah. I can't. I can't fixate on that, can I. But the way he looked at me when he found out-

If the Concierge guesses and gets the **Suit** right, then they change one thing about the room the Guest is currently in.

Concierge: Hmm. I keep hearing this wailing sound over the phone.

Guest:What? Oh god you're right. It's coming from the closet. Is it getting louder?

If the Concierge guesses and gets the **Rank** right then they get to make up one **fact** about the Guest. Whatever this fact is, it replaces whatever was previously true and erases all memories that contradict it. If this new truth is illogical or otherwise contradicts large parts of the Guest's life, the Guest will be unable to recognize that and accept the new reality no matter how bizarre.

Concierge: I'm guessing *your parents didn't love you very much*, did they? They were never around.

Guest: I... I guess they didn't. I thought... no you're right, they didn't care for me at all.

If the Concierge guesses and gets **EVERYTHING** right, as in they guess the **EXACT RIGHT** card then they have **complete control over the rest of the scene**. They can do any of the above, as well as anything else they can think of. This represents the Concierge gaining full control over the Guest, so there is no need to be subtle.

Concierge: You think that your mother's death is your fault. You should have been there.

Guest: Oh. Yeah, you're right. I could have stopped it.

In-game the Guest becomes incredibly suggestible, but the player of the Guest should feel free to add any amount of detail to the scene so long as it doesn't contradict and supports what the Concierge has already said. If this happens early in the game it's suggested that the Concierge play dumb about the sudden power they have, but if it happens later in the scene the Concierge player is welcome to reveal their true goals and inhumanity at this point.

Concierge: The room is getting darker, isn't it? The walls are getting closer. Do you hear that sound? That scratching in the walls?

Guest: Oh god. Oh god. What is that?

Concierge: Her name is Lucy. I left her there a long time ago. She wants to welcome you home.

OR

Concierge: Do you feel that? I think it's getting hotter in here?

Guest: I... yes, it's like I'm boiling. Ha. Did you turn the heat up?

Concierge: No. I think we're in hell, don't you? I know I'm dead. I think you might be as well. We both belong here, don't we?

Guest: You're joking. That's not funny.

Concierge: Everything is funny in hell. And you're the biggest joke of all. I tell you you're dead, and that's all you have? Denial?

OR

Concierge: There's a man in the window. He's staring at you. He doesn't seem to be blinking. Do you see him?

Guest: Ye-yes. He's putting his hands on the glass. I think he's crying?

Concierge: Oh. You made him cry? Why would you do something like that?.

Ending a Scene: Once the Concierge guesses a card exactly right or once the third card is pulled the scene is over. They can choose to keep playing for as long as they need to wrap up the scene, and then when the Concierge chooses to end the scene they hang up. Except for the

last scene, in-game the phone line is suddenly disconnected, and the Concierge player is encouraged to end the phone call mid-sentence as if they were cut off.

The Last Scene: In the last scene, the Guest either leaves the hotel or doesn't. It depends on how much of their personhood is left. This is explained in more detail on the Guest and Concierge worksheet. **The Guest chooses when this scene is over.**

Voicemail: Calling Down is broken up into three scenes. Each scene begins with the Guest calling the Concierge and, with the exception of the last, ends when the phone line "goes dead" unexpectedly. Both the Guest and the Concierge get to leave a voicemail or voice message during the game— the Guest's voicemail is after the first scene, and the Concierge's is after the last scene.

The Guest's voicemail are left for an offscreen character (their Anchor) who the Guest has hurt or otherwise left behind. These messages can be pleas to let the Guest come home, about how much the Guest hates them and hopes they die, or something else entirely— whatever makes sense for the character.

The last voice message is completed after the last scene by the Concierge. Depending on how the last scene ends, the Guest either escapes the Hotel or doesn't. If they do, the last voice message is directed to them. If not, it can be directed to the Anchor character the Guest created (and should have spoken about during game). **Once game is over, the voice messages should be replayed for both players.**

All together the game looks like this:

Pre-game (Read this, worksheets, set up.) >> Scene 1 (10-20 minutes) >> Guest Voicemail 1 (2-5 minutes) >> Scene 2 (10-20 minutes) >> [Break! 5 Minutes. Drink water!] >> Scene 3 (10-20 minutes) >> Concierge Voicemail (2-5 minutes)

After these pages are the Concierge and Guest worksheets, as well as a reference sheet.

