

TITLE**The Kafka Trap****NO. OF PLAYERS**

5 players

DURATION

2 - 2,5 hours

TEASER

What is your greatest fear? Are you a parasite? What did you have for breakfast? And why did you just lie about that? How many legs do you have? Are you sure?

Come join us! No means yes. Yes means never. And you never know who you'll see in the mirror when you wake up tomorrow.

TAGS

#kafkaesque #oppression #bureaucracy #disempowerment #paranoia #

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EXPERIENCE AND LEARNING

The sociocultural educational role-playing game (EduLarp) “The Kafka Trap” introduces the dangers of excessive normalization and bureaucracy within socialistic oppressive societies.

The players will experience the dehumanizing aspects of systems that prioritize rules and collective ideals over individual human experience and rationality.

Characters will find themselves entrapped in societal norms following tedious procedures reflecting the struggles of individuals in any conformist society.

The story is inspired by the normalization period of the Czechoslovakian history which is broadly described by Franz Kafka in his books. The players will challenge their attitudes about the concepts of disempowerment and social norms imposed by political regimes.

Players can practice skills of persuasion and negotiation while engaging in stressful situations questioning their human nature.

STORYLINE

In the world we live in The Party controls everything, making life very difficult and scary for everyone. People are given random jobs and have to follow a lot of confusing and always changing rules. The Party has also changed history, so no one is sure what's really true anymore. This has made everyone afraid to say what they think.

You are part of a group of five people who show up to work one day, only to find out your position no longer exists. You find a note saying, "You have been terminated," which makes you feel very hopeless. Without a job your life has little purpose. What will the others say? But just when you think there's no way out of this tough situation, you find a ray of hope in a newspaper ad. It's for a job interview, but the ad is mysterious. It simply says, "Come for a job interview." So, that's where you are headed now.

PRODUCTION

...A note about Music/ sound:

There is not a dedicated soundtrack, though the different music and sounds should each help to cue the players as to the changes in environment/ stress. background sounds (ticking clock and distorted classical music were used as well as alarm clock/ chime sounds for the end of the sessions (consider using different alarms noises for each section).

Music 1 for uncomfortable situations

<https://youtu.be/0xVrbTzKdxU?si=QEPf5Fn8nx1KQ82d>

https://youtu.be/Qgsy8BEsLzg?si=w2qsgwyUF_UEXiuk

<https://youtu.be/iNpXCzaWW1s?si=XvWM5Uh4I3zFYOxP>

Music 2 for Stressful Tasks in interview

<https://youtu.be/gk6-daEMygo?si=NRbPhmh4VKNtvBFS>

Music 3 for transition to Trial

<https://youtu.be/CDWtH8eHeEU?si=REOGdesyUHR9Ufjv>

Music 4 for Cells

<https://youtu.be/BwzczcCnwDU?si=GHLb1HJljkwrfme>

Music 5 for Tension in Trial/ Climax

<https://youtu.be/kITIG5RMMybE?si=Gyud0FfY5gQGZAAQ>

https://youtu.be/99uf6cq6cyU?si=jOf03izSXF_UMXEU

Room preparation:

Desk, 5 chairs in front, 1 behind.

On the table are 5 pens and papers with the names of the characters, each positioned separately for each character in front of the chair.

Waste basket (without label showed towards the room)

5 “Jail cells” outlined with tape on the floor.

Props, Materials:**Job interview**

Desk/ Chairs/ Tape to mark “ Waiting rooms“, after round 3 they are called Cells”

Garbage Can labeled “Application Disposal”

Pen and Clipboard (with interview questions/ game instructions/ text)

5 pencils

6 Interview forms/ application papers (5 to be filled, 1 to be ripped)

Props for the tasks:

Each task is described in the scenario. If the tasks are changed by the facilitator they should follow the requirements to be confusing, ambiguous, pointless. Here are the props which are needed to perform the tasks from the scenario:

Timer or Hourglass

Box of matches

Cup of water, empty Glass

Tape or Rope

Some dice

Blindfold

Playing cards

Trial:

Creepy Mask, preferably no-face, white face

GAME SCENARIO AND THE MECHANICS

Briefing

The facilitator will be playing an NPC during the game. In case players need to speak out-of-game, they need to raise their hand. The game has a structural mechanics of acts where day and night change. The tape on the floor identifies a separated room.

General safety guidelines:

1. At any time anyone can leave the game without questions asked .
2. If something is mentioned which anyone does not want to play on, they should cross their arms on their chest, which is a signal to change the topic.

