



IN THE DARKNESS

A SYSTEM-NEUTRAL ADVENTURE FOR ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

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In the Darkness is a system-neutral one-page adventure for role-playing games (RPGs), based on the classic “three-act scenario” model and designed to allow some versatility, depending on how much the Game Master (GM) wants to simplify it. If they wish to use only the most basic content available here, this adventure may last only for either a short one-shot or a couple-sessions mini-adventure, at most. If they wish to make use of the extra tips and options (and, perhaps, even complement with extra content of their own), this can easily turn into a small campaign.

1st ACT – THE PREMISE

The Player Characters (PCs) are in the subway, on their way to another absolutely banal day, until a series of surreal events trigger a fantastic adventure. In the end, it will be revealed that, at one point, it was all a dream.

Suggestion: Based on this knowledge, it is up to the GM to introduce small clues that there is something out of the ordinary in the environment surrounding the PCs.

The PCs wake up either when the key is used to open the lock or when they die in the dream (either as a result of combat or another situation caused by the players themselves). When a character dies, their body disappears in the dream (dissipating into a cloud of smoke, turning into sand, etc.).

If one of the PCs dies in the dream and wakes up before the others, the GM can reveal (to their player) that it is a dream and his PC has become one of the forest ghosts, instructing them to, from time to time, whisper messages to the rest of the PCs. These messages may be of encouragement, discouragement, anger, etc. To help the player improvise what to say, the GM can print the dialogue cards that are available with **In the Darkness**.

1st ACT – THE SUBWAY

The PCs are on the subway. The GM describes the station and prepares the narrative. They can describe that the PCs are either sitting waiting or are already in a moving carriage, heading towards their destination.

Each player then describes their character as well as why they are there. Were they on their way to class? To work? To a doctor's appointment? On a leisure trip? Do they happen to work in that subway station? Are they a homeless person who was there simply begging for con?

The PCs can either explore the station or interact with each other until the GM declares something like *“You feel boredom overtaking you, numbing your mind and your senses. After all, it's just another boring day in your bland life. You are in a banal place, crowded with uninteresting people, like everything else in your life. Ah... if only you could escape this monotonous normality and set off on an epic adventure - one that appears in books and movies - if only for once ... What you wouldn't give to be able to get out of the subway and pursue this adventure. Unfortunately, duty calls. Your banal life must continue for at least another day.”* After this narrative, the catastrophe is triggered.

1st ACT – THE CATASTROPHE

An earthquake is felt. The earthquake causes severe shaking on the floor, walls, and ceiling of the subway, causing the emergence of deep cracks. Pieces of ceiling begin to come loose and fall at random. Panic sets in among the crowd.

Suggestion: If the pace needs to be slowed down, the GM may describe a crater opening under the feet of one or more PCs (optional damage), who now have the added challenge of getting out of the hole.

The PCs must aim to get out of the subway station, find a safe place and eventually find the cause - natural or terrorist - of the earthquake, as well as either finding an alternative way to reach their destination (if they were unharmed) or obtain medical attention (if injured).

As a result, they have to look for a way out of the wreckage and the chaos, caused by panicked

people who are currently crying, screaming and running in various directions.

If the PCs spend too much time rambling through the Metro tunnels, the GM can simply guide them to the surface in a narrative manner saying something like *“You have reached an area where the ceiling has completely collapsed and you cannot go on any further, the only solution now it's to go back and try the other way around.”* or *“Despite the dust that now surrounds you, you can feel a fresh draft. It looks like there's a tunnel somewhere nearby that leads to the surface.”*

Suggestion: If the PCs decide not to rescue any injured passengers and leave the subway on their own, the GM may (optionally) choose to have one of the Game Master's Characters (NPCs) follow them. This character can be a child or someone who has been injured and ask the PCs for help getting out.

2nd ACT – THE FOREST

Upon reaching the surface, the PCs discover that they are no longer in the city but in the heart of a forest. As it is night time, the ability of the PCs to perceive their surrounding environment is quite limited; however, the forest dwellers do not seem to have the same problem.

Optional: The GM can use the fact that the adventure takes place at night to spice up the game with some scary stuff if they so desire.

The subway entrance gate closes and locks autonomously, trapping the PCs in the new unfamiliar environment. Above the lock, a paper appears with the message *“In order to find my key, which of the paths will it be?”* The lock is indestructible and can only be opened with its key.

Optional: It is up to the GM whether the PCs will remain normal humans or, while on forest soil, acquire random superpower by rolling in the table below.

If the powers are implemented, the GM can also give players the opportunity to describe their new looks. Are they still human, or have they become something different?

