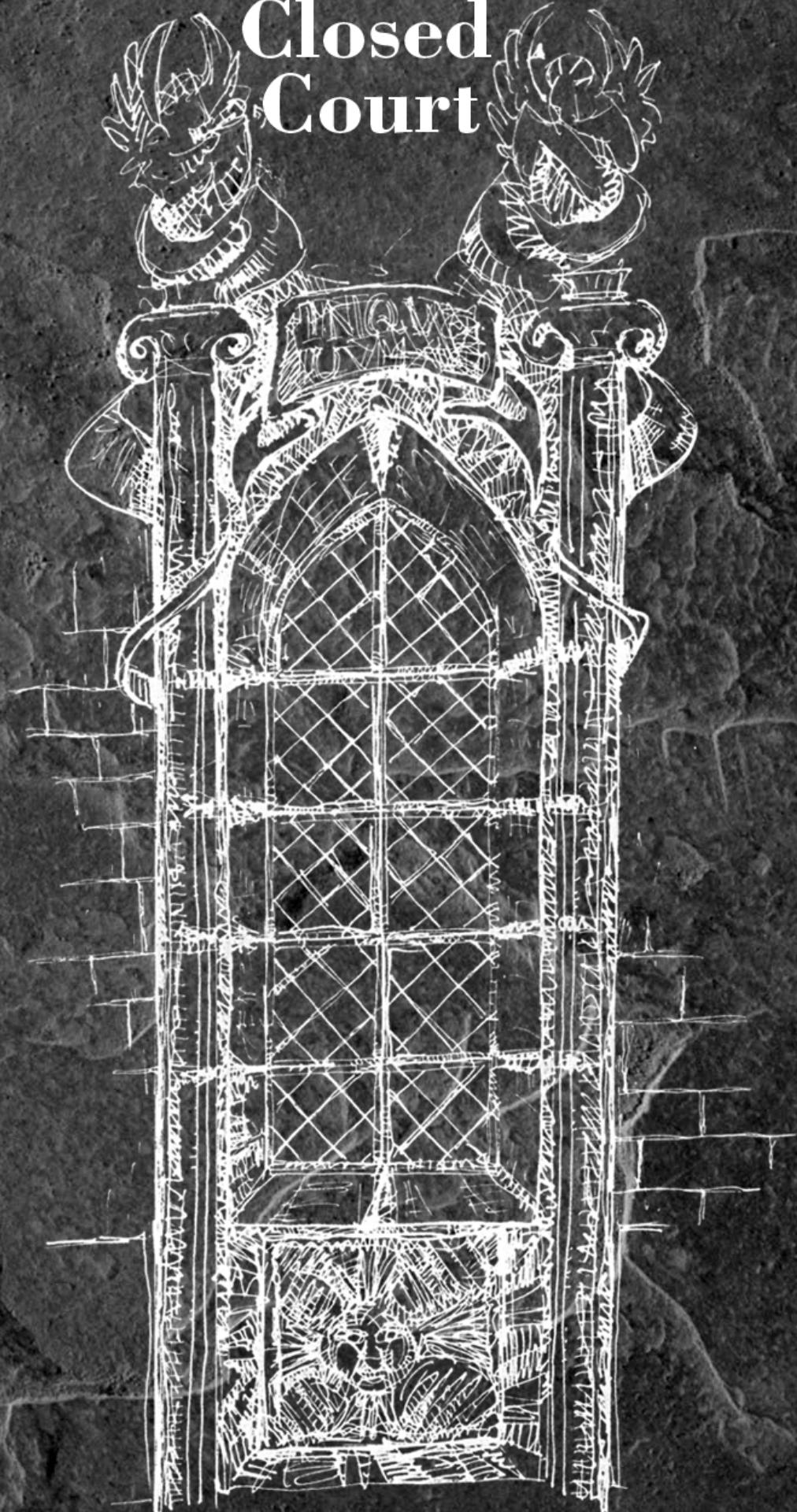


Closed Court



Laaste Døre by Thomas Munkholt
20th Anniversary English Edition
1994-2014

Closed Court

Laaste Døre – 20th Anniversary English Edition

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Closed Court 20th Anniversary English Edition

Written, illustrated and layouted by Thomas Munkholt
Laaste Døre premiered at Fastaval 1994 – it won an Otto Award for Best Handouts and came in third for the Audience Favourite Award

Closed Court is translated from Danish by the author with thanks to Per Fischer for comments

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Thanks to Sanne, Anne, Jesper, Kristian and Rasmus for test and critique (the original play-testing group).

Also a big thank you to Jacob Bondesen and others for keeping the scenario alive, as well as those who suggested that *Laaste Døre/Closed Court* had a place in the history of the Danish tradition of written scenarios.

TEASER TEXT

In the old part of town stands a foreboding brownstone building, looking like a monument founded on authority and discipline. This is my Department. And yours.

Above the enormous doors something is written in Latin about loyalty to the State – I am sure you know it by heart. You should. Crossing the wet cobbles and going up the wide stairs towards the doors and its oath of allegiance you get the sense that the building is leaning in on you, and the Classical reliefs above the leaded windows are fixing their accusing glare.

Grab the bronze handle, pause for a brief moment and indulge the instinct to look over your shoulder – knowing full well that you are being watched – and gaze up at the Palace. But why so self-aware? A guilty conscience, perhaps? Maybe even something to hide?

Worry not. Please, step inside. Tonight, I shall hear your confession. There shall be an inquiry in the service of truth and State. No one is without blame. Step inside, meet the others – they are waiting. Set aside your fears, come meet your destiny and let me lock these doors behind you ...



Foreword

Closed Court (Laaste Døre) was originally written for Fastaval 1994. It has been called the original “intrigue scenario”. Fastaval 94 also saw the premiere of Lars ‘Kaos’ Andresen’s *Isabelle*, and although two very different scenarios, they share some common ground in defining their characters through personal, opposed motivations. Perhaps this is no coincidence as Lars and I lived together in a flat-share in Århus at the time – a lot of Fastaval planning and a lot of scenarios came to be in that old apartment in those years.

Obvious story influences at the time were a trip to Prague in the spring of 1990, as well as Steven Soderbergh’s *Kafka*. I also saw *The Trial* with Anthony Perkins around this time. I wasn’t particularly knowledgeable about the world of Josef K, but I felt I got the gist of it. It was never meant to be a commentary on anything literary or political anyway, it was just a cool setting. I stand by that shallow view.

Having conflict between all the player characters was the central, motivating idea, but reading it today I could clearly have gone a lot farther, losing both the Game Master and the lipservice Storyteller system. The rules definitely feel tacked on – now even more so than was the case in 1994. They don’t add anything, other than give the characters a common format, but were included to give those who were unfamiliar with playing without a system something to resort to. *Vincenzo di Monfortes haevn* had done away with the Game Master a few months earlier, so I was aware of the concept, but unfortunately didn’t feel confident enough to carry it through. I remember worrying about who would be the arbitrator in case of escalation, as well as the opposite case: what if the players just sat and stared at each other?

The “handouts” were considered a pretty big deal at the time (the scenario won the Otto Award for Best Handouts). Not a whole lot of thought or effort went into it, to be honest. It was simply a way for the Storyteller to influence events, which could otherwise be a challenge in a “closed room” setup. But it did lead to a

great scene when one player ate the Telex-strip as it came out of the Machine.

This translation has been underway since December 2006 when I made a very rough first version. At the time there was some talk of preserving Danish role-playing history and making it available to the international community at large, which necessitated English translations. But then I travelled abroad with my family for a year and started working freelance, and through this period I drifted somewhat away from the roleplaying milieu. Last year I picked it up again, aiming for the 20th anniversary – and missed, but here it is.

I have stayed as true to the original as possible and tried to recreate the layout faithfully. I have corrected a few minor mistakes, what I would simply call proofing, and I had a terribly flowery prose at the time which I have toned down somewhat, but no major revisions. It is basically the same text, structure and layout. It was very tempting to include footnotes or a clarifying appendix, but I think it makes better sense to leave the scenario as untouched as possible, retaining its value as a historical document – a snapshot of the Danish scenario-writing tradition springing from Fastaval.

Unfortunately, the original illustrations are long gone, so despite a brush-up in Photoshop some resolution is lost. (The original layout was done by Scotch taping drawings into a Word document and throwing it directly into a photocopier).

Roleplaying scenarios have come a long way since *Closed Court*, making this work quite dated in many ways. And sure, it is, but there is also something surprisingly confident and accomplished about it that I am quite proud of. I hope you will enjoy it, or at least learn something about where our shared tradition came from.

Thomas Munkholt
Copenhagen, February 2015

Introduction

This scenario has its genesis a few years back when I hatched the idea of doing a psychological drama. At that time it was still a very broad idea – I could imagine several dramatic setups in which the characters did not form a coherent party working in a concerted effort towards a common goal, but rather had individual motivations and were forced together by circumstance.

The conflict in *Closed Court* revolves around guilt and blame. The characters are human and as such each have their own cross to bear. But some manipulative power turns their sense of guilt against them. The basic premise is that you will lash out at someone else in order deflect blame – thus creating a scapegoat. This is the principle of this roleplaying fiction and the game in which the characters are caught up.

The tone of the scenario follows naturally from this idea: paranoia and alienation are the predominant states of mind in the Old City as well as in this scenario. It also provides an interesting conflict regarding personal integrity versus loyalty towards the State. At first it may seem like an easy choice: our natural inclination is to denounce the corrupt system and fight for personal freedom and the uniqueness of our identities. But in closed court, when it becomes a question of you or him, things immediately become more ambiguous.

So, to the characters the story revolves around an Inquiry into their innocence in the eyes of the State, but what is actually at stake are their own souls. Will they make a sacrifice to become fulfilled human beings and free themselves from their anonymous roles in an oppressive society, or will they choose a more tangible, albeit short-term freedom that comes from pointing the finger at someone else?

What is likely to happen is that the characters begin to rise above their public masque as Procurator, Secretary etc., and recognise each other as human beings. The paradox is that this is only possible while they remain in the isolated world of the Department, but outside the doors awaits the old society, and the State

will not be satisfied with a humane solution – it needs to appoint guilt. The best victory attainable is not making one of their party break down and declare himself guilty, but rather clinging to one's own humanity – even if that means ending their lives in the offices as a bomb goes off.