The facilitator reads the storyline. Players are being given their ID cards and name tags that they have to put on their chest. They have as much time as they need to read what is written in the passports and ask questions.

Act 1. The Interview:

Players are directed into the play-space (a room with a table), facilitator seated on one side of the table, 5 seats on the other.

The facilitator says:

“Are you here for the interview? Please, be seated.”

Pointing at each separately the facilitator will ask names and previous occupation.

It is possible to add “interview-like” questions such as:

Do you know how to type?

What is your parents occupation?

What is your success rate?

How many pages can you staple in a minute?

Players are given a job application (a form) and then asked a series of questions and given tasks with the belief that they are applying for a job.

The facilitator says:

Please complete each task or question to the best of your ability.

“I do not know” is not an acceptable answer

If you have any questions, please save them until we are concluded.

Do not fear, Do not lie, Do not steal”.

If the players start talking to each other, the facilitator should repeat this phrase: *If you have any questions, please save them until we are concluded.*

After 5 minutes or at least 3 people finished filling in the form, the facilitator says:

*Each of you, place your interview forms into this collection bin *presents/ passes around a garbage can labeled “Application Disposal” **

MUSIC 2 BEGINS: .

Each task is absurd and does not have any apparent effect on their progress or success. Anything that is not forbidden is allowed- The facilitator should be indifferent to the players' noting 'something' on their clipboard's paper.

If at any point the player refuses to perform a task, the facilitator should reply with "noted", and continue with the next task/ question. The first two tasks are performed separately for everyone to see, afterwards the rest are performed simultaneously.

The facilitator starts giving instructions:

*P1 *Uses egg timer* T., Hold your breath.*

P2 D., remove the matches from this box. Now put them back. How many matches are there in the box?

P3 P., Tie yourself to your chair. What is the most important sector of the economy? Which one should it be?

P4 Pour liquid from the vase into the cup. After pouring liquid from one container to another. W., "how many ML of liquid have you consumed today?"

P5 DICE: C., please roll the dice. Thank you. Please continue.

**observes for some time* What is the current total that you have rolled? Thank you. Please continue.*

P2: D. put on this blindfold. Tear a piece of paper into 7 distinct shapes. Blindfolded, assemble these pieces back together.

P3: P., build a tower from these cards.

P1: T., use the egg timer. Remove the matches from this box, put them back. Is war inevitable?

P4: W., measure the distance from your left elbow to your right index finger (Provide no measuring device). Be precise.

*P2: D., *presents or pours out a pouch of colored beads* Sort these by size, scent, shape, and color, in that order.*

P3 and P1: P. and T., without speaking, do a synchronized dance together.

P5 C., What is the current sum you have reached? You may stop. Confess and repent by standing on one foot singing the national anthem.

All players: To the best of your mnemonic ability, remember the exact sequence of images which were on your copy of the application form

Your progress is noted. Unfortunately, none of you has yet been eliminated. Wait here.

Act 2. Trial Music 3 starts

The facilitator (wearing a mask) appears with “A LIST” (the purpose of A list is to give the players ideas about possible crimes even though they didn’t commit any).

The facilitator announces:

There will be a trial. The guilty person needs to be found. You have 5 minutes.

At this moment the players do not know what “crimes” they might have committed. They have to assume.

Reeducation mechanics

For the whole time of the trial (all four rounds) there is a possibility for players to be caught doing something wrong and get reeducated. There is no particular list of things that are wrong so it is up to the facilitator to decide what are the things that are punishable. If facilitator decides to punish someone he will tell the player that he/she did something wrong and would take him/her around the corner for the reeducation, which means that the facilitator would give the player a reeducation card where it would be explained what rules the player would have to follow till the end of the round. There are two different punishments for the first and the second offense, reeducation and brainwashing.

1st round

Parasite report

2nd round

Negative reports

3rd round

Positive reports

4th round

Final reports

Each round lasts around 10 minutes with the first round being slightly short since the players don't have their life stories yet. And the last round can last up to 15 minutes.

Round 1. Music 1 starts.

After the first round of the incriminations, everybody has to submit the voting paper and report (or not report) somebody. **The facilitator should read out loud how wrote who. The accused person (reported the most times) is asked:**

“What crimes did you commit?”

1. If they admit their guilt

“Which crime are you confessing to?”

2. The person replies that they didn't commit any crime and are falsely accused - no confession.

“Nobody is confessing to the crime, go to your waiting rooms and think about the things you have done in your past.”