1d20	superpower
1	sticky adhesion to surfaces
2	walk through walls
3	bio-armor (coral, scales, wood, metal...)
4	controlling the 4 elements
5	healing touch
6	speak to plants
7	speak to animals
8	invisibility
9	summon hallucinogenic mushrooms
10	self-magnetization
11	cellular regeneration
12	super strength
13	super speed
14	telepathy
15	teletransportation
16	seeing ghosts
17	night vision
18	x-ray vision
19	flying
20	throwing up light balls

The PCs can explore the forest freely as well as find various areas and curiosities (these or others created by the GM):

- Gang of mischievous monkeys, laughing and mocking the PCs

- Shooting stars that, upon contact with the ground, turn into edible cookies

- Cave with fruit bats made from fluff balls

- Harmless ghosts from other characters who couldn't find the key and got stuck in the woods

- Pond or stream with frogs and leeches

- Tiny fairies that instinctively hide from the PCs

- Cliff whose precipice seems endless

- Small bioluminescent plants

- Giant carnivorous plants

- A dirt road that splits into three, clearly leading in different directions

- A log cabin left abandoned

IN THE DARKNESS

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2ND ACT – THE 3 PATHS

By finding the three paths, the PCs must decide which one to follow. Each path leads to a different type of challenge, which provides three distinct ways to obtain a key that will enable them to unlock the lock, thus returning to the subway and possibly to their reality. Should they not be able to overcome one of the challenges, the PCs can always go back and try their luck on an alternative path.

The arena (combat)

Along this path, small stones gradually rise from the ground and cluster together to form stone walls that flank the path. At its end, the characters find themselves in a circular arena. The walls are too high to climb.

By inspecting the arena, the PCs discover what at first glance seem to be footprints. As they approach, they realize that the arena has, in several places small craters, perfectly circular.

Just like before, behind them appears a gate that prevents them from turning back, and between it and the PCs, a gap opens in the ground. On the wall is a note that says, “In order for this gate to vanish, the beast you will have to nourish.” From the bottom of the ditch, in which two huge gleaming eyes are now visible, guttural sounds can be heard.

Before the PCs have time to react, an increasingly louder “Boing! Boing! Boing!” sound can be heard, indicating that something is approaching. From several sides, fluffy furballs, the size of small dogs, frenetically bounce toward the PCs with a famished look, exposing their row of small but menacing serrated teeth.

The PCs must defeat all the fuzzy flea-dogs in combat and use their corpses to feed the monster in the pit. When it has feasted on the last of the flea-dogs, it will promptly burp and spit a key, which will fall and land at the feet of the PCs. The gap then closes and the gate fades and dissipates, allowing them to go back through the same path from where they came.

The tower (social challenge)

Along this path, small slats of wood gradually begin to align along the landscape until they rise and connect, forming a wooden fence, too high to climb. Inside the enclosure, surrounded by the fence on all but one, is a small building with a tower.



Inside the building is a cultured-looking NPC, thoughtfully sitting at his desk (this may be a scientist, a wizard, etc., depending on the type of setting the GM wants to convey to the players). If the PCs ask him about the door or how they can return to their world, they will provide a copy of the key they had made for another group of people, who ordered such key, but never returned to pick it up. In return, the NPC will simply ask each of the PCs to tell them the best dream they ever had.

Suggestion: The GM may impose an additional condition for the GM Character to be willing to offer the key to the PCs, from a friendly conversation prior to proving they are good people, to answering a riddle (below) or even a direct exchange for an article that one of them has in their possession.

In the center of the maze, there is a fountain with some coins and a key. The PCs must be able to reach the center of the maze and then find the exit again.

The speed of the game can be accelerated (by an hourglass) or slowed down (by replacing the key in the fountain with a stack of keys that requires you to find a specific one) as needed.

Suggestion: If the PCs have powers that invalidate the maze challenge (flying, crossing walls, etc.), the GM may choose to introduce extra complications such as new enemies or environmental challenges (wind gusts, the maze hedges being mimics, etc.).

If the PCs fail to meet any additional challenges proposed by the GM (e.g.: a time limit), there is simply no key in the center of the maze or it crumbles to sand and disappears as it is removed from inside its limits.

This forces the PCs to have to go back and follow a different path to try to find another key.

3RD ACT – THE FINAL CHALLENGE

Upon returning to the subway entrance, the PCs are confronted with lookalikes of their own, which stand between them and the gate, preventing them from reaching the lock.

If the PCs have obtained the key through the NPC, their doubles claim to be the people who originally ordered the key, claiming that it belongs to them and requiring the PCs to return it to its rightful owner.

The lookalikes become progressively more hostile as the PCs approach the gate. If one of the PCs is only 30 feet from the entrance, the respective double attacks them, followed by the others, and the fight begins.

If one of the NPCs has followed the PCs from the subway, they must be the first to die. This is particularly important if it is the first death in the adventure so that the PCs can see that the NPC's body disappears after his death.

This adventure **In the Darkness** ends either when the PCs are able to use the key to open the lock and return to their reality or when all the PCs die and wake up from the dream.

Riddles:

Q: “The more I grow, the less one can see. Who am I?” – A: the darkness

Q: “I can run around entire fields, never even moving a step. Who am I?” – A: the fence

The labyrinth (puzzle)

Along this path, small plants gradually begin to align along the passage until they begin to rise and intertwine into hedges that lead into a maze. The hedge is too tall to climb.