It is not my intention to impress my own preconceived notions upon the characters – the players must assume this responsibility. This does tend to make the scenario somewhat unpredictable, but on the other hand it allows for the emotional drama to play out to its fullest.



SYNOPSIS

Six people are gathered in an office in the Department (the very essence of credibility, loyalty and tradition). They are the Gendarme, the Dissident, the Commissar, the Procurator, the Secretary and the Watchman. The Commissar carries a letter. It states that a Document of great importance to the State has disappeared from the Department. And no one may leave until a guilty party has been found.

The only thing wrong with this equation is that none of those present are guilty! At least of this particular crime.

Nevertheless, accusations and revelations abound. Everybody has something to hide, and even if it is not all of relevance to the case it comes to light once you start probing ... And seeing as no one has any interest in ending up a scapegoat they will attempt to lash out at others to shield themselves.

During the Inquiry something like clues appear, but this lost Document actually isn't all that important. The crux of the matter is that they are all pawns in an unfathomable game. Still, facts come forward regarding the

particular Monday on which the crime was committed. The discussion turns to Pier 112, a red herring, as well as other matters that can be used to cast suspicion on each of the characters. Some information can be found in the character descriptions given to the players, but further notes are handed out as details are recalled.

As the Inquiry progresses, outside factors start to interfere: telephone calls with clues to a mysterious puzzle (someone has hidden a bomb deep within the Department – in a radio valve processor simply known as the Machine); a burglar disturbs the silence; and the teleprinter starts to reveal the player characters' most intimate secrets.

The tension culminates around midnight when the bomb is set to go off – this is the last chance to find a solution. A gun comes into play, and the story's ending is left to the players and their characters.

than the players, so I won't cheat you completely.

The setting is deliberately left unspecified which also makes explanations somewhat vague, but there is something rotten "somewhere in the upper echelons". The leadership is corrupt, malignant, paranoid and paralysed. But a group of sinister men is trying to pull as many strings as possible, for therein lies power, and power is their means of survival and a symbol of status.

So, there they are, keeping an eye on their subordinates, as they are in turn are keeping an eye on their subordinates, and so on and so forth down the chain of command. But somewhere along the line a mistake sneaks in – as inevitably they do. And the system reacts by passing the ball down through the hierarchy until it hits a suitable scapegoat that no one will miss. And if none can be found, one can always blame the "dissidents".

Error and responsibility

This scenario revolves around a gaffe in highest places (where ever that may be). The mistake itself occurred with a classified Document kept on file in the Department. The responsible party ("the Minister") looks for a scapegoat (as unofficial procedures dictates) and arranges matters to incriminate someone from the Department. He simply bribes a random citizen to say that he saw someone leave the Department on said night and then tries to destroy the Document – simply getting rid of the evidence (out of sight, out of mind, as the saying goes). The Document disappears, and a commissar (the Commissar, in fact) is assigned to solve (or rather, close) the case through an Inquiry.

But the mistake is such that dissidents may have used it to gain access to the Palace itself – something that has hurt an old and honourable army officer's reputation, and this has him quite vexed. "The General" tries to oppose the sinister plot and get ahold of the Document before it is destroyed. To this end he sends a henchman into the Department to retrieve it, coincidentally on the same night as the Inquiry.

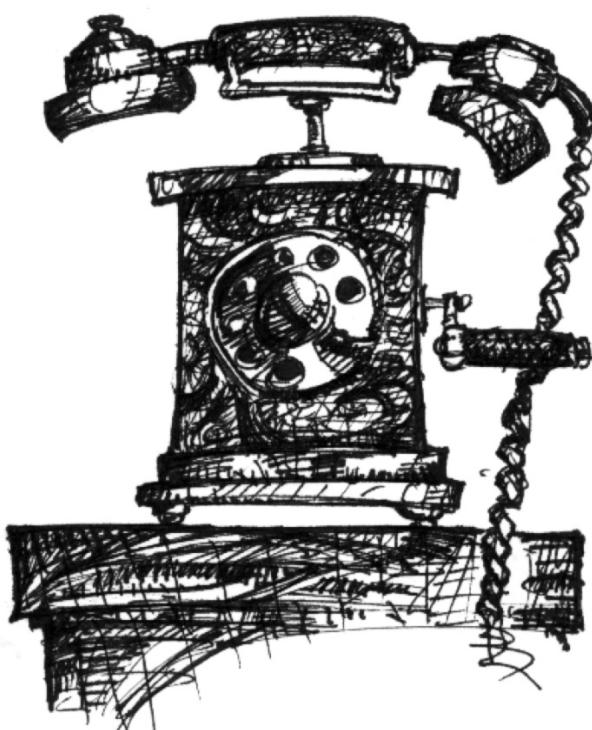
And worse, at the very tip of the pyramid resides an even higher power – everybody is watched by someone else. This "Supreme" (in a sphere of power similar to that of the Storyteller) interferes with the scenario when



BACKGROUND

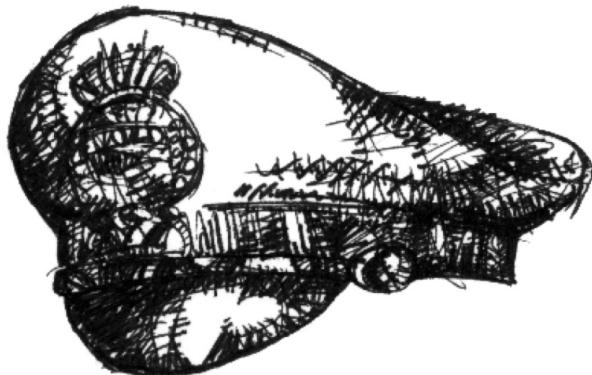
The hierarchy

While not particularly important to the scenario, it remains prerogative of the Storyteller to know a bit more



He (or She) sends exposés to the office regarding the people gathered there, simply to prove His (or Her) omnipotency or by some mysterious design.

Phew.



The Document

So what does this infamous Document say? Well. It is a draft of a legislative proposal that may at some point be brought up for consideration. One wouldn't want to publicise anything that wasn't sure to pass as official politics. But in this instance a copy was circulated in the halls of the Palace for a week before the error was exposed. Bad as that was, the draft is based on a specific case that mentions the General. Actually, it is all just a question of a new fit for Gendarme uniforms. But the confusion in the wake of the Document's circulation might conceivably have been enough for someone to enter the Palace wearing a false uniform and place a bomb if he was so inclined. In fact, a group of dis-

sidents did manage to enter, but they were all arrested.

The crime

The Document has been removed by a servant of the Minister. This happened on Monday in broad daylight (at around 15:00 Hours, while the Procurator, the Commissar and the Secretary were all at work, the Dissident was at the docks, the Watchman was waking up from his nap, and the Gendarme was headed out on patrol – in other words: none of the accused are guilty). Whether the Minister has kept the Document is unknown, but it has most likely been destroyed.

Yet, the General has not given up – as a matter of fact, he doesn't know that the Document no longer exists – so he activates his operative (an agent working under cover within the Palace Guards) to steal it on Friday. The player characters cannot really use this information other than to further the confusion.

The bomb

The bomb is the idea of the Supreme – in other words it transcends mere mortal reasoning; after all, this is fiction. But the idea should be clear enough – think of the Inquiry as a sort of experiment and the bomb as the emergency break: if the characters should accidentally become better persons they would be far too dangerous to have walking around and they would have to die. And if they learn nothing, the system will have proven its effectiveness.



TONE



A psychological thriller

Do not waste any opportunities to describe the scenery – whenever the scene changes, add a short description to set the tone. This whole world is more or less in sepia tones, like a faded photograph. The Department is chosen deliberately as the backdrop to this drama: to the characters it stands as an overwhelming symbol of

tradition and the authority of the State. It exudes a faint but undeniable sense of oppression, and its very essence is inspired by a ponderous hierarchy from which follows a sense of paranoia: “Someone is constantly looking over your shoulder, so don’t let us down!”

I have added an element of, shall we say obliqueness. The Supreme towers above it all as an unseen Big Brother, or Eye in the Sky. His/Her function and title in society remains undefined and inconsequential. This is simply the Supreme. The raven pecking Morse code against the window is a similar slightly supernatural fancy. The idea here is to reinforce a sense of eeriness bordering on horror.

The alienation is important, and this is the reason for the absence of proper names in the scenario: people and locations are named for their purpose.

The situation in itself is fairly ugly, but if you can make the most of the setting the scenario will benefit from it.

Setting

The story plays out in closed court inside walls of the Department, but it may be useful to have an idea of the background as a whole. These few paragraphs serve to give you a general feel for things. It is, deliberately, a stereotype – recognisable and easy to relate to and expand upon.

The scenario takes place in a nowhere and everywhere town, simply called the Old City. When describing the place to the players, you may let your imagination travel to a Prague-like place in the inter-war period. All the buildings are old, covered by commanding reliefs and statuettes. The numerous squares are decorated with monuments, sculptures and symbols of Good doing battle with Evil, Biblical scenes and fascist dioramas. The streets are cobbled. Transport is by carriage, the police are mounted, and there are rattling trams and a few automobiles.

Most men wear dark jackets or suits in muted colours, and any self-respecting lady wears a long skirt or a dress, preferably also a discrete hat or a scarf. People are always hurrying along and you never look anyone in the eye. The Old City is often covered in a dense and deadening fog rising from the River and only the main

thoroughfares are lit (and cared for by night watchmen).

A step hill rises in the middle of the Old City. An old fortress circles the hill until it meets the Palace cresting the summit: home of the Government and its many bureaux, including the Department. The Palace is built from dark stone and its windows emanate a constant yellow glow. Here the leaders of the Realm gathers to decide the fate of the common man. But politics is not otherwise discussed – policy-making is left to the bureaucracy, which was designed with that in mind, and the ruling class who must be permitted to protect their interests. Women and riffraff don’t have a vote (and who would they vote for anyway?).



THE DEPARTMENT

The Department is a massive, imposing structure. It has a grand entrance from the main boulevard, accessed via wide steps. Gothic, leaded windows, several meters high, let the light into huge clerical halls where a grey sea of typists, secretaries etcetera are busy behind their desks. The façade is decorated with reliefs and statuettes, and a phalanx of angels surmount the roof of the building on all sides.

Entrance hall

The first sight that greets you is the entrance hall. An impressive and spacious room with two sets of balconies, one above the other, and a domed ceiling. Stairways and corridors lead in all directions. Marble is the predominant building material.