3. The person replies that they committed the crime - confession.

“Noted. This is not the crime. Why are you lying? Go to your waiting rooms.”

4. If there is no one person with max votes.

“Nobody is accused of the crime, go to your waiting rooms and think about the things you have done in your past.”

Players are sent to the “cells” and they find documents - their first memory. Note: the facilitator can either prepare the first memory in advance or give them out to the players when they are at the cells.

Round 2. Music 4 starts.

The facilitator comes to the “cells” and announces that the players can exit the “waiting rooms” and there is free time to stretch their legs. After the facilitator leaves the room to give some freedom for the players to talk (5 minutes).

The facilitator announces:

There will be a trial. The guilty person needs to be found. You have 10 minutes.

After the second round of the incriminations, everybody has to submit the voting paper and report (or not report) somebody. **The facilitator should read out loud how wrote who. The accused person (reported the most times) is asked:**

“What crimes did you commit?”

1. If they admit their guilt

“Which crime are you confessing to?”

2. The person replies that they didn't commit any crime and are falsely accused - no confession.

“Nobody is confessing to the crime, go to your waiting rooms and think about the things you have done in your past.”

3. The person replies that they committed the crime - confession.

“Noted. This is not the crime. Why are you lying? Go to your waiting rooms.”

4. If there is no one person with max votes.

“Nobody is accused of the crime, go to your waiting rooms and think about the things you have done in your past.”

Players are sent to the “cells” and they find documents - their second memory. Note: the facilitator can either prepare the second memory in advance or give them out to the players when they are at the cells.

Round 3. Music 3 starts

The facilitator comes to the “cells” and announces that the players can exit the “waiting rooms” and there is free time to stretch their legs. After the facilitator leaves the room to give some freedom for the players to talk (5 minutes).

The facilitator announces:

There will be a trial. The guilty person needs to be found. The Party wants to know who has the purest heart. Fill in your report. You have 10 minutes.

After the third round of the incriminations, everybody has to submit the voting paper and report (or not report) somebody. **The facilitator should read out loud how wrote who. The accused person (the one with least amount of positive votes) is asked:**

“What crimes did you commit?”

5. If they admit their guilt

“Which crime are you confessing to?”

6. The person replies that they didn't commit any crime and are falsely accused - no confession.

“Nobody is confessing to the crime, go to your cells and think about the things you have done in your past.”

7. The person replies that they committed the crime - confession.

“Noted. This is not the crime. Why are you lying? Go to your cells.”

8. If there is no one person with max votes.

“Nobody is accused of the crime, go to your cells and think about the things you have done in your past.”

Round 4. Music 5 starts

The facilitator comes to the “cells” and announces that the players can exit the “waiting rooms” and there is free time to stretch their legs. After the facilitator leaves the room to give some freedom for the players to talk (5 minutes).

The facilitator announces that now there will be a final trial. The guilty person needs to be found. Nobody is leaving the room before the confession is made.

Possible Final Endings:

- **ENDING 1:** The players do not incriminate anyone.

The facilitator leaves and announces: I have bad news for you. Nobody got the job. You may leave.

Epilogue 1: *The players did not cooperate with the state, and were punished brutally. Depending on the extent of commitment they have shown to the government in the past, they will either immediately be assigned to brutal work in a labor camp or put through painful 're-education' programs before being deemed harmless enough to reenter society. With their personal suffering comes a sign of light, as the state does not manage to fully control the people, dangerous ideas of dissidence spread through the nation. Ideas of hope, justice, and eventually, ideas of freedom.*

- **ENDING 2:** The players accuse one person, Character X, and he confesses.

The facilitator leaves with the person, Character X, pulls them aside and tells them: *This has been a job interview, and we are very impressed with the results of the group. Please put this mask on, come back in the mask and announce: Congratulations, we all got the job!*

Epilogue 2 Text: *Character X is allowed to live and work as an informant for the state, though forever must be careful of their words and actions. The state is always watching. The remaining 4 characters each work with enthusiasm in their new roles, cooperating closely with the state, informing on their colleagues, neighbors, friends and families with the honest belief that they are helping society. The government continues to rule to this very day with no sign of weakness, ever-strengthening its grip over the nation. The electricity in the hospital never did get fixed properly.*

- **ENDING 3:** The players accuse one person, Character X, and he/ she does not confess.

