

Berlin, 1939. As suspicion and whistle-blowing become chillingly common and the Third Reich reaches the height of its power in a delirium of blood and steel, the SS comb the streets of working-class neighbourhoods, looking for the last remnants of those deemed undesirable by the regime, those who managed to survive wave after wave of deportations and summary executions.

During the coldest winter in human history, three people cower at the barking of bloodhounds and the shrill sound of whistles spurring them on, as they huddle together in a building in the squalid outskirts of the city. They know they must hide lest this be their end. Will they manage to survive? Will they redeem their sins? At what cost?

In *First they came*, players will step into the shoes of three opponents of the Third Reich to discover the pain and paranoia carved into the hearts of the German people by the persecutions of the regime. By reliving the characters' trials, they will have a chance to understand how they came to their predicament.

What mistakes and atrocities did they condone to save their own lives? Were they part of the problem, as well?

Roles: 3. No gender restrictions.

Time: 1 hour.

Replayability: Medium. The three character sheets are made up of multiple-choice questions. The audio track that will span the length of the game also comes in two versions.

Leitmotiv: Guilt, egoism, melancholy, indifference, opposition and complicity in the Nazi regime.

Chamber staging: Let's print out the character sheets, as well as the *Apartment inventory*.

We should find a room we can plunge into complete darkness.

For the game we will need to play one of the two available audio tracks, by using a stereo, a cellphone or some other sort of recorder. Let's also find a torch or lighter, so that we can move around in the dark when we need to.

Symphony staging: We could play in a dark, dusty attic, filled with relics of the past.

Let's use a good sound system for the audio track - a nice touch would be to place the speakers in the room below us, so that the sounds will drift up through the ceiling.

Libretto

Oscar is a strange beast. This should be the introduction to the entire book you're holding, but it is especially true for *First they came*. He is a strange beast because he lives outside of gaming groups, tribes and cliques, and yet he is far from being an hermit. For this reason, when you happen to play with him, you're in for a long chat with someone who knows the value of games, and their ability to create bonds.

The Chaos League, our collective, was born and raised in Abruzzo, well-hidden between mountains and sea, autonomously and somehow distant from the evolution of the "gaming scene". Despite this inclination, it felt natural for us to join this bizarre orchestra, whose

musicians are people we have played, chatted, laughed and argued with.

It was thrilling to pick up the challenge of writing an intimate game, for so few participants, different in form from those we usually organise, yet founded on the same principles, starting with the realistic setting and the strong tones.

Roleplay has a way of showing us slices of likely worlds, of people we could have been and somehow are, maybe without realising it. This is why we believe that gaming will always have a social, political declination: playing puts us in contact with others, and it makes up the connections that tie us to our world.

This scenario was born from a quote (erroneously) attributed to an author we hold very dear: Bertold Brecht. Persecuted by the Nazi regime for his political stance and his theatrical and literary production, he was forced into a long exile, his books burned at the stake in 1933.

In its period of supremacy, the regime turned its homicidal fury towards more than just the Jewish: many fringes of society fell victim to raids, executions and deportation, from the Romani, to homosexuals, to the disabled, to political opponents. Soon a true, proper organised opposition ceased to exist, and Germany's various minority groups failed to form a single, united front to stand against the Nazi party, instead splintering further and further.

The atomisation of the fabric of society was one of the most overwhelming victories of Third Reich propaganda. The climate of suspicion towards the undesirables brought thousands to whistle-blowing, even among family members, among friends, men

and women who, in the end, were all fighting the same fight against the regime.

Many dutiful citizens did their part, contributing to the arrest of undesirables out of greed, out of honest faith in the cause and in the superiority of the Aryan race or simply out of envy, to get a rival out of the way. But the majority did nothing at all: they simply stood by, watching.

Their sloth and indifference tipped the scales of fate.

Orchestrations

Set-up

Let's print the character sheets (in the instructions, we will refer to them as A, B and C, since two names are listed for each character) and the *Apartment inventory*, then cut the inventory into three parts, one for each of the apartments (numbers 12, 34, and 56) where the protagonist live and store potentially compromising items. We can then randomly assign roles and apartments.