The office

The Procurator’s office is a 5 by 5 square meter room with a high ceiling. A parquet floor of rosewood is partly covered by a few well-chosen rugs of maroon nuances. The use of hardwood is carried through in the wall panels. Above the panels is a sombre and discretely patterned wallpaper covered with certificates, a series

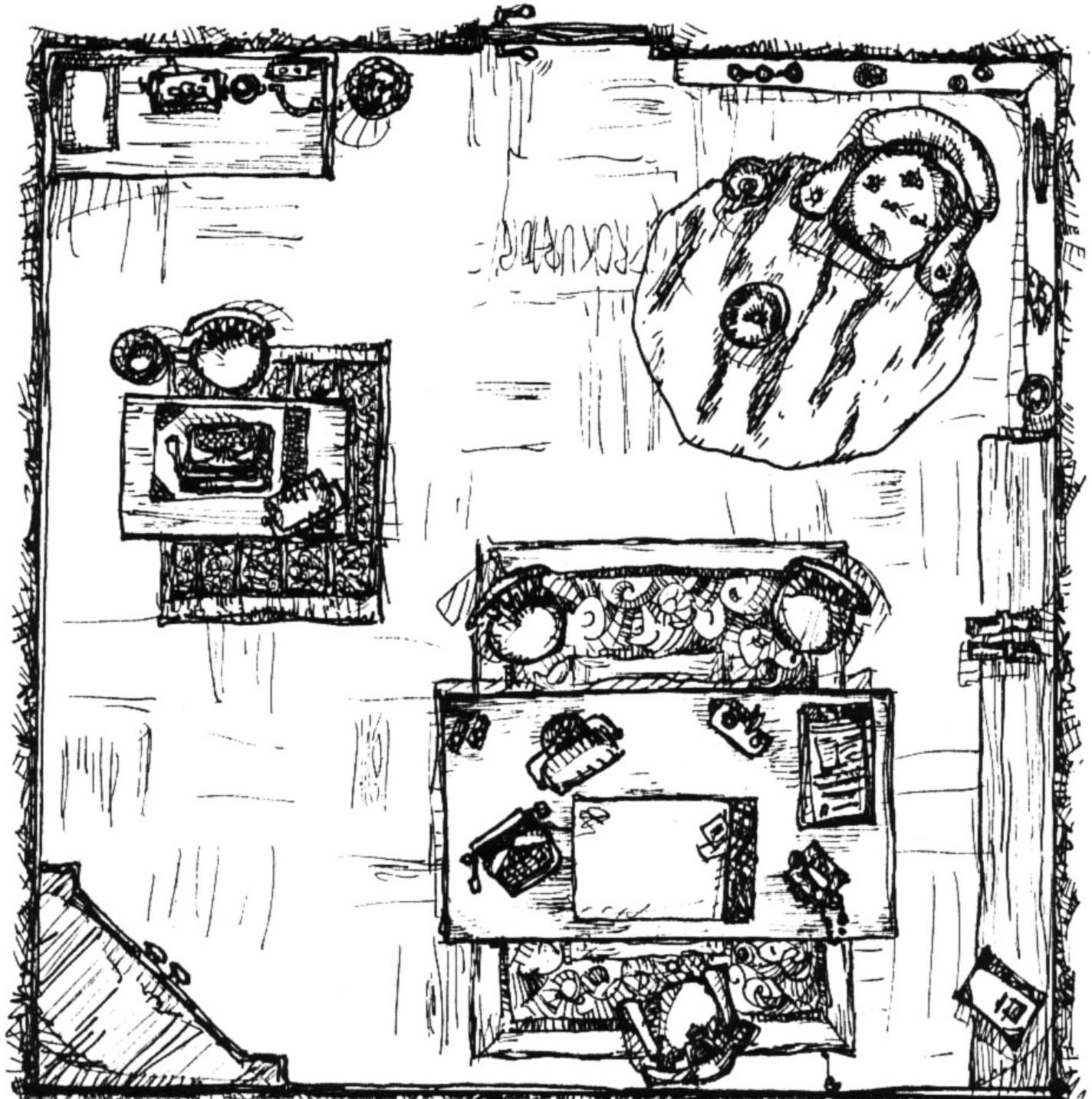
of lithographs of the Department through the years, a still life and a crest. The ceiling itself is worth closer study: the stucco is made from wood and highly detailed, using a pattern of square shapes. A lamp of spheric glass hangs suspended from a rosette in the centre, covering the room in a muted, orange glow.

There are two desks: the Procurator's own mahogany table and one serving an assistant. Across from the larger table are a pair of chairs for guests. A winged chair and footstool occupies one corner with an ashtray on a plinth beside it. The opposite corner holds a closet con-

taining personal paraphernalia – some books, tobacco etc. (no liquor). There is a typewriter on each of the two tables, while a telephone and a teleprinter sits one a separate table to the side.

The basement

A winding stair of stone descends into the basement beneath the building. Behind a locked iron door sits the Departmental Data Processing Unit, known as the Machine. It is a remarkable wonder of valves occupying several square meters. In front of the Machine is a



desk with a keyboard similar to a typewriter, and there is a slot from which a telex can be printed. There is no monitor or displays of any kind.



THE STORYTELLER

The driving force behind *Closed Court* is the individual motivations of the player characters rather than some clearly defined goal, so in this scenario you will be more of an unobtrusive guest than some omnipotent power. Which can be hard! But there are several good reasons for you to be present:

Initiator

The players must have their characters handed out, and they can't read them in advance – ergo, you will have to decide who plays who, or allow them to pick one from a brief description. Page 2 of the character sheets should remain face down until the Commissar's letter has been read out loud.

Director

I suggest you set up the playing room to reflect the office layout (as well as can be done – push some tables around, point out what stands in for what). This really lends itself to a kind of semi-live playing-style. In my experience a bit of acting out helps move forward a roleplaying-intensive scenario as it supports immersion.

Authority

You are the absolute authority of the gaming session. It is your job to make everything run smoothly. Help the players get started, deal with troublesome elements, assist players who are having trouble with the open and challenging format, arbitrate disagreements (which are not part of the scenario), etcetera.

Events, recollections & suspicions

A very practical aspect of your job will be to introdu-

ce the characters to outside influences. There are not many scenes that lets you get in on the roleplaying, but there is one “action” sequence, as well as some important information to be slipped in.

Arbitrator

If something absolutely calls for a roll of the dice, you decide how to resolve it. I suggest keeping it as simple as possible, but that is up to you. And more importantly: the characters' Willpower-stat cannot be changed without your consent. If someone wants to overcome his natural instinct, he can only do so by spending Willpower if you let him. Similarly, you can take away points when a character is breaking down mentally.

Storyteller

Prevent the story from turning into one huge argument. Make sure to create an atmosphere around the Inquiry – offer little details from their surroundings, things that suddenly capture their attention. And coordinate their actions: let the players describe what they want to do and bring it all together in a striking sequence.

Emotional catalyst

One danger in this scenario is that the players become too defensive – this is something you should be aware of and try to prevent. A handy tool in this regard is acting as the voice of their conscience. Openly ask the player how his character feels (for instance relating to another character or event), urge him on and make him answer in front of the other players. The players respect you, and you will find that it is no problem at all to push them in this fashion.



RULES

Actually, you don't have to think in terms of rules at all – this is simply a tool to keep difficult players in line (Willpower in particular). Everything that happens in the story can be resolved without the intervention of chance. If it turns into fisticuffs for instance, you simply decide the outcome using common sense – be severe, but fair.

I have lumped a bunch of traits under the heading of "Personality". These are Nature/Demeanour, Willpower, and Integrity/Citizenship. Together they should offer an overall impression of the character that is easy to take in and put to creative use.

Nature/Demeanour

Nature is the personality worn on the inside; one's true will. Demeanour is what is reflected on the outside; one's representation of the self, made to fit into the surrounding culture.

Willpower

At the beginning of the game each character has his full Willpower; as it drops the boxes are checked off until none remains (it may not come to that).

This trait is primarily a tool for the Storyteller: the characters are pretty set in this society, and the players may understandably have a hard time accepting this. If they keep stepping out of bounds the Storyteller may if necessary subtract a point of Willpower. If for instance you have a very persistent "let's shoot our way out!" type of player, you will be forced to lower the character's Willpower for each breach of conduct until it reaches zero, which effectively takes him out of the story. It is also your job to decide whether a player can voluntarily spend Willpower to resist the character's instincts. Furthermore it serves as a mental indicator in the game: if one character comes consistently under too much pressure he will soon hit zero Willpower and suffer a breakdown. As the stat goes down, desperation goes up. Characters can also gain Willpower if every-

thing goes according to one's Nature (for instance, if everyone does what the Commissar says, he should be rewarded), or some of the characters help calm down a broken character (that would take some intense role-playing, but it should definitely be rewarded).

Integrity vs. Citizenship

These two opposed traits are coupled so as to always add up to 10 – what you lack in one, you will automatically have in the other. Integrity is being true to one's character; standing by oneself. Citizenship is one's willingness to make sacrifices for the greater good; putting community above the individual.

How this affects the characters is very individual. If you decide that the Commissar's Citizenship is starting to crack and therefore shift one point from Citizenship towards Integrity, it may cause a small shock, loss of Willpower or similar. Whereas if the Gendarme tries to develop his independence, breaking a rule during the course of the game may actually be beneficial to his Integrity.

You may simply decide to leave this trait as an indicator of the character's loyalty to the State and not touch it any further. But no matter what, you may want to discuss this with the players once the scenario is over – did anything change for the characters? At the end of the day, this is what it's all about.



The Scenario

OPENING

How much of this you wish to simply relate and/or play out is entirely up to you, but it may serve as a nice warm-up.

The office is closing down. Another day at the Department is done for most of the employees. But a small group of people are still gathered in the old, distinguished building.

Late in the afternoon the Commissar arrived at the office of the Procurator and commanded him, as well as one of the office clerks, to stay after work. As the last workers are leaving the Department, the Watchman goes to the office where there is still light, and the Commissar asks him to stay.

It is evening by now. The four are assembled in the Procurator's office – a spacious room bathed in the yellow glow of the ceiling lamp. The room is adjacent to a large office pool with a vaulted ceiling and tall, gothic windows to one side revealing that evening is coming on, as well as a view of the sprawling rooftops, and in the background is a castle-like building and a couple of churches with their tall steeples.