The facilitator leaves with the person. Facilitator comes back and announces: *Congratulations, you all got the job.*

Epilogue 3 Text: *No one ever saw Character X again. The other 4 characters each worked in their new roles, cooperating closely with the state, informing on their colleagues, neighbors, friends and families. Though they never had confidence that they were on the 'inside' of the system, always looking over their own shoulders expecting others to be spying on them. The state is strong, and has no sign of ending its rule over the people, though whispers of dissidents have never fully been eliminated.*

- **ENDING 4:** All players confess.

The facilitator leaves, then comes back and announces: *Congratulations, you all got the job.*

Epilogue 4 Text: *The 5 characters each worked with enthusiasm in their new roles, cooperating closely with the state, informing on their colleagues, neighbors, friends and families. The government continues to rule to this very day with no sign of weakness, ever-strengthening its grip over the nation. The electricity in the hospital never did get fixed properly.*

End of Game REFLECTION and LEARNING

**How did it feel to navigate a system where rules were ambiguous or seemingly pointless?
Can you think of any real-life situations where individuals face similar challenges?**

How does the game illustrate the pressures to conform or betray others for survival? Where do we see similar dynamics in today's workplaces, governments, or social structures?

**What emotions did you experience during moments of accusation, trial, or "reeducation"?
How do these feelings compare to those faced by individuals in authoritarian or overly bureaucratic systems?**

Did you make decisions in the game that conflicted with your personal values? How does this relate to real-life dilemmas faced by individuals working within oppressive systems?

**What does the game teach us about the ways oppressive systems maintain control by disempowering individuals? Can you draw parallels to historical or contemporary regimes?
What sorts of circumstances or conditions do you think create governments like this?**

Were there moments when you felt powerless? How does this compare to the experiences of marginalized groups in the real world?

Were there moments in the game where collective action could have changed the outcome?

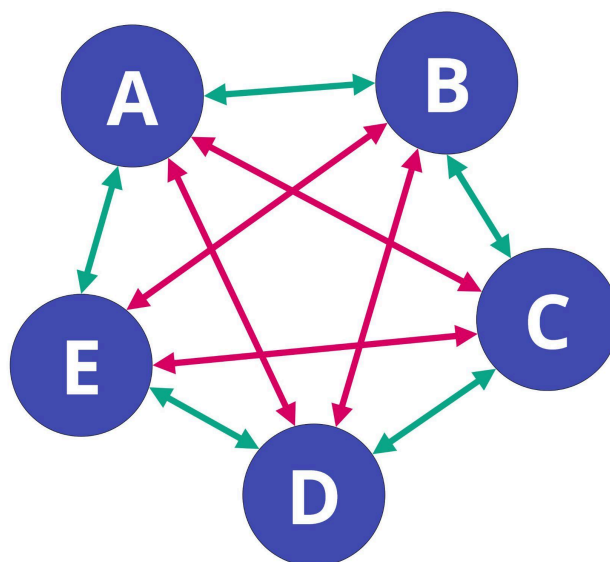
RELATIONS

Fill the chart, based on the relation pentagram, using a few basic words only.

This chart is useful for the game designers to make sure that there is balance between the characters and for the game facilitators to read it during the game and moderate the course of action.

The relations should be incorporated into the Printable Character Cards, there they should be wrapped in more text and stories.