If we're playing during the day, or light comes from outside, let's do what we can to darken the room we've chosen, by closing blinds or putting sheets up to the windows.

We should now download the audio tracks we need from the Laiv.it website. There are two of them, of different length, and we should choose one randomly for each game. When we set up the stereo, let's mind the volume: at the beginning of a track is a handy soundcheck as not to spoil anything. We should set the sound to be clearly audible, but not too loud: the game will be played in whispers.

When we are ready, let's pause the track and sit down on the floor, making sure that everyone can comfortably put their hand on the

other two players' shoulders. We are going to play in the dark, so a torch or lighter will come in handy to move around before the start of the game and after its end. In fact, to begin playing, one of us will have to take the light source, set the track to play, turn off the room's lights and go back to their place.

The game begins with A alone in the attic. B will enter after hearing the SS say "We're looking for a dissident", while C's entrance will come right after the gunshot. Since we're all already sitting down, we can use a common formula to signal we're entering the game: "Who's there?"

Game mechanics

The scenario tells the story of three people, deemed undesirable by the Nazi regime for different reasons. Since we live in the same building, though each on their own, we know each other by sight, but we ignored each other's status as a runaway - until we found ourselves together, cowering in the attic during an SS raid.

Since the game is set during the raid, it's important to keep our voices down to avoid detection: let's base our portrayal of the characters around this fact. We should never forget that the entire scenario lives in an intimate dimension, centered on the memories of the pain each of us had to go through and on our hopes of survival.

It's clear that the Nazi are looking for someone in particular and that sooner or later they will find our hiding spot, unless... Someone comes out in the open, sacrificing their life to save the others. In fact, if the SS find their *Scapegoat*, they will leave the building satisfied; otherwise, they will find all three of us at the end of the track.

How much time do we have to decide what to do? No one can tell, since the two tracks are of different length and both have a few minutes of silence at the end: the duration of the track is anything but a guarantee. Still, this is not an individual choice, in the hands of a single player and hinging on a character's willingness to die for the others: a game mechanic, explained in the *Epilogue* section, will help us find our ending.

For now, let us concentrate on what we will do during the game itself, besides experiencing the anguish of the protagonists, hunted in their own home.

Narrate the Traces: In the character sheets are *Traces* that reveal how our protagonists are *Part of the problem*, and how they can become *Part of the solution*. Let's make sure we share these stories, and tie them to the *Evidence* that will surface during the search downstairs. Is there a reason why you cannot be the *Scapegoat*? The others should hear it.

When the occupant of number 12 tells the others of how they've made a living by stealing in the last few months without looking anyone in the eye, the others will surely be more likely to choose them as a *Scapegoat*.

On the other hand, when they explain that they intend to use their stash to fund a high official's assassination, their position might become more ambivalent, and worthy of further consideration.

Contextualise Evidence and Assets: The *Apartment inventory* gives each apartment two compromising items. One of these will be mentioned in the audio track, and will be confiscated by the SS

searchers as *Evidence*, while the other will stay hidden, and still be available to the character as an *Asset*. Both of these elements should be given context by the player who lives in that apartment. They are narrative cues that might make us look more suspicious or open up new possibilities once we insert them into the story. It falls on the others to ask us questions about them, either to help us out or get us into trouble.

If the SS agents find a chest of gold in apartment 12, the character who lives there should find a way to explain why they were hiding a treasure in a working-class apartment block. Is this really their only secret?

Actually, they also have a fake passport: the Nazi agents didn't discover it, so they can still find a way to use it. If it escapes notice in the raid, they could use it to leave the country, or offer it to one of the others, as long as they help them in their revenge against the regime.

Connect our stories: Never forget to pay heed to the others' stories, so as to make at least a connection with another character before the end. Let's hook our story to theirs, in the way we most like, perhaps by putting them in a bad light or offering them help. The actions of each affect someone else. Let's tell the stories of our responsibilities and their consequences.

The character living in apartment 12 might tell of how they stole the chest of gold from a military truck. The tenant of 34 asks them where it happened, but instead of answering they claim to have finally recognised the other's voice: yes, they're the soldier that yelled at them to stop as they ran away with the gold.

