

**TITLE****The Kafka Trap****HEADLINE**

...

**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 #

**AUTHORS**

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## CONTACTS

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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.

## **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 15 minute session (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/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=GHLb1HJljkwrme>

Music 5 for Tension in Trial/ Climax

<https://youtu.be/kITIG5RMMybE?si=Gyud0FfY5gQGZAA>

[https://youtu.be/99uf6cq6cyU?si=jOf03izSXF\\_UMXEU](https://youtu.be/99uf6cq6cyU?si=jOf03izSXF_UMXEU)

## **Props, Materials:**

### **Job interview**

Desk/ Chairs/ Tape to mark “Cells”

Garbage Can labeled “Application Collections”

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

Timer or Hourglass

Interviewer’s mask

Box of matches

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

Cup of water, empty Glass

Tape or Rope

Some dice

Blindfold

## **Room preparation:**

Desk, 5 chairs in front, 1 behind, On it are 5 application papers, pens, 2 cups with water, waste basket (without label showed towards the room)

5 “Jail cells” outlined Tape outlined on floor.

## **Briefing**

The GM is greeting the players and reading them the storyline. Players are being given their passports and ID cards 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. Explain how players can ask questions that are outside of the game during the game.

For the newbies it is good to explain the concept of larp beforehand (improvisation, playing as characters). It is better to say as little as possible about the setting and the gameplay itself.

### **Act 1. The Interview:**

Players will be directed into the play-space (probably a room with a table), GM seated on one side of the table, 5 seats on the other.

Players will be first 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. Each task is absurd and does not have any apparent effect on their progress or success.

Anything that is not forbidden is allowed- The game master 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 game master should reply with "noted", and continue with the next task/ question.

The GM will say:

*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".*

Each of you, place your interview forms into this collection bin \*presents/ passes around a garbage can labeled "Applications" \* **MUSIC 2 BEGINS:** .

*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., stack the torn pieces of paper (from the player who tore the paper) into a tower.*

*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., your application form was filled incorrectly. Fill in the second provided application form.*

*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.*

*P2: D., submit your refilled form into the application acceptance receptacle. Recite the newest version of our glorious national anthem.*

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

*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**

The GM (wearing a mask) appears with "A LIST". The GM announces that now there will be a trial. The guilty person needs to be found. You have 15 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 GM to decide what are the things that are punishable. If GM 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 GM would give the player a reeducation paper where it would be explained and where would be a punishment that the player would have to follow till the end of the round. There are two different punishments for the first and the second offense.

#### **1st round**

-

#### **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.

#### Round 1.

After the first round of the incriminations, everybody has to submit the voting paper and report (or not report) somebody. The accused person (reported the most times) is asked what crimes he committed and if he admits his guilt.

GM: "Which crime are you confessing to?"

1. The person replies that he didn't commit any crime and he is falsely accused - no confession.

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

2. The person replies that he committed the crime - confession.

GM: "Noted. This is not the crime. Why are you lying? Go to your cells."

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

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

Players are sent to the "cells" and they find documents in their personal files - part of their memory

#### Round 2.

The GM announces that now there will be a trial. The guilty person needs to be found.

After the second round of the incriminations the accused person **is asked what crimes he committed and if he admits his guilt.**

GM: "Which crime are you confessing to?"

1. The person replies that he didn't commit any crime and he is falsely accused - no confession.

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

2. The person replies that he committed the crime - confession.

GM: "Noted. This is not the crime. Why are you lying?. Go to your cells."



3. If there is more than one person with the same amount of vote:

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

Players are sent to the "cells" and they found more documents to their personal files - second part of their memories

### Round 3.

The GM announces that now there will be a trial. The guilty person needs to be found.

After the third round of the incriminations the accused person (the one with least amount of positive votes) **is asked what crimes he committed and if he admits his guilt.**

GM: "Which crime are you confessing to?"