The Department is silent and deserted. The corridors are empty. Everything – except the office – lies in darkness.

Outside the building hovers the curious Dissident, lured there by a tip-off – supposedly from a comrade. The Gendarme comes by, ordered to be extra vigilant about dissident activity in the streets surrounding the Department. He detains the loitering Dissident and decides – since the light is on in the building anyway – to bring him in and ask if he has any business on the premises, or if he should be brought to the Station for further questioning.

Once these two are inside and the doors close behind them, a bell tolls. From this moment on, no one may leave the Department. And the Commissar is about to open his envelope ...

THE GUILTY PARTY

Depending on your collection of players certain characters will be more or less obvious victims – a majority can probably soon agree that the Dissident or the Procurator or whoever is to blame, but that will not appease the State: they want a full confession. This will be harder to obtain, and that's the main conflict of the scenario. The dark men outside will simply offer some cryptic nonsense and close the door again should the proposed victim be unwilling to make a confession on the spot (and thereby face certain death). In their view “none are guilty” equates to “you are all guilty”.

One possible solution to this paradox may be to push someone to the breaking point where he will accept his unjust destiny (possibly unpleasant for the player, but it's nothing personal, and the scenario description does warn about mature content).

Another solution could be killing off somebody and presenting him as the guilty party – he tried to run and caught a bullet. Both solutions are fully acceptable to the dark men and should be interesting to role-play, particularly if you have some good players who understand the story's tone.

The third possibility is refusing to play this sick game (the characters in the scenario, that is!). They are all – in the eyes of the State – guilty of something, but hardly in their own conscience and reason. It is interesting whether they will take this guilt upon themselves or come to realise the grotesque nature of society's dog eat dog principle and decide to fight tooth and nail.



RECOLLECTIONS

These memories are used throughout to give the players snippets of information to discuss and increase the general confusion. If someone mentions the Club, for instance, anyone who may know about it should be reminded.

The gun is a game changer – whoever finds it gains an obvious advantage; he will certainly be difficult to coerce into a confession. At the same time it may serve to step up the conflict. It may also prove useful if the players decide that killing is a solution to the conundrum. Don't let them get away with a breakaway attempt – the dark men will shoot out as many kneecaps as it takes to stop the characters (but they will refrain from killing).

The information concerning the uniforms can be used to incriminate the Gendarme (implying that he is not a real Gendarme).

The Club

- Commissar: Another member of the Club possibly craves his position. He goes there to appraise the competition.
- Dissident: Knows it as the Kriminal Kapitalists' Klub.
- Procurator: Social pressure among peers – unpleasant but necessary to maintain one's status.

The Document

- Commissar: Somehow related to the uniform-scandal a few weeks ago – apparently the Department was to blame.
- Secretary: It was about uniforms; a legislative proposal of some kind.
- Gendarme: The police arrested dissidents breaking into the Palace wearing false uniforms a few weeks ago (this should only come to light if someone mentions the uniforms directly).
- Dissident: A procedural cock-up a few weeks ago gave some comrades access to the Palace.
- Procurator: Something military or related to the police; a bill of some kind.

The Machine

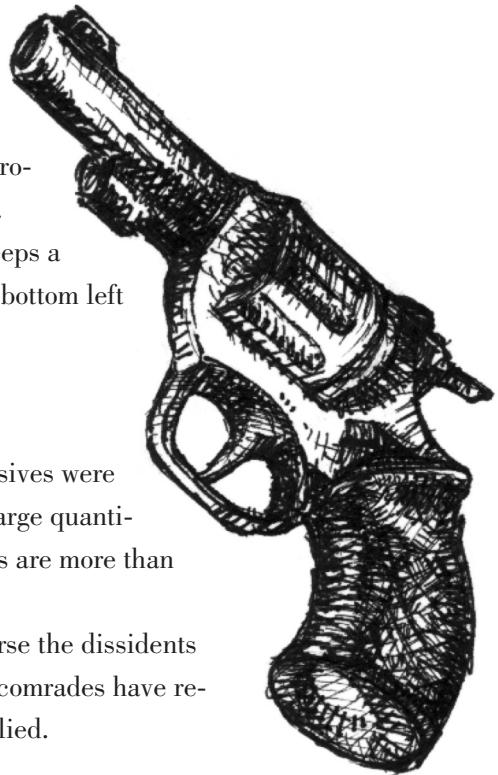
- Commissar: The computer is somehow in contact with the Palace. It knows everything about everyone in the Department and its connected branches.
- Secretary: Personnel files on employees; he has heard it called "the Machine".
- Watchman: Has seen all sorts of weird, discarded printouts – calls it "the Machine".
- Procurator: The computer is connected to the Palace; it contains personnel files on Departmental employees and its connected branches.

Pier 112

- Secretary: Something about real estate development?
- Dissident: He worked there on Monday.
- Procurator: Something about land development? There was a classified reference.

Pistol

- Secretary: The Procurator keeps a pistol in his desk drawer.
- Watchman: The Procurator owns a gun.
- Procurator: He keeps a pistol in the desk's bottom left drawer.



Bomb

- Gendarme: Explosives were recently stolen in large quantities – the dissidents are more than suspected.
- Dissident: Of course the dissidents have bombs; some comrades have recently been resupplied.



SUSPICIONS

You have to keep the characters on their toes and suspicious of each other. Hand them notes on a regular basis with hunches, suspicions and recollections about the others. Remember that society views keeping silent about people's crimes as a form of complicity – if you fail to disclose information it may be construed to mean that you want to cover up your own involvement or as abetting a criminal.

The Commissar actually has good cause to be guarded around everyone here. The State must have put them here for a reason. He knows of the Procurator from the Club – you can expand upon the Procurator's reputation as you go along, early on painting him as unambitious, and progressively building up to serious neglect in his important office. He may speculate that the Gendarme is not a real cop if it is revealed that the Document had something to do with uniforms. The Watchman's behaviour will make him suspect a drinking habit (he should become increasingly antsy as the night goes on), and he should definitely doubt his efficiency. The Dissident could be connected to anything.

The Procurator may vacillate between fear of the Commissar and scepticism – could it possibly be a plot directed at his person? He may have heard talk in the Club about these commissars' somewhat excessive zeal. The Dissident's presence is something new and frightening – wonder what it means? Was he the one he met on Monday? The Watchman may have snitched – that would be bad. He knows he's a souse, but he will have to be careful about flinging dirt, because the custodian may not have said anything and could then decide to blab in order to cover for himself.

The Secretary has heard some things about the Commissar, and he may be suspicious about this particular person's honesty. He has a feeling he has seen the Dissident before; could his fiancée know him, or perhaps the other way around?

The Dissident has heard many stories about the unpleasantness of the commissars and can probably pin some of those on this particular officer. Stories about

how they have captured innocents without evidence and tortured out confessions; about missing persons who were actually driven away and killed. He may also have a feeling that he has seen the Procurator before, and if his homosexual leanings come to light, recall that it was at the Docks. He remembers that the Secretary's girlfriend was involved in the Cause. This can be expanded upon so he gradually begins to consider if she is still involved (and where does that leave the Secretary?). If it is revealed that the Document gave fellow dissidents access to the Palace wearing false uniforms, he will likely consider that the Gendarme may really be an anarchist in disguise. He has heard from other parties that the Watchman drinks and that he serves the enemy – having sold his soul for Vodka.

The Gendarme: The Commissar may be the worst of his kind – the Gendarme feels pretty sure that the State carries out torture and executions. He will slowly build an increasingly stronger sense that the Dissident is actually guilty of subversive activity (but what will he do about it, if anything?).

The Watchman has a strong suspicion that the Procurator is involved in shady dealings after closing hours. And he is certain about his immoral affections towards the Secretary (he can be made aware of looks exchanged as the evening goes on, and isn't it reciprocated? Certainly more than a flirt). The Dissident is guilty by implication of his name.



EVENTS

This is as close as the scenario comes to a progressive plot. Here is presented a number of scenes that serve to ensure some situations that will demand a roleplaying effort on the part of the players, as well as offering a minimum of forward momentum. They also introduce certain outside factors that may influence the outcome. The scenes are listed with an approximate timeframe – whether this fits precisely with how long the players spend is an open question. It mainly serves to suggest a chronological course and offer an ideal timeline. Don't

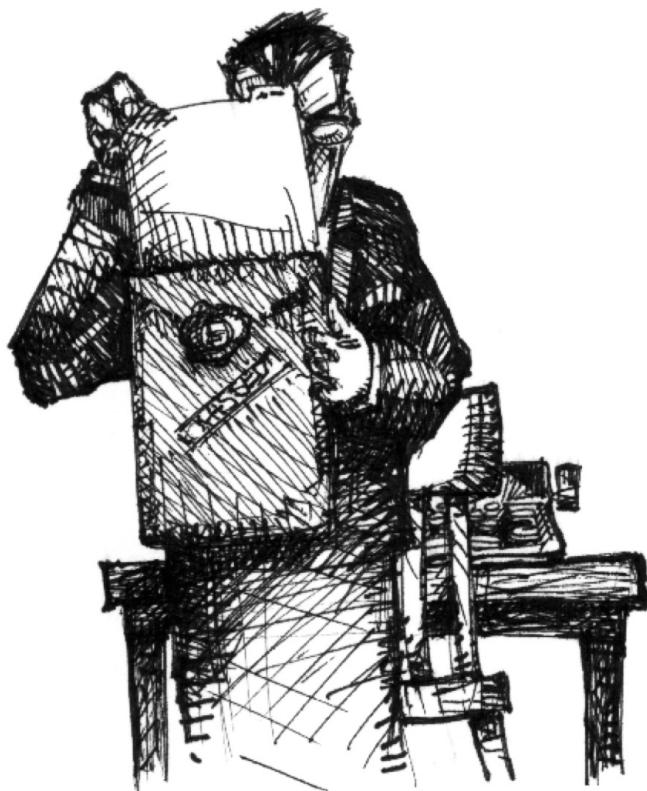
let the proceedings drag. If the players are arguing and making accusations back and forth that is perfect, let them – but otherwise you should always be pushing towards the third phone call and a dramatic finish.