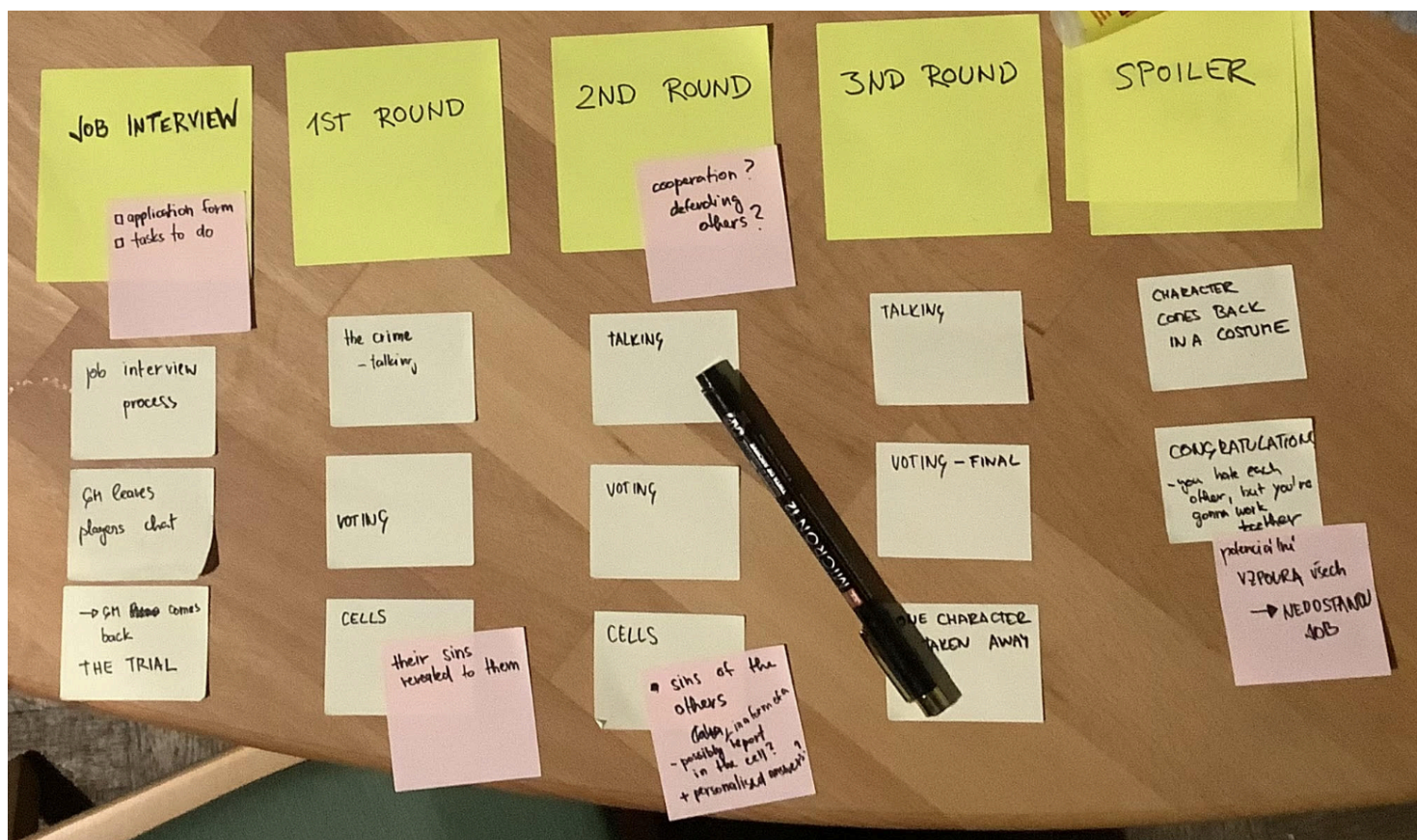
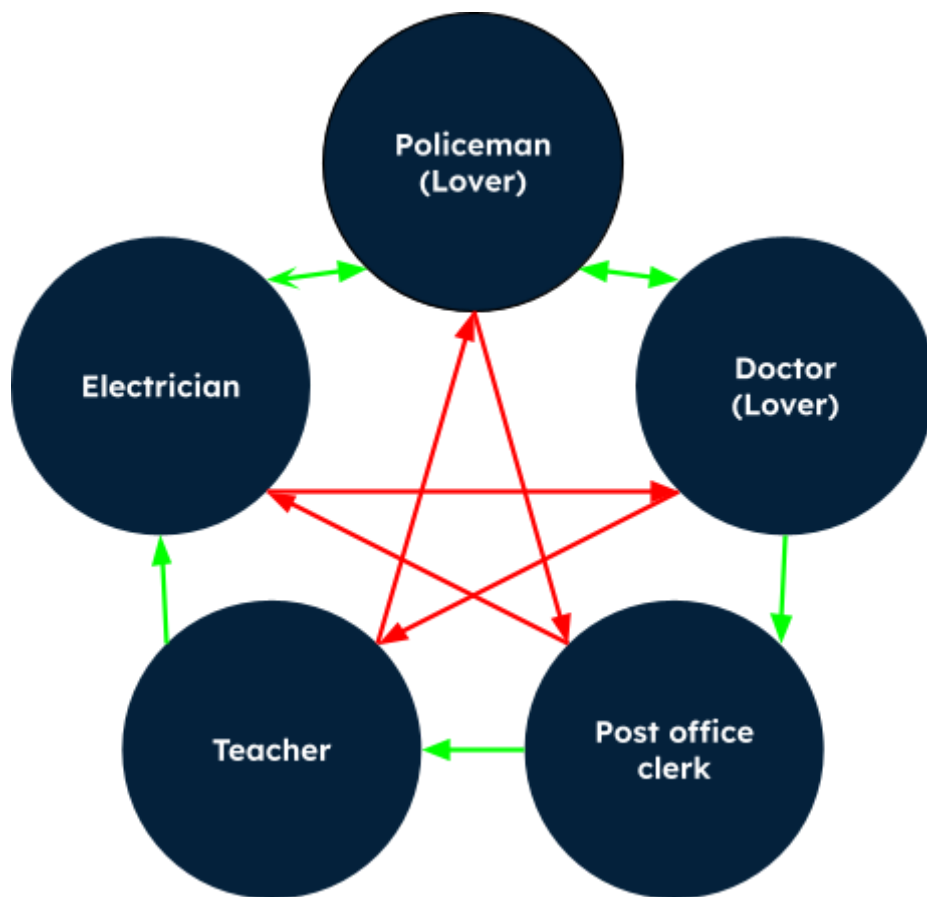
MAIN CHARACTERS - relations between them are balanced according to the pentagram chart