4. The person replies that he didn't commit any crime and he is falsely accused - no confession.

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

5. The person replies that he committed the crime - confession.

GM: "Noted. This is not the crime. Why are you lying?. Go to your cells."

6. If there is more than one person with the same amount of vote:

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

Players are sent to the "cells" and they found more documents to their personal files - reports about other people.

### Round 4.

The GM 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 GM 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 GM 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 uniform on, open this letter, and read it aloud to the rest of the group.*

The person comes back in the uniform and announces: *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 GM leaves with the person. GM 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 GM 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**

What happened?

What did you experience? How did it make you feel?

What could have done differently?

What did you learn?

How the reality of the game relate to the real world? What period(s) of history was the game inspired by? What countries were influenced by the normalization and oppression of the system?

Are there any countries in the world now where citizens experience similar problems? Have you ever been there? Do you know anyone who lives in these countries?

What sorts of circumstances or conditions do you think create governments like this?

In real life what can be examples of re-education cards? Have you ever received any?

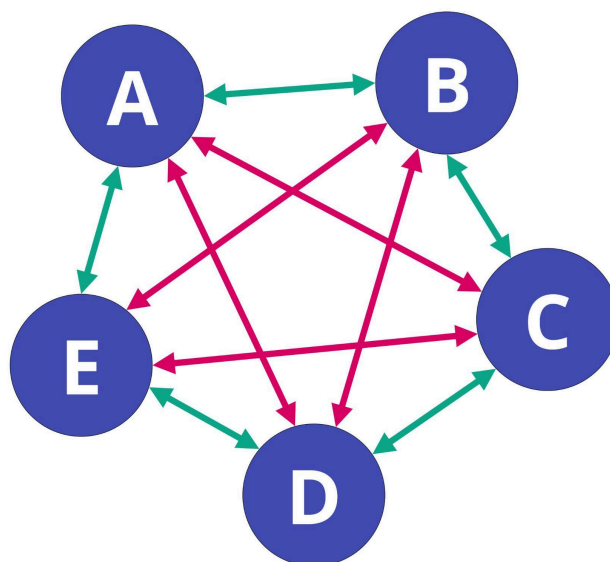
## RELATIONS

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.