The Commissar's authorisation (18:00)

Once everyone is assembled and a nearby church bell tolls six, the Commissar breaks the seal on his envelope and reads the letter out loud (handout #1). It states that on September 13 of this year (that is: Monday) certain papers disappeared from the Department; that their content was confidential and might pose a threat to national security if they fell into the wrong hands; that they were under the Procurator's area of responsibility; and that the Watchman was on duty on that particular night.

Once the letter has been read, the players may examine the second page of their character sheets. Give them some time.

The Commissar goes on to question the employees (and the others), and at first they will have no knowledge of the papers. But the right questions will trigger recollections, and it is for the players to decide if their characters reveal this knowledge.



In closed court (18:00, sharp)

The doors are inexplicably closed – it appears the keys no longer fit (side exits are also blocked). All the phone lines from the building are dead as well – if they try to connect though to Central Exchange all they hear is a busy tone). Outside the building a couple of black automobiles appear, and well-dressed gentlemen take position in strategic places.

Phone call – part I (ca. 19:45)

A matter-of-factly feminine voice delivers the first part of a code revealing the placement of a bomb. Any questions remain unanswered, and once the message is delivered the phone is hung up.

»*This is a public service announcement. Please do not interrupt. The ants go marching one by one. Hoorah! Hoorah! Hickory dickory dock, the mouse ran up the clock. Six fat sausages sizzling in a pan. One went pop, the package went bang! And they all go marching down into the ground, to get out of the rain. Boom, boom, boom, boom!«*

Men in black (once things are in full swing, but not too late)

If too much time is spend on dreary discussion (even if it is relevant to the scenario), the guardians of the building interfere on their own volition.

A bell his heard clanging from the front door that has been locked until now. When one (or more) of the characters goes to the hall they find the door open and two men dressed in black, wearing hats and long coats, waiting on the doorstep. They will ask if the characters have found the guilty party. Once they have their negative response they look at each other, one of them checks his pocket watch, and they leave, shutting the huge door behind them – sealing it once again.

If anyone attempts to slip past them, one of them will calmly produce a handgun and shoot the escapee in the leg and then aim the weapon at the others. The other man picks up the fugitive and drops him unceremoniously back into the hall. The bleeding wound is another problem for the group to deal with.

These sombre gentlemen can be used to underline

the sense of isolation now and again – they stand motionless under a streetlight during the whole session.

Nature calls (ca. 20:00)

One of the characters in the office suddenly needs to pee – it doesn't matter who, but you should make it appear as if he is up to something.

He walks down the darkened hallways and finds the toilet. Standing in front of the urinal he notices a sound coming through an air vent near the ceiling. It sounds like a door slamming. If the character makes a sound (runs the tap or opens the door to leave) he hears running steps through the grating, another door, and then silence. It is impossible to estimate where the sound originates from (but you could let the sound move in the direction of the office to ensure that the character re-teams with the others).

You could also – and this may serve you better in some cases – use the scene at a point when one or more of the characters are walking around in the building anyway: they see a beam of light or hear footsteps.

Burglar (following the preceding event)

The characters may want to search the building. Hopefully they won't walk in one group. If they split up the party, the smallest group (or one without the Commissar) surprises the burglar: as they enter a dark room a blinding spotlight is directed at them, and while they're still seeing stars, he runs straight at the characters, pushing them off balance and shooting past before they can stop him. At the end of the hallway he tumbles over the bannister and drops about seven meters to the marble floor in the entrance hall, breaking his neck.

If they're moving as a group they find him in similar situation, but he will be unlikely to give them the slip, and instead he struggles desperately and is killed accidentally (a warning shot hits him, a blow drops him



to the floor, killing him, or something along that line).

The man is dressed in black, wearing gloves and a thick jumper. He has a skeleton key in his pocket. He has no ID, but tattooed on his left shoulder is a regimental crest, identifying him as a castle guardsman (even if he seems a little slight). It doesn't seem like anything is missing from the building.

The dark men will take him off their hands, but they won't accept him as guilty of anything other than burglary, and that is not what the Inquiry is about.

Phone call - part II (ca. 21:00)

The female voice is back. She gives the second part of the code, and the phone is hung up.

»This is a public service announcement; please do not interrupt. Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor. Rich Man, Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief. If you don't give me one, I'll take two. The better for me, and the worse for you. Abracadabra! Look at the clock, midnight on the dot! Six skeletons are sleeping tight.«

Raven (whenever)

At some point, when someone steps out of the office (to search the building for instance, or to answer the doorbell), they notice a clicking sound against one of the large windows. A raven is pecking the glass. They will notice, but only if they think about it themselves, that it is morsing strange little messages (similar to the phone messages – something that matches the hour or situation).

If you consider it desirable these ravens could also be used to whip up a more mysterious, supernatural mood: a black feather suddenly falls from the ceiling, or someone notices a shadow flickering inside the building.

Telex from Hell (between 21:00 and 22:00)

A scratching sound comes from the teleprinter – the bakelite machine starts spewing a slim paper strip (handout #2). There is no sender, and the contents may at first appear cryptic. It is actually revelations about each of the persons in the room.

They can use the information however they want to,

but it should certainly put everyone on an equal footing – no one seems to have a completely clear conscience.

Phone call - part III (ca. 23:30)

Third and final part of the code. The characters should now be able to find the bomb in the basement.

»This is a public service announcement; please do not interrupt. Chop, chop, chop, chop. The last man's dead. Tick, tock, goes the clock. And one bright night, by the full moon light, comes a ghost right into ... a dark, dark box. The ghost in the Machine.«

Bomb (approximately at midnight)

The bomb is placed at the heart of the Department – a giant hulk of a vacuum tube computer. The Machine is in the basement and no one in the office has a key. Which means they will have to force their way in – if midnight is still a long way off it will be quite difficult, but not a major obstacle if time is short. But they still have to break down the expensive Departmental door, and if they are still very faithful to the State this will take some self-conquest (Willpower).

The bomb is in a suitcase in one of the Machine's cabinets, connected to a clock and set to go off at midnight. It is a very complicated type of bomb – neither typical to the State or terrorists. Tell the players that they will probably not be able to defuse it without detonating it.

Some of the players might be interested in the Machine breaking down, but no one are likely to cherish the thought of the bomb exploding, so there's likely going to be a flurry of last minute negotiations and compromises, possibly resorting to violence to reach one's goal.

If the characters try to defuse the bomb the Machine goes on the blink – the little coloured lights fade out one by one, and with a dying hum the computer shuts down. This is immediately observed at the Palace to which the Machine is connected, and everyone in the building is arrested if they try to leave without presenting a self-confessed traitor, or shortly after midnight when the dark men enter and arrest everyone for sabotage against government property.

If they leave the bomb be, it will blow up at mid-

night – be fair and make this as clear as possible. The increased pressure will do the competition good. If they still can't bring themselves to find a scapegoat, they will have to die. Make it a beautiful ending; they have refused to be pawns, and if nothing else they died as free men.

Introducing the gun shortly before this scene might be a good idea as it gives one of the characters a clear advantage over the others. This can help escalate the situation considerably.



CLOSING

And so it is likely to all end in tears. The characters will be victims of the invisible Management's sick games: the bomb went off and killed them; or they defused the bomb and were arrested for sabotage; or they compromised themselves and sacrificed an innocent man. But nobody promised that they would live happily ever after – it was all about the trial leading to the end, not what came after.

And even if they did manage to get away, the absurd truth about the corrupt nature of the system, and possibly the death of an innocent, will forever haunt them.

The end.



DEAR PLAYER

This short introduction is not intended to reveal the course of the gaming session you're about to enjoy, but to give you a basic idea about some specifics of the scenario, and where you are expected to perform to give everyone as optimal an experience as possible.

In this scenario you have a large responsibility in regards to the story that is to unfold. Your character is important to a dynamic session. Playing your character is crucial to a good game.

The scenario will differ from almost anything you have tried before where you act as part of a group with a stated, unifying motive – “the Swiss knife hero”, you might call it. This group then turns on a common enemy. In order to make it to the end, you must pass a number of obstacles dictated by the plot. That is not the case here.

From the very beginning you will have some factual information about your character. There should be enough material to play from until you know a little bit more about what is going on. As the game progresses you will discover more about your character's involvement in the situation, and you will have to address this knowledge. The other players likewise hold a handful of cards – some are hidden, others open, but everyone has to play along, whether they like it or not.

Try to put forward your best roleplaying skills. The scenario plays out more or less in real time which naturally invites semi-live action. Play, or act out, your character as a part, considering his Demeanour and Nature. Don't be afraid to let go of your dice because there won't be much to roll for anyway.

An important measure of your interaction with other characters is the trait called “Integrity vs. Citizenship”. Closed Court was nicknamed “the Kafka-scenario”, and I make no secret of that inspiration. Everybody in this fictitious roleplaying setting is in some way, and to some extent, subject to the authorities, the standards of the society and the demands made by the State. As a modern person you may have reservations about being this humble, but for this session you will have to play

under the rules of the Management. The State is basically an uncontrollable authority – and even in closed court you have to be vigilant – you never know who may be watching you at this very moment.

Setting

Your character is a citizen of an old, proud nation, the Realm, living more precisely in its capitol – let's just call it the Old City. The time period is not important; not a whole lot has changed over the centuries anyway – but if you picture a period somewhere between the world wars, that wouldn't be too far off the mark. The system is served by a bureaucratic hierarchy and the Palace is its bastion. Politics is not something you discuss – things are the way they are (and everyone is pleased, of course). The Management sets great store in its citizens being loyal to the State, and it is the duty of its subjects to inform on unfaithful or disloyal fellow citizens. The judicial system is extremely fair: not a single convict in the State gaols has not confessed his or her guilt.

On a technological level there are wonders such as radio valves and automobiles. Some public buildings are equipped with telephones (calls are dispatched through Central Exchange), and teleprinters are used between the departments. The common man is transported in trams or using their bicycles.



»The Commissar«

Personality

Nature: Control (will try to impose his will upon others; stability; power and status)

Demeanor: Perfectionist (proper and speckless façade; order and control)

Willpower

Integrity Citizenship



Description

- **Physical:** A rather small man with a lean build. He wears steel-rimmed spectacles; dressed in a black three-piece suit with patent-leather shoes, black fedora and a long overcoat – immaculate. He signals his important office with a slightly superior expression. Now and then he smokes from a cigarette holder (particularly when he feels on top of the situation).
- **Mental:** Rational and analytic. Only slightly above average intelligence, but with a focussed mind. Recipient of a good bourgeois education. A bit of psychological understanding. Works in a very logical and rational manner.
- **Social:** A servant – he is used to taking orders from superiors and to receive respect from his inferiors. Few friends, but many colleagues. His spare time is given to his work – it's his only real interest.
- **Resources:** Limited (but above average); lives in a boarding house. When the cause is deemed worthy he can requisition a vehicle through the right channels.

