

A Single Step

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A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

Lao-Tzu

Introduction

Concept

A Single Step is about resistance, endurance and hope.

It's a pervasive game which can be played by people separated by hundreds of miles.

You are a resistance group, working together against a totalitarian regime. You care about each other even though all you know about who the other people are comes from code names, whispered conversations through secure lines and scrawled messages that somehow make their way to you.

The game revolves around missions - going to a location, having a conversation, posting a letter. The group leader - who acts as the GM- will set missions based on personal goals which are communicated privately at the start of the larp (more about this in Getting Set Up) - whether that is to try to walk 5 minutes down the road once a day, make a phone call once a week or cycle 10 miles every Saturday.

The real world aim of the larp is to keep us connected in a very difficult time.

What This Larp Is

Co-creative: The mission leader sets missions and sketches out the shape of the general story but a lot of the narrative is decided by players - e.g. how the mission went or what the scene

they played means for their relationship to each other.

Transparent: Characters know nothing, players know everything. Maybe Raven is actually Nova's 20 year old daughter. The characters don't know, but the players can plan the reveal. The players should also know how long the larp will last, and what will happen at the end.

Mutual support: The missions are about trying to enjoy different activities at a time that it may be hard to summon the energy to go out, or stay in contact with people. The players should understand and support each other.

What This Larp Is Not

The larp is not intended to be a way to gamify exercise or social interaction. A player might not have the energy or motivation to complete their mission. That's fine - they can instead reply with a different narrative (see Play Example).

Safety

There should be a channel for communication off - game, both for calibration and safety discussions.

You should obey both laws and guidelines when it comes to exercising or going to certain areas.

You may be set a mission that you shouldn't do - maybe the group leader is unaware of the guidelines in your country or has sent you to an area you

wouldn't feel safe going - that's fine. Let them know. Safety should always come before play.

Before starting the larp you should decide on the tone and list any topics you want to avoid in a shared google drive document. You should also set up an off game chat on a Facebook group, Discord channel or any other medium you feel comfortable with. After this you can begin character creation.

The Game Outline

This section is about the experience of the game both as a player and a facilitator. There are some things that players should know going in.

The game has a time limit (mutually decided). After the time limit you receive communication that your group has been tracked down and you have two days left before you will be identified. Depending on the game set up and the way the narrative has unfolded the characters may have different options including trying to run to the border, meeting with others to make a last stand or performing some action to either buy the group time, or assist the next rebels who will come after them. When the character's decide it's time they will make a last post, or send a last letter or make a last call explaining what they have chosen. Depending on the tone of the game more optimistic outcomes such as finding people willing to help them get to safety, or joining with others may be more likely for the players.

Set up

Setting Up - Practical

- Agree on a tone - are you going for dark with glimmers of hope, optimistic, high pressure, adventure?
- Privately message the group leader with thoughts on what you would like to achieve. Be as specific as you like (e.g I would like to leave my house for 10 mins everyday, and some sort of social contact twice a week; I would like to get out for a ten mile bike ride once a week and attempt some sort of social contact everyday.)
- Set up your lines or veils - lines are a list of things that shouldn't be in the game at all (e.g there should be no torture mentioned or in character backstories). Veils mean it can have occurred but can't be described explicitly (e.g. you were tortured but you aren't going to say any more than that about it.)
- Make sure that you have an off game way of contacting everyone - either to calibrate, so that you can suggest a plot hook or ask them to do something differently.
- Create a spreadsheet of contact details that each player wishes to share and make sure you all have each other as friends on the social networking platform that you're using.
- Make sure players understand that they can leave the game at any time.

Setting Up - World Building

Create your dystopia. The best way to do this is to have a conversation about what interests your group.

Some questions you could ask:

- Is it real world or do you want it closer to fantasy or sci-fi?
- How long ago did the regime take power?
- What happened?
- What's stopped most people fighting back?
- What has been lost due to the regime?
- What is their ideology?
- What are the rumours about them?

Setting Up - Character Creation

Everyone should play a single character apart from the group leader who may also play NPCs. The group leader's main character is an experienced and competent mission leader - the role is to GM the game using this character to set missions, send warnings, reveal secrets, interpret information and bring the game to an end by warning the characters that they're running out of time.

For the other players they can create their characters as people situated within the world. Some questions that might be helpful prompts are?

- What's your code name?
- What's your real name?
- What's your background?
- Why did you join the resistance?
- What keeps you fighting?
- What makes you want to give up?

- What are you most ashamed of / guilty about?
- What was your greatest achievement?
- What is your role in the group?
- Who are the important people in your day to day life?
- What secret are you keeping?

Post your character in the off game chat and explain what is common knowledge about you and what is more private.

Setting Up - Relationship Creation

You may have decided that the group formed at the same time - or there may be people who have been in it for longer than others. Decide how your character feels about each member of the group and describe a way you worked together on a mission in the past. Decide if you have any secrets either known by neither of the characters (e.g we're actually family, real life best friends, someone I dislike in real life) or known by one of you (x loves y, x thinks y has betrayed them etc.)

Play

The Larp

For the duration of the larp the group leader is the GM and crafts a story. This can be either reactive or preplotted but should take into account what players want out of the game and what secrets need to come out.

A possible starting point for the larp could be establishing secure communication - maybe beginning with one method e.g. text message and branching out to other forms of communication.

Another possible starting point could be looking for a member of your own or another resistance group and slowly letting a story unfold with the added narrative of the players - either they uncover something, or maybe the person they were looking for wasn't what they seem.

Maybe the characters know the end is coming and their aim is to leave something behind e.g coded directions to a safer place for the people who come after them.

Play Example

The group leader has given Nova a mission to go a mile away to nearby wood and photograph a specific area. The narrative justification is that it may prove to be part of a possible escape route and you want to document it for the future.

Nova uploads the photograph in the group set up for the purpose.

Nova: Mission completed. Something felt off though.

Sage: Off? What do you mean? Were you seen?

Nova: I don't think so. It just didn't seem like anyone had been that way for a long time. You can see how overgrown it is.

Group Leader: OK - I need volunteers to check out some of the other parts of the route. Be careful. It may be a trap.

Alternatively if the player is unable to complete the task.

Nova: I tried to get out, but I felt like I was being followed.

Jesse: Did you recognise anyone?

Nova: No, but I'm worried I'm being targeted.

Group Leader: OK, be careful and let us know if you see anyone else. Does anyone have high enough government clearance to look into this?

The End

The players know time is running out. They should play towards their group being discovered two days before the last day of the larp. At that point they need to decide what to do. Will they make a heroic last stand together in the hope of some small victory? Do they think they might actually win? Do they run away into an uncertain future or do they follow a trail that has been left for them to likely safety? Do they separate, or meet together in person for the first time? The group has two days of play around knowing that the end is coming and then each player makes a final post detailing them leaving their house for the last time, and describing where they're going and what they see in the distance.

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