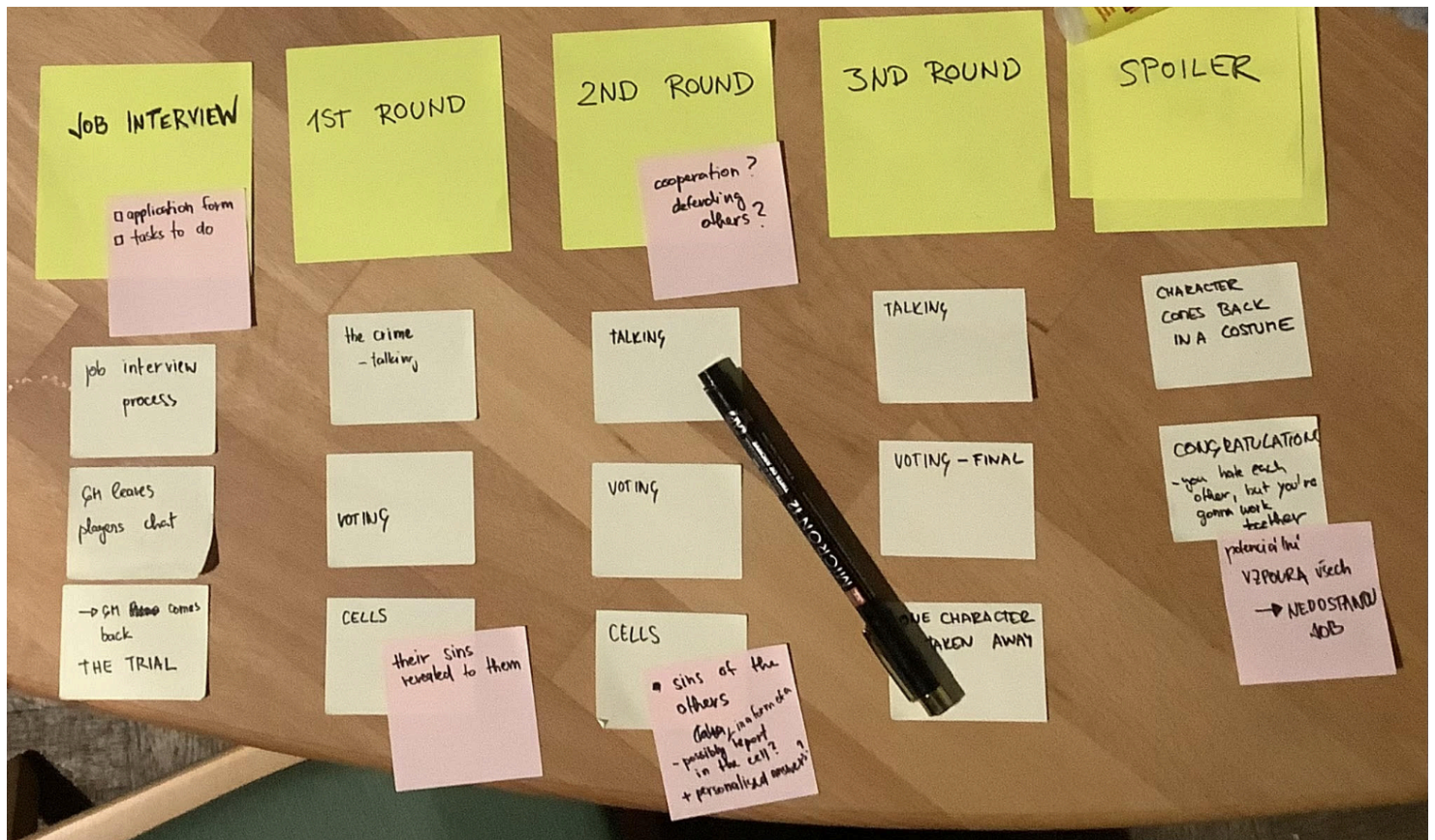
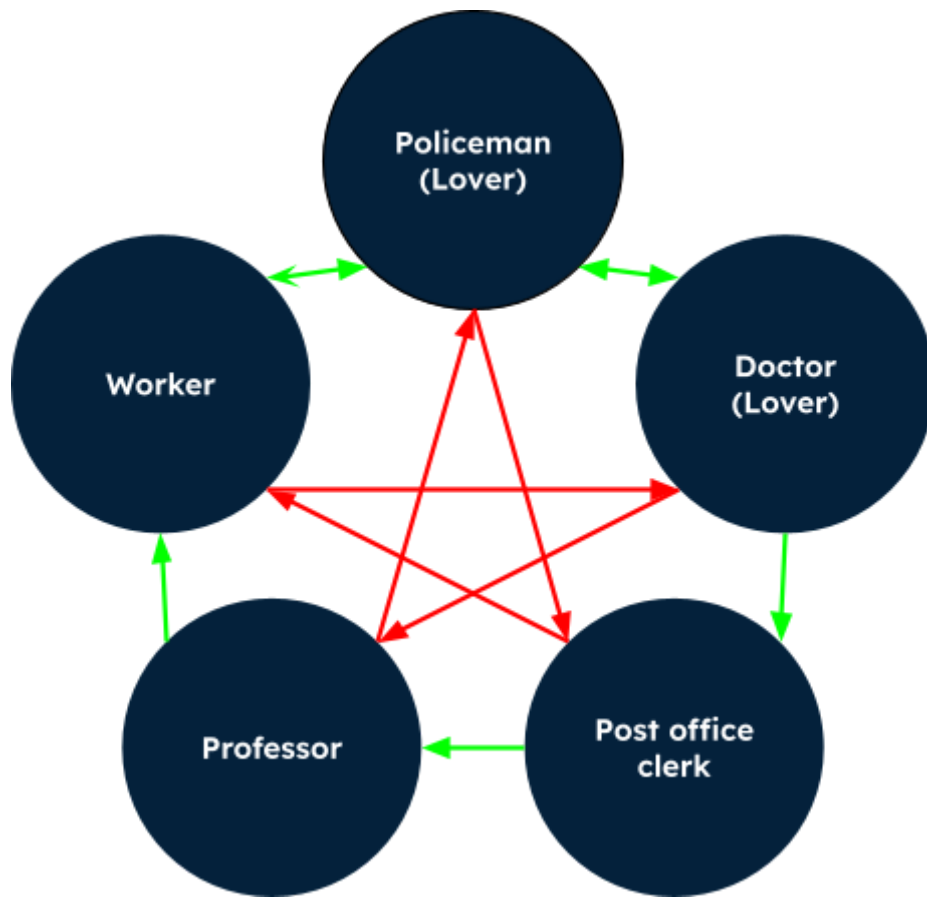
MAIN CHARACTERS - relations between them are balanced according to the pentagram chart