Background

The Commissar was born into a small family in a modest provincial town. Socially they were never anything special. Once he had finished school he immediately moved to the Old City to make something of himself. He received further education and managed, with mediocre grades and self-discipline, to grease his way into the bureaucracy. He was still a young man, and he took some knocks in the rough hierarchy. But his elbows got sharper – he saw what he could achieve using just a little force and decided to go for the grand prize. Driven by ambition and dedication he started to see results. Slowly he worked his way up through the system to the position he holds today. A few of his colleagues have suffered

along the way, and the higher up he gets, the less trust there is. He has broken all ties to his family. But there are always new goals ahead of you: power should be in the hands of the strongest – simple logic.

Today

He has just been ordered to go to the Department. He must bring the Procurator, the Secretary and the Watchman to the office of the aforementioned, await further arrivals, and at exactly 18:00 hours open the envelope and read its content out loud to those present.

Presentation

It is important to present one's argument, and in order to ensure that everyone understands it (and accepts it) it should be accompanied by a lengthy explanation. Actually, understanding it becomes a moot point as long the point is accepted. From his experience with backstabbing he has learned that it is better to keep your cards hidden, but you also have to be careful not to use outright falsehoods as that will often lead you into deep water.

He stays calm. Speaks articulated and possibly a little insensitive. Appears casual and nonchalant – whether he sits, walks or stands he'll be sure to appear in control. Emphasises his power by condescending everybody else (in moderation, of course).

At first glance ...

The Commissar appears preoccupied by his shiny shoes but does manage to sneak a glimpse at the elderly, annoyingly fidgety *Procurator* – either a weak character or a guilty conscience. He certainly has a tarnished reputation at the Club. Appears to lead a decent private life, but apparently not as zealous about his work as could be desired.

And his handsome *Secretary*: The young man obviously lacks the powers of imagination to conceive what he could be doing here. And yet, he is obviously naïve – and might therefore unknowingly be involved. He could also be covering for his superiors.

That elderly *Watchman* ... now, there's a man who knows his place! That's the sort of behaviour that will ease the job of the Commissar. But is that a slight alcoholic vapour about him? Certainly a proletarian – and everybody knows that they can never be fully trusted. *The Gendarme* seems like a dependable person in a tight spot.

If one could include the suspicious and proletarian character – *the Dissident* – in the subsequent report that would be perfect. He must surely be guilty of something. Clearly a socialist, which implies involvement in subversive circles.

Monday, September 13

Monday was an unusual day. He had worked at the House of Interior Affairs from 8:00 am to 4:35 pm (including a 20 minute lunch break) and was headed home to the boarding house when he was stopped by a superior (“the Cabinet Official”) and asked to deliver a letter on his way home. He naturally consented. The letter was for a lawyer in the Latin quarter of the Old City. The Lawyer received the letter and read it with the Commissar present. He noticed that the envelope had an official stamp from the Palace, and the Department was mentioned in the letter (he noticed it by accident). The Lawyer gave his thanks and mentioned that the Commissar’s service might soon be needed again.

Having eaten at a restaurant he went to the National Theatre – the play ended around 9:30. From there he went home, had a cup of tea and read the newspaper before heading to bed at around 10:30. He was seen at the restaurant (a rare treat to himself), in the theatre and by the Landlady.

Today (Friday the 17th) he was once again contacted by the Cabinet Official and asked to drop by the Lawyer – a new letter would be waiting for him. There was: sealed, and attached was an order to carry out an official investigation of circumstances pertaining to the Department – he was to get a confession from at least one of the persons there. The envelope was to be opened at the beginning of the Inquiry, exactly at 6:00 pm. Which he did.

Motivation

The Commissar is here to serve the State and himself. He has found that the two are not mutually exclusive: being unscrupulous is an important asset in performing one’s duty in the service of the Realm, as well as in personal pursuits. So, somebody committed a serious crime – treason to the State – and this is all very simple: The guilty party must be found, which will lead to justice, which will benefit the State, and if the Commissar is of service to the State he will also be helping himself.

Secrets

Actually, this is a slightly unfortunate case. He has a sneaking suspicion that somebody in the House of Interior Affairs wants his job. And it could be any number of people – it is no secret that the Management encourages a bit of healthy competition. Someone placed lower on the rungs of the ladder gunning for his position wouldn’t be able to match the Commissar’s level of influence and resources, but with the aid of a good contact it might have been possible to orchestrate.

There is also the mystery surrounding the fact that the Department was mentioned in a top secret letter just a few hours before the Document disappeared from there. Could somebody have an interest in it going missing?

It sounds preposterous. It would certainly mean subversive activity – communists or anarchists, most likely.



»The Secretary«

Personality

Nature: Helper (naturally inclined to help others)

Demeanor: Confidante (inspires confidence in others; shows interest in others)

Willpower

Integrity Citizenship



Description

- **Physical:** Of average height and built. Wears a brown suit with a sombre tie and matching shoes. A handsome man. He has black hair and dark eyes.
- **Mental:** Good at his job. A little narrow in his thinking, but still curious about the world – he simply isn't accustomed to being inspired by new impulses.
- **Social:** Engaged to be married. Keeps few, close friends. Goes to cafés; enjoys a beer now and then.
- **Resources:** Lives by himself in a single room apartment; only has the means to support himself. His mode of transportation is his fine bicycle.

Background

Born in the Old City. Grew up among several siblings in a very ordinary middle class family. He took his degrees with good marks and started looking for an apprenticeship position. Went unemployed for a few months – an unpleasantly cold and hungry period – but finally had luck at the Department. It is a large, honourable institution, and things have been moving at a snail's pace, but the Secretary is content, and by his own skill and effort he now holds a low, but trusted position. Still, not enough to support a family, so he has postponed his marriage – he wants it, but a child would be another expense, and as it would also keep his fiancée from working it will probably have to wait a while.

Today

The Secretary has been working late as always. He noticed the arrival of the Commissar and was summoned to the Procurator's office. When the Watchman arrived, he was called inside as well.

Presentation

The most important thing is sticking to the truth. And supporting others. He has a pragmatic, thoughtful mannerism – as if typing up a report, elucidating.

His body language is open and neutral – rank and attentive. He keeps his facial expression in check and doesn't gesticulate unless he becomes eager, in which case he typically paces a few steps before delivering his clever points.

At first glance ...

The Procurator looks sombre and a little nervous. As always he is impeccably dressed in grey. He is wiping his sparsely haired head with a handkerchief, fidgets with the pipe in his pocket, throws a sudden glance at the diminutive man with the spectacles and seems to regret his craving for tobacco. They share a mutual respect, the Secretary and the Procurator. Alright, so he is growing old, and an increasing amount of work lands on the Secretary's desk, but that's okay.

The short, darkly dressed man leans against the desk – a rather rude attitude, considering the Procurator's high office. He must consider himself quite important. Perhaps an agent of the State? A *Commissar*? (There are rumours about the zeal of these officers, bordering on the fanatical, and his own fiancée has told him how they have stretched the law to achieve their goals.) But why is here?

The Watchman has placed himself more humbly by the door. His eyes are alternately flickering over the unaccustomed surroundings and staring fixedly at the floor. The Secretary has only glimpsed him briefly before this – an ageing but good man. Does things in his own way, and he won't interfere with that.

The late arrival, a big fellow, looks intimidating – dangerous, even. Not exactly violent, but still ... he would be worried about meeting him alone after dark. (What if *the Dissident* knows his fiancée from the past!)

Fortunately, the accompanying *Gendarme* looks very experienced and reliable. He has seen him on patrol in this neighbourhood before.

Monday, September 13

A busy day at the office as usual – working hours from 7:45 to 15:45, plus some overtime. He had been in contact with confidential papers several times during the day – even papers with the Palace's stamp. As he was finishing for the day the Procurator asked him to step into his office. They worked for another hour on a case concerning cadastral plots around Pier 112. On his way out (it must have been around 5:00 pm) he ran into the Watchman who usually came in at this time – but he looked like he had been there for a while.

On his way home he dropped by the bakery, bought a baguette and went home to have dinner. He stayed at his apartment the whole evening. Read a book. Went to bed at 10:00. The Baker will confirm the visit, and the Concierge that he came home at about 5:45.

Today, Friday the 17th, he has been working till 5:30 and was summoned to the office where the Procurator introduced him to the Commissar.

Motivation

This is all rather unexpected. He intends to be as helpful as possible – and get home early. His relationship is of high priority to him, and even though they do not live together he still feels it would be letting his fiancée down if he couldn't keep his promise to come visit her tonight. But it's a balance, for as long as he serves at the Department he is restricted by his duties as an employee.

Secrets

His fiancée was involved with radicals when she went to university. He cannot prove that she actually did anything illegal, but on the other hand she has made no secret of her past association with extremists, and those types will do anything. But she says she has left all that behind her now.



The Secretary, page 2: the Inquiry

»The Dissident«

Personality

Nature: Revolutionary (wants anarchy and change)

Demeanor: Critic (dissident and critically disposed; questions the status quo)

Willpower

Integrity Citizenship



Description

► **Physical:** A fairly big man in good shape. 32 years of age. Black curly hair and a bushy moustache. He used to work at a furniture factory and knows a bit of carpentry, but he is primarily a menial worker. He has served in the military (and knows a little about weapons and munitions). He wears a black beret and a large red scarf, a long dark overcoat, grey shirt, worn pants and heavy boots.

► **Mental:** Only has a rudimentary education. But he knows how to read and write and has read a number of revolutionary theories. He writes propaganda material – not exactly art, but one day he plans to write his great, important manifest.

► **Social:** Lots of “comrades”. They go to cafés a lot and carry lengthy discussions. Drinks beer and spirits in good company. He likes to smoke when drinking.

► **Resources:** Shares an apartment with three other workers. All his current earnings are black. He carries a duffel bag with an assortment of equipment and tools – you never know what you might need as a jack-of-all-trades.