Dedicated to:

Psychic Children on the Run from Danger, a 200 word RPG from which I have taken the card guessing mechanic. Used to a much different effect in Psychic Children, I really love both the simplicity of the mechanic and the rush it gives the players (and the game) when they manage the guess correctly. I feel like this is a mechanic that has a lot of potential, and I really want to see if it works in a different genre to (hopefully) create tension and build suspense.

Ten Candles, from which I have borrowed the use of voice messages. In Ten Candles the players each leave a voice message at the very beginning of the game, as if leaving a voicemail for someone they knew from before the world, and at the end of game once players have died the messages are all played back to back. It creates a wonderful contrast between the start and end, and also because of the intimate nature of voice creates this artifact that feels like it could have come from a real person. It's a wonderful mechanic, which I have joyfully stolen.

Guest Worksheet

It wasn't supposed to go down like this. You made some mistakes, took a few wrong turns, and now you're here. The questions below will help you build your character. Don't feel like you need to get *everything* down on the page— even more about your character should come out during roleplay.

1. **Building Your Anchor.** There's someone back home that you hurt and wish you were with now. Who are they? What's their name? What's your relationship to them? How do you feel about them now? *Could be: spouse, ex-partner, best friend, parent, child, etc.*
2. **You did something bad.** Maybe you regret it, maybe you don't. You did something so awful that it landed you here, in this hotel. What is that awful thing? *Did you cheat on your spouse, get fired for embezzlement, burn down someone's home, get someone killed, etc?*
3. **Who are you?** What's your name? What's your day job? Who were you before you came here? *Stockbroker with two kids, a dog, and a secret; former anarchist turned door to door vacuum salesman; recovering cultist with kleptomaniac tendencies; etc.*
4. **What's your damage?** What happened when you were younger— could have been as a kid or it could have been last year— that set you on this path? *Got cheated on, bullied as a kid, wrote a book no one would publish, abandoned as a kid, etc.*
5. **How did you make it even worse?** There truly is no feeling better than digging your own grave. What did you do that made this whole situation even worse than it was before? *Blamed all my problems on someone else, bet my life savings, moved somewhere remote and unfriendly, swindled the wrong person, took it out on my kids, etc.*

What makes you, you? List the three cornerstones of yourself. If, during the course of the game all three are lost, damaged, or otherwise changed irrevocably then you are lost to the hotel. Each should be a sentence that describes a fact about your character that, if changed, changes them fundamentally. When you get to the end of scene three, ask yourself if these are still true.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Concierge Worksheet

You're not sure if any of this is real, not this hotel or yourself or the people who come here to stay. You only exist some of the time. Largely at night, when the actual concierge goes to bed and you take his place. You think you are dead. In fact, you are pretty sure you are dead. You think, probably, you died in this hotel. You suspect it was not a happy or peaceful death. You suspect you probably deserved it. More than that, you aren't sure.

You know these things to be true. You also know you like to cause pain, to twist the knife, to scare and confuse and entrap. All that, and you are lonely. Those that come and go never stay.

1. **Who are you?** You don't remember your old name, from when you were alive. What name will you give the Guest if asked?
2. **What do you remember?** What fragment of a memory, good or bad, do you hold on to from your past life? What do you think it means?
3. **What keeps you tied here?** Do you like it here at this hotel, or do you feel imprisoned? How do you pass the time?

Your goal is to keep the Guest here, forever. If the Guest forgets who they are, like you did, then they will be stuck here just like you are. They'll have no choice but to keep you company for the rest of time.

As a spirit, you have a kind of pull, a control over the fabric of reality here. If you can find out more about the Guest and the cornerstone facts of what makes them who they are, then you can use your pull to change those facts into whatever you want. You just need to keep the Guest talking, so you can learn more about them. If they think you like them, maybe even care for them, then they'll be that much easier to manipulate.

Reference Sheet

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All together the game looks like this:

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Suggestions:

- If you're playing the Concierge, keep track of what you've already guessed.
- Remember which numbered cards you removed before play.
- Focus on the relationship between the characters– the Concierge wants someone to stay with them forever, and the Guest wants someone to confide in. How does this turn toxic?
- Remember, neither of you are playing nice people.