FREELANCER CHARACTERS - outside of the pentagram of relations

—	Doctor Lover	Policeman Lover	Worker	Professor	Post office worker
Doctor Lover	—	Lover		Euthanized his mother	Prescribed medicine
Policeman Lover	Lover	—			Sent his wife to jail
Worker accident	Is bad electrician for hospital	Best friend from school	—	Knows him	
Professor hit with car		Killed a dog with car	Was a good, supportive teacher BUT betrayed him	—	
Post office worker fired	Read their letters	Read their letters	Lied about a mistake he'd made and as a result, the worker'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 him, they have been in correspondence (they have nicknames and a password/keyword/phrase to recognize each other). Her lover has not explained why she can't meet him, but he is \*certain\* they will see each other soon.
- She has a vague thought about helping a patient "too much" once.
- Her job is complicated by constant power failures at the hospital (the worker's fault)

### After Round 1 (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

### After Round 2 (report)

- She learns that the worker caused the power failures.

## Worker

### 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.
- He recognizes his best friend from school, the policeman.
- Also recognizes the teacher. He was his favorite teacher, the only person who supported him during his difficult childhood.

### After Round 1 (memories)

- He thinks about not doing his job well, which causes the occasional electricity failure at the hospital where he works..
- Remembers not being able to study due to family history

### After Round 2 (report)

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

## **Policeman/Lover**

### **Character sheet**

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

### **After Round 1 (memories)**

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

### **After Round 2 (report)**

- He learns the teacher ran over his faithful dog

## **Teacher**

### **Character sheet**

- Policeman and worker maaaaaaybe vaguely familiar. Careless drinker and driver.
- His mother died in hospital.

### **After Round 1 (memories)**

- Remembers running over the dog. He 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. He believed at the time that the policeman had a better chance to succeed in the future due to family history

### **After Round 2 (report)**

- He learns the doctor provided euthanasia to his mother

## **Office clerk**

### **Character sheet**

- Older person, health problems
- His 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.

### **After Round 1 (memories)**

- Remembers that a long time ago, he accused his colleague (the worker's father) of a mistake he had made and this colleague got fired as a result.
- Recognizes the doctor - she helped him get medicine he needs for his chronic illness under the counter

### **After Round 2 (report)**

- He learns the policeman was spying on him pretending to be his neighbor and he reported on his wife, causing her to be sent to jail.

You have made some mistakes, that's for sure. You were a coward and did not admit your mistake so another person was fired instead of you. A sad man who was once a professor and couldn't stay at university for ideological reasons. Could this be your crime?

Or is it maybe connected to your condition? You got the medicine despite the lack of drugs that year you were not supposed to. The young doctor, D., gave it to you - now you remember her!