Background

The Dissident was brought up in a solid working class family and grew up in the Old City's terraces. His father expected him to become a mechanic like himself and stressed physical labour over formal schooling. But then the boy started reading books! The father decided to kick out the soft young man, and he joined up with a group of idealists who were willing to accommodate him. In this crowd he was introduced to a wide range of subversive literature, and following a short, troubled period, he joined the dissident bandwagon. He works odd jobs to chip in on the rent, but he mainly writes

propaganda about the hardship of the proletariat (and often refers to his own childhood).

Today

A message from one of his comrades about mysterious and exciting activity taking place in the Department lured him here – he had sneaked in pretty close (curious about the light) when a Gendarme challenged him.

Presentation

Makes his arguments using big gestures. “Loud makes right,” is a good starting point. Naturally, you have to stick to your opinions and never budge an inch, even under duress!

The Dissident makes sure to be in the centre of things when he has something to say; otherwise it pays to stay in the background. Expresses himself using a loud voice, clear articulation and great conviction. Likes to gesticulate violently to emphasise the gravity of his words. May at times lapse into brooding over the injustice of the world, only to explode with great and righteous anger.

At first glance ...

These people are victims of the system, the lot! Scattered along the walls, like traitors before a firing squadron – dumb and blind, awaiting yet another death sentence from an unjust rulership!

Particularly that black leech in front of the desk – obviously the worst kind of State flunkey. A real bastard, they say. Everybody knows that these *commissioners* are blind servants to the system. Many have been unjustly condemned.

The old man with the hunched posture is a dead man walking – broken down by years as a slave. He knows from comrades that this *Watchman* has accepted “gifts” for turning the blind eye to people visiting the Department at strange hours. But he seems pitiable rather than anything else ...

The young well-dressed, naively smiling *Secretary* will be the same in just a few years. The Dissident knows his fiancée, they went to school together. She was quite dedicated back then – she may have been able to talk some sense to that stick-in-the-mud. Perhaps he just needs to be shaken up a little to awaken to the revolutionary cause.

And then there's that middle-aged, grey *Watchman* with the pipe – a sell-out in the employ of the powers that be. His kind deserves no compassion – they have chosen their own sorry fate.

The Gendarme is paradoxically the one closest to the Dissident himself: a man willing to fight and die for his convictions. Too bad that he is undoubtedly a fascist.

Monday, September 13

Monday ... hmm. The Dissident had slept in – it had been a late night at the printing press. He had breakfast/lunch at his favourite café and met with some comrades. In the afternoon he had gone to the Docks, earning a some small change. He was walking through the area surrounding the Palace, not far from here – seizing up the enemy, as it were – when he had a collision with some posh cow, and he had to run from a gendarme. Later, a female friend – a comrade, of course – gave a birthday party so he ate and drank well. Later in the evening he and his flatmates had taken a walk in the Latin quarter. They came home past midnight, had a few beers and went to bed. None of these alibis can be admitted (so as not to bring any comrades into trouble;

he intends to use the standard cover story prepared by the dissidents for these sort of situations – that he was working at this or that location, had dinner with a friend and played cards with certain fellows at a certain hour – all alibis will confirm that story).

Today, Friday, he went to the Department because a rumour in the underground movement had circulated through the week, and a note from a comrade who came by the flat mentioned unspecified but interesting going-ons at that place. Or as he will more likely put it: He was merely passing by.

Motivation

This situation is at once confounded and a blessing. Caught between these slaves to the system it might look as if he's done for, but it may actually be a chance to throw a blow for the cause. He fights for liberty and equality, but not just for himself – if he could win a few converts to the cause that would be brilliant, and those who cannot come to terms with the inevitability of radical change will have revealed themselves as true tyrants, deserving of whatever unhappy fate may befall them. Anyone who has caused damage to the system, even just involving a piece of paper, must be a potential ally after all, and that could make this seance very interesting.

Secrets

He is involved in genuine terrorist activity – not just the Dissident's slightly silly façade. In this capacity he has committed several crimes with fairly clean conscience. But then, he has never killed anyone – deliberately.



»The Procurator«

Personality

Nature: Traditionalist (sticks to the norms; clings to the good old days)

Demeanor: Builder (wants to create something good and of lasting value)

Willpower

Integrity Citizenship



Description

► **Physical:** 58 years old. A little below average height.

Grey hair (balding) and a trimmed moustache. Slightly overweight, but regular walks keep him fairly fit. Wears a grey suit, a grey woollen vest, shirt and butterfly.

► **Mental:** Well-educated. Has a broad knowledge, without any obvious specialisations. Well-read in literature and interested in art. Has a comprehensive political understanding, but it is not a subject that he discusses much.

► **Social:** Several well-respected friends. Visits the Club regularly, a place to meet his peers and groom his position. Regularly eats out. Married, with two daughters that have both left home.

► **Resources:** Well off; home owner. He even owns an automobile.

Background

The Procurator was born and bred in the Old City. He comes from a good family, and his father held a position in the Department before him, although he still had to work to get where he is today. He attended prep school and joined the Club as soon as he graduated. He was given a learning position with one of the head clerks for a few years – something of a trial for the otherwise privileged young man. His father didn't want his career to be served on a silver platter, and the Department's board supported this attitude to avoid soft employees (while still recruiting from the higher classes – people more naturally disposed to responsibility than the common people). His father died, and soon after the Procurator got his current position. Since then his ambition has waned somewhat and he doesn't have any wishes for further advancement.

Today

The Procurator worked the whole day as usual. The Commissar arrived and asked him to call in the Secretary and later also the Watchman. Then they waited.

Presentation

In his experience a fresh, youthful perspective is all good and well, but it has limited justification – what do they know, really. Which doesn't mean you cannot listen to other people's opinion, just remember to brush off any subjective arguments. And since he is an authority figure, and the Department's highest ranking representative in the room, his word should carry some weight.

He is a little nervous about the whole situation and fidgets some – papers, his glasses, pipe, tobacco. Otherwise he keeps a low profile; appears considered (somewhat pensive, perhaps) and calm. Speaks slowly with a full baritone, sounding reasonable and hiding his nerves.

At first glance ...

The presence of *the Commissar* is eerily strange. He exudes authority but the rude secrecy so enjoyed by these agents of the State much provokes an almost shameful dislike of the short, darkly dressed man. Does he know about the fraudulent accounting? This might be a personal and unscrupulous attack on his person – that sort of thing has apparently happened before.

Not to mention the embarrassing presence of two employees! One can only hope he won't be taken to task for their incompetence.

The Secretary has always been polite and competent – the Procurator has actually given him confidential tasks above his status – but one can never really tell.

And that old doddering *Watchman* – in his office! He drinks a bit too much. But on the other hand, the man has always stayed out of his way.

Even more auspicious is the presence of this suspicious latecomer – wearing a beret, large coat and that outrageous scarf, looking to the world like a *dissident*.

The presence of *the Gendarme* doesn't exactly help calm his nerves. What would the Club say if it came to light that the police were here? And his "chance" appearance does seem a little mysterious in relation to the other events.

Monday, September 13

On Monday the Procurator came in at 9:30. He was at the office the whole day, sorting through some documents that were being filed to the archive. This took until a little before 4:00 pm. In order to finish early he asked the Secretary to help him close some cadastral matter (regarding a plot of land near the Docks). He took his time closing down once the Secretary had left and didn't leave until between 5:00 and 5:30.

Going home, he had an unpleasant incident. In an alley five minutes from the Department he noticed a suspicious character pulling into the shadows as the Procurator passed. He considered turning the information in, but there are all sorts of bad people these days. At home (about a quarter to six) he had dinner and went for a long stroll in the Park. He was back at 9:00 pm. He listened to the radio for an hour and smoked his pipe. Then he sent his housekeeper home, looked into some papers and went to bed around 11:00. The housekeeper is the only alibi (and only until 10:00 pm) as his

wife is on vacation in the country.

Motivation

The Procurator is looking forward to a nice and quiet retirement with a good pension and some grand children. This event definitely wasn't part of his plans for the future. This matter must be settled as quickly as possible to give members of the Club as little to talk about as possible. The Commissar may be a problem – he likely won't have the respect that is usually shown towards a Procurator. He will try to reach a quick finale and get home in time for a fine glass of Cognac.

Secrets

He has embezzled from the accounts to help ensure his own pension. Not much, but over the years it still amounts to something.

Illegal homosexual leanings. Something he suppresses. But he can't deny his feelings for the Secretary.



»The Watchman«

Personality

Nature: Traditionalist (sticks to the norms; clings to the good old days)

Demeanor: Builder (wants to create something good and of lasting value)

Willpower

Integrity Citizenship



Description

- **Physical:** Short and a little stooped. 60 years old. Grey, reclining hair. Rarely ill, but he still feels the weight of old age. He has a lot of practical deftness and knows a little about working with wood, metal and mechanics. He wears a black suit, white shirt and an official Department-tie – all a bit threadbare but otherwise nice (if a little old-fashioned).
- **Mental:** Uneducated – only five years in school, and his reading and writing skills are poor. But he is not at all stupid, even though his mind lacks intellectual embellishment. Besides, he has the experience of old age to help him size up others.
- **Social:** Knows his place – somewhat servile to those who surpass him in the system. Doesn't talk that much. His acquaintances are mainly the elderly ladies in his apartment building who spoil him with coffee and cookies. He also goes to public houses now and then (but mainly sits by himself). He drinks spirits or beer.
- **Resources:** Limited; lives in a small flat and saves on his rent minding the building.

Background

The Watchman has been a worker in the Old City all his life. He grew up in a small town house with a large family, and started working at a very young age. For some reason it has never progressed beyond unskilled work – he liked it the way things were. But he has tried a little of everything, and the accumulated experience from a number of crafts has been sufficient to scrape by. Contentment and a common life are probably keywords in the Watchman's life. He has remained a bachelor and is pleased with that situation. His odd jobs are enough to make a living, and in any case it beats the token allowance from the State.

Today

Today, Friday, he came in to work as usual and was shortly after called into the office where the Procurator, the Secretary and a third character unknown to him were waiting.

Presentation

It is important to remember that the Watchman wishes to enjoy a well-earned retirement, and that he is innocent of anything that you could think to blame him for. And if he is guilty, he is certainly not the only one. His strategy, such as it is, is covering his own back by saying as little as possible.