FREELANCER CHARACTERS - outside of the pentagram of relations

| — | Doctor Lover | Policeman Lover | Electrician | Teacher | Post office clerk |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| Doctor Lover | — | Lover | | Euthanized his mother | Prescribed medicine |
| Policeman Lover | Lover | — | | | Sent his wife to jail |
| Electrician accident | Is bad a electrician for hospital | Best friend from school | — | Knows him | |
| Teacher hit with car | | Killed a dog with car | Was a good, supportive teacher BUT betrayed him | — | |
| Post office clerk fired | Read their letters | Read their letters | Lied about a mistake he'd made and as a result, the electrician's dissident father was fired. | Helped him get document for student (policeman) | — |

| F | G | H | outside of the pentagram of relations |
|--------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| positive relations | | | negative relations |



Characters

Doctor/Lover

Character sheet

- has a lover, never seen them, they have been in correspondence (they have nicknames and a password/keyword/phrase to recognize each other). The lover has not explained why they can't meet, but they are *certain* they will see each other soon.
- has a vague thought about helping a patient "too much" once.
- their job is complicated by constant power failures at the hospital (the electrician's fault)

Memories

- provided euthanasia for an old dying woman once
- gave under the counter painkillers to the post office clerk - it can also be a crime in this society

Cell report

- learns that the electrician caused the power failures.

Electrician

Character sheet

- Couldn't study because of family background - almost obtained a permit at one point, but things didn't work out. Became an electrician instead.
- recognizes his best friend from school, the policeman.
- Also recognizes the teacher. They were their favorite teacher, the only person who supported them during his difficult childhood.

Memories

- thinks about not doing their job well, which causes the occasional electricity failure at the hospital where they work..
- Remembers not being able to study due to family history

Cell report

- Finds out that the teacher gave the policeman more points, so the policeman was able to study and the electrician wasn't.

Policeman/Lover

Character sheet

- Has a lover but is not able to meet them because members of the secret police are not allowed to be in relationships. Writes letters secretly, they have a phrase to recognize each other.
- They recognize their best friend from school, the electrician.

Memories

- remembers snitching on the post office clerk's spouse. They pretended to be their neighbor and reported their anti-government talks.
- did not send somebody to jail out of compassion

Cell report

- learns the teacher ran over his faithful dog

Teacher

Character sheet

- Policeman and electrician are vaguely familiar. Careless drinker and driver.
- Their mother died in hospital.

Memories

- Remembers running over the dog. They didn't stop to see what had happened, learned about it later, only thinks (hopes?) it was an animal and not a person.
- Also remembers that the policeman is a student he helped get a permit to study uni at the expense of another student. They believed at the time that the policeman had a better chance to succeed in the future due to family history

Cell report

- learns the doctor provided euthanasia to their mother

Post office clerk

Character sheet

- Older person, health problems
- Their spouse was arrested for undisclosed reasons
- Enjoys reading love letters and remembers a particularly juicy set where there was a particular phrase by which the lovers recognized each other.

Memories

- Remembers that a long time ago, they accused a colleague (the electrician's father) of a mistake they had made and this colleague got fired as a result.
- Recognizes the doctor - they helped them to get medicine they needed for their chronic illness under the counter

Cell report

- learns that the policeman was spying on them pretending to be their neighbor and they reported on their spouse, causing them to be sent to jail.