WRETCHED & ALONE

SYSTEM REFERENCE DOCUMENT v1.0
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What is it?

Wretched and Alone (W&A) is a System Reference Document for games based on Chris Bissette's *The Wretched*. These systems typically create solo games about struggling alone against insurmountable odds and documenting that struggle.

Generally speaking, they require a block tower, a deck of cards, one or more six-sided dice, and ten tokens of some kind. Some games will vary from this.

This SRD is aimed at designers, writers, and publishers who'd like to publish games that make use of the systems and ideas from *The Wretched* in their own setting.

What This Isn't

Some SRDs are player-facing, intended to teach you how to play the game. This isn't one of those. Wretched & Alone is intended for designers interested in making their own games using the W&A framework. This SRD is an attempt to break down the mechanics of The Wretched into its component parts to make it easier for you to understand how the system hangs together and which levers can be moved to change the play experience.

All W&A games teach players how to play during the course of the game, using the oracle to introduce new mechanics, explain what different systems do, and introduce new win/lose conditions. Each game works differently, and therefore it is not possible to explain exactly how they function in a document like this.

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You can't use the SRD to make anything that would be prejudicial to Loot The Room or Chris Bissette's honour or reputation.

Finally, nazis, homophobes, transphobes, and other bigots are expressly forbidden from making new content using the *Wretched and Alone* system. If you have to ask whether this includes you, it does.

Theme

Wretched and Alone games generally place their protagonist in hopeless and bleak situations where they must do their best to survive or escape.

However, W&A games are not limited to this bleak outlook. The rules as is create a system where winning is unlikely, but ideas that have been discussed for use with W&A include such broad concepts as :

- building up the courage to share your true feelings at a slumber party. Your own fear and other distractions get in your way. You lose if the party ends before you can share how you feel.

- seeking enlightenment. Your struggle is with your own thoughts and earthly burdens. You lose is you cannot get past your earthly burdens.

- creating a cure for a disease or blight. Time and resources are against you, but you have to try. You lose when humanity or perhaps just yourself succumb to the disease.

- inventing something that will make people's lives better. You wrestle with ideas and problem solving. Failure doesn't mean death or dishonour, simply frustration you couldn't make your idea work.

It is more common to lose the game than it is to win. This is intentional, and the game is about the journey, the hope and what you can save before the end. Failure states greatly outnumber successes.

Rules as an Unreliable Narrator

Part of the desired play experience is the pursuit of victory or escape, even though this is almost impossible. Bear in mind, some of humanity's greatest achievements have come from the seemingly impossible. The rules should encourage the idea that the player can "win" the game even when this is highly unlikely.

An afterword or debrief can be utilized to explain that there was never any hope of winning the game, and that this is a feature rather than a bug.

Core Mechanics

The Die

This determines how many tasks you must face each day. It also used for tests to see if you are successful on the salvation mechanism tied to the Ace of Hearts

Salvation (Ace of Hearts)

Each game has a way of winning. This mechanism arrives with the Ace of Hearts. Ten tokens are placed on the Ace. At the end of each round, the player rolls and can remove a token from the card if they roll a 6. Once all ten tokens have been removed, salvation arrives in whatever form the setting dictates. This may come with a final pull from the tower. Collapse at this stage would snatch salvation away at the last moment.

The Oracle (a deck of playing cards)

The deck provides the tasks and challenges you face. Generally, a deck has four topics/areas, each mapped to a suit. The Kings of each suit are one of your countdowns to failure. When all four Kings are revealed something in your setting ends your quest. This may mean death, giving up, becoming lost, or something else.

The Ace of Hearts acts as a salvation mechanism (see above). The Aces of the other suits give some bonus or help in your plight.

Odd numbered cards usually require you to pull from the tower, and even numbers are usually safe.

The Block Tower

The block tower is one of your countdowns to losing. Some of your tasks from the deck will make you pull from the tower. It represents the fragility of your path to completing your task. When the tower falls, you fail. Most likely in permanent and irreversible ways.

Block towers and accessibility

Not everyone has a block tower, and not everyone is able to interact with one. In *The Wretched*, the block tower is optional for this reason. We encourage you to keep the block tower optional and even make alternative resolution methods available if you can.

There was some discussion of this as part of Wretched & Alone jam:
https://itch.io/jam/wretched-jam/topic/796498/dice-substitute-for-jenga-towers

Tokens

The tokens are used to track the progress of the salvation mechanism on the Ace of Hearts. Tokens can be anything physical that players can easily keep track of, but it is recommended that you suggest something fitting to the theme of your game. For example, *The Wretched* tasks the player with trying to repair their ship, and the suggested tokens are screws, nuts, and bolts.

The Journal

Wretched and Alone games are best recorded and documented. Depending on the theme and topic of the game, this might be video/audio logs, a handwritten diary, a typed document or something else entirely. Find

what works best with the theme and give guidance on how to do it. Encourage roleplay and creating something evocative.

Win Conditions

Winning *Wretched and Alone* games is rare, and it is supposed to be. The salvation mechanism from the Ace of Hearts offers a <1% win rate. In the original *The Wretched*, the other win condition is impossible; he player's own hope creates delusion that is embodied as an unreliable narrator in the game setup text. Whether you wish to make the second win condition achievable or atler the chances of winning is up to you.

Special Thanks

We've received really useful feedback on the *Wretched & Alone* SRD from a number of sources. If you are one of these people, we'd like to say a special thanks to you for helping make this better.