He has a pronounced humility about him – hands behind the back, eyes cast down. If addressed directly he will avoid eye contact as much as possible. Clears his throat when nervous, and his gaze flickers. He starts craving liqueur as the evening progresses; starts to shuffle his feet and lose focus.

At first glance ...

Feels out of place among these well-dressed gentlemen: The kind *Secretary* – an nice young man with his future ahead of him; often says hello when heading home. He looks a little confused – understandable.

And the *Procurator*; he always seemed like the elevated superior. The Watchman has sometimes wondered that the Procurator and the Secretary worked late so often. And the older gentlemen does send the younger man such strange looks.

But it actually seem as if the darkly dressed stranger with the accusing glare is at least as high in the hierarchy. A strange character – obviously not from the Department, but what then?

And the *Gendarme* – once upon a time he was this young and proud himself. But he no longer likes the police – they are always harassing the little people.

The arrestee at his side on the other hand is completely unwanted in this honourable Department. He is the type of person who would ruin it for those who just want to be left alone. These *dissidents* should be thrown in the slammer, the lot of them.

Monday, September 13

The day started early with yard work at the apartment building. That passed the morning. Then he had a lunch break and a nap. Later in the afternoon he ate an early dinner and went to work in the Department. He came in a little before 5:00 pm because a letter arriving the same day had instructed him to take an extra look to see that some filing cabinets were in order (the letter ended up in the stove). He checked them, didn't notice anything amiss and began his round at the usual time. Met the Secretary on his way home – a little late. A short while later he heard another person leaving and assumed it was the Procurator. He double-checked the doors and settled down in the guardroom – napping now and again – and left for home at 5:00 am when the cleaning personnel came in.

Motivation

The Watchman considers it his duty to serve his superiors in the Department. He would like to keep his job. Hopefully this meeting is uneventful or at least not detrimental to his situation.

Secrets

He drinks. Just a drop now and again. Nothing wrong with that, is there? As long as he handles his job. And he does, to everyone's satisfaction. And if they're kind and give a little gratuity to a poor man (not that he's complaining, mind you) that will even earn them extra service. The Procurator for one has often taken advantage of this special offer to be ensured peace and quiet to work after hours.



»The Gendarme«

Personality

Nature: Independent (strength in his own identity; free will)

Demeanor: Conformist (follows orders; stability, law and order)

Willpower

Integrity Citizenship

Description

► **Physical:** Tall and stocky; black hair; 27 years old.

Like all gendarmes he is well-trained and capable of taking care of himself and society. Well-versed in the use of firearms, but it is not something you carry around (he doesn't even like the idea of shooting to kill) – the baton is the authorised weapon. He dresses in the uniform of a gendarme radiating authority: black and double-breasted, with polished brass buttons, shiny boots, cap and a long cape.

► **Mental:** Very basic education with Gendarme training on top – which includes a rudimentary political understanding. In connection with his profession he has learned basic procedures regarding investigation, arrests (a traitor is the responsibility of the guardsmen) and the like.

► **Social:** Several friendly colleagues. Besides which he is happily married (they would both like to have a child, but fortune has yet to bless them). The couple has a few, close friends. He enjoys a beer now and then, and on rare occasions a glass of wine (but he never drinks on duty).

► **Resources:** Reasonable; lives in an apartment with his wife.

Background

Comes from a typical middle class family. He always wanted to be a police officer and serve the State, and he was well-behaved in school and a studious pupil – in fact, the Principal's recommendation helped him along. His life has actually been happy and pretty comfortable until now – he has a nice home and a beautiful wife, and he can provide for the both of them. But he has seen enough of society's less successful mechanisms to doubt its infallibility. There has always been poverty, and it will likely remain so, as well as other unavoida-



ble evils. What really bothers him is the strange feeling that not everybody has a real sense of their own place in society – and this fact is used to exploit people. That doesn't seem right.

Today

Was out on patrol when he observed a suspicious character by the Department. The Gendarme decided to ask if anyone inside (the light was still on) knew him or if he should be taken to the Station.

Presentation

Tries to keep an open mind and answer as honestly and fully as possible.

Keeps to the background – physically, as well as in relation to the discussion. Sticks to what is most relevant and answering questions. But if an opportunity for closure reveals itself he will probably out of old habit try to make sure that it is resolved in a decent manner. He keeps his ground and maintains equilibrium; appears very mentally balanced. Still, he may have a hard time hiding his feelings once they have been stirred in favour of or against some cause or person.

At first glance ...

A colourful gathering. It looks like one of these unofficial meetings that he has heard whispers about – in which case the diminutive man wearing spectacles and a black suit must be a *commissar* (some of those have a bad reputation – it is said that they value themselves higher than the State), and the others are suspects in his investigation (where does that leave himself?).

That would probably include his captive, *the Dissident*, a suspected criminal (not that he has done anything wrong in any demonstrable way). Perhaps they were all just waiting for the big man to show up and get himself arrested?

Actually he would rather the calm, elderly gentleman with the pipe, *the Procurator*, was in charge of the situation – or is he a bit too nervous? Certainly a little apprehensive.

The nice young man by the door can hardly be very deeply involved – probably just a *secretary*.

Nor the old *Watchman* in the scruffy suit, for that matter. But wait: hasn't he been lurking outside the Department on several occasions – hidden in the shadows with his bottle?

Monday, September 13

On Monday he got up, ate breakfast with his wife and went to work, all according to routine. From 8:00 till 12:00 am he walked his beat along the River. Then he had his break and came home to eat (his wife was at work). He returned to the Station at 2:00 pm and did various work-related tasks for the next hour. He was then sent back out on patrol, this time in the area surrounding the Department, from 3:00 till 7:00 pm. Late in the afternoon he had a situation when he heard a scream from an alley. It proved to be a woman who had been frightened by a big, menacing man, who, it transpired, hadn't done anything other than look like a big lug – in fact, the description would fit the Dissident. Following his patrol he went home, ate dinner and played cards with his wife. Her mother came by for a short visit around 9:00 pm. The couple went to bed after she left, well before midnight.

Today (Friday the 17th) the patrol was once again in the area of the Department. The Gendarme had been told by a superior to be extra vigilant in case of dissident activity. He observed a suspicious character

keeping to the shadows while apparently trying to get as close to the windows of the building as possible. As he carefully approached he could see that the big man fitted the description of the shady character from Monday's patrol. The Gendarme decided to take him into the Department to see if anyone there could identify him or if he should be arrested.

Motivation

He is here in his capacity of officer of the law, and this should remain in the back of his mind in his approach to the situation at hand. He is not under obligation to anyone present, except that the Commissar may have some authority regarding the specific case. Actually, it may be convenient that he is here – he can stay rational and hopefully fair in the situation. Apart from that, he has a family to look after, and that is something that will be playing in the back of his mind all the while – but duty has called him here.

Secrets

He nourishes a budding rebellion against the establishment. In some situations lately he may have been less than diligent. But it can be difficult to arrest someone if you're not a hundred percent certain about their guilt, but on the contrary have a strong feeling about the person's fate in some obscure prison.



The House of Interior Affairs, September 16

Re: File B-11/s48/p8a (ref.: State Document ZG19/s915/psl-3 (confidential, class B))

Responsible officer: State Commissar L18

Authority valid as of today

It has come to this Bureau's attention, from a reliable source, that your Department has lost a certain Document of national interest and great importance to the security of the Realm. Invoking ordinance Securitex §3b and c it is our duty to inform you that if your Department in any way can be proven liable, it is considered complicit to or engaged in outright treason.

Said Document carries a stamp of confidentiality (class B), i.e. military secrets. The State has been informed that your office has been in possession of said Document until its disappearance on the night of Monday 13 September. The individuals summoned for this Inquiry - or whomever may incidentally be present on the Department's premises at this reading - by the Authority granted by this letter - stand accused of subversive activity.

The Inquiry is set to commence at 18:00 hours. Whomsoever is inside the premises is considered in temporary custody of the State. This clause remains in effect until a guilty party ("the Traitor") has been found, at which time any charges against other parties present ("the Jury") will immediately be dropped, and they shall be free to leave and carry on their service to State. The Traitor will be escorted to the Palace by guardsmen to await sentencing.

The Commissar will chair the Inquiry (but remains included under the conditions stipulated in this Authority). Any further sanctions towards the Department will be based on the Jury's report. However, this particular branch remains sceptical, as does our State leaders, about any involvement of this honourable Department in these matters. The transgression must naturally be attributable to the actions of one shameful renegade citizen.

Respectfully yours,

Bureau of Interdepartmental Security
House of Interior Affairs

If you are a very diligent Storyteller and want to give the session an extra boost, you can cut out the text, line by line, and glue it back together as one long strip to make it look like as if it really just came from a teleprinter.

And you thought she was a true angel! It never occurred to you to question the small matter of the radio station that was bombed just a few days after you found her studying a map of the station, out of »general interest«? And now - do you think the dissidents will just let her abandon their cause? But of course: as long as you don't ask any questions, she will have a safe alibi.

»We do not kill!« Did you actually believe that claptrap? That you could leave a bomb in a commissar's office and expect no one to get hurt? The last time it was three women, married and leaving behind children, who came in to work as a bomb went off with some delay.

Once your pledge of loyalty to State and society meant everything to you - the law was what you lived for. But then you let that first beggar off the hook, then some drunkard ... and now you're willing to defile your ideals because you have doubts about the State being right! Opportunist. Renegade.

Traitor.

And what is it that you fear? That your wife will leave you if she should find out about your desires and vices? So now you're saving up to your luxurious retirement. Tell me, are little Adonises included in your plans? So far you have gotten away with it - how many people have you deceived with your shady deals? How many boys undressed in your mind? (Well, at least one in this assembly!)

But when that eel of a junior clerk decided to go for your position, you knew it was either him or you. It was only a matter of time before you got to him - his bungled plans regarding the dissident raid last year was all it took to take him down. And those forged papers to the civil servant about his private life was a stroke of genius. Not to mention your subsequent assumption of the case. Evidence - who needs it? Everyone just wanted to see the case closed. Send them off to the gas chamber, good riddance. And then followed the raise.

How many do you think know about your vice - how many have bought your silence with a bottle of Vodka? How many people consider you a little old, stupid, insignificant man that they are free to exploit? Ever wonder how many have suffered from the crimes committed by this Department with your tacit knowledge ...?