Never stop listening: It's worth repeating how vital it is to always listen carefully. Let's listen to the audio track, to the noise from the search and the words of the SS, but most of all let's listen to the tales of our companions in misfortune. Let's do all we can to understand what they want to say, and what direction are they suggesting we take in this six-handed story. This is the only way we'll be able to weave a well-knit tapestry out of each other's prompts.

For example, the tenant of apartment 12 didn't decide to recognise the tenant of 34 as a soldier out of the blue. They listened as the other confessed his desertion, and thought to tie the two threads together.

Fill in the blanks: The characters are, by choice, little more than outlines that leave every detail to the imagination. Let's work hard to fill in these blanks with intuition and invention. It doesn't matter if we forget a detail of our character sheet during the game. Let's make up something and carry on.

The player of apartment 34's tenant found nothing on their sheet about their former rank, battalion, or anything else about their military career. They are thus free to invent and improvise, taking into account the others' suggestions. Why was their troop carrying that chest of gold? Had they received an order, or were they stealing as well?

No diversions: We should always stay in our places during the game. Never get up, and most of all never take another player to the side for

a private chat. What is said to someone is said to everyone. Once a secret is revealed, it no longer is a secret.

For the tenants of 12 and 34, keeping the theft of the gold secret would be safer than compromising their positions with the tenant of apartment 56. But there's no room in the attic for privacy, and the fear of making too much noise is far too real. Everyone is in the same boat.

Epilogue

The game can only end in two ways: if the audio track ends, or if one of us stops it themselves. If the end is reached without one of the three characters turning themselves in to the SS, everyone will be arrested: they will certainly be interrogated, tortured, and in all probability killed. The only way to avoid this is to single out a *Scapegoat*.

At any time, each of us can lay a hand on another player's shoulder and squeeze it, thus silently expressing their vote: "I want you to be our *Scapegoat*". It's a gesture that doesn't belong inside the narrative, and it should in no way be revealed - for instance, let's not tell the others to stop touching us.

As soon as a player receives two votes, they will know to step forward as a *Scapegoat*: they can take a few moments to speak their last words, but soon they will get up, light their way with the torch and go to the sound system. Once they're there, they should say: "It's me you're looking for. I'm turning myself in", and finally turn off the track to announce the end of the game.

Only one vote can be expressed, and it cannot be revoked. Once it's assigned, that's it. During the game we can reach an agreement about the *Scapegoat*, we can make deals to further our fight, or promise to take care of our savior's loved ones. The risk of scattering votes shouldn't be underestimated, if we don't want to lose the tiniest chance of survival. It's a bad idea to vote before we hear everyone's stories: who knows, after all - maybe even in our eyes some people deserve death more than others...

However, we should never forget that time is of the essence: the audio track might end at any moment and the SS agents might break into the attic to seal everyone's fate.

Apartment inventory

Apartment 12

- A locker full of jewelry
 - A picture of you hugging High Official Harman
-

Apartment 34

- A Nazi military uniform
 - An invitation to a gala in honour of the Führer
-

Apartment 56

- A loaded gun
 - A bomb ready to be set off
-

Aaron / Anna

You were born in a middle-class Jewish family: cloth merchants. You lacked nothing and your home was full of happiness. You remember your many brothers and sisters, your family was devoted, dynamic and well-loved. You were young and in your prime, everything piqued your interest and you threw yourself in all things like they were a new adventure.

Then, one day, everything was taken from you: the chance to study, to play sports, to enter this or that place. The race laws. Your friends abandoned your family and your shop one by one. Poverty and its dark shadows slithered into your home. It was too much. You had enough of only ever seeing bitter, frustrated people around you.

You left your family, your loved ones, everything, in exchange for the anonymity offered by the city. A humble job in a working-class neighborhood, and the lodging you can afford. Every passing moment you ache for your previous life, but you keep telling yourself that this is the best option, both for them and for you.

Things are not easy for your people, so now you keep away from everything and everyone, denying your roots and your faith in public. Survival has become your obsession.

But at what cost? How can an existence so far from everything you were be desirable? Is it truly your fate to bear such humiliation? If only there was a way to put an end to this collective madness, if only there was someone who could help you...

Inclination: Melancholy, suspicious.

You were part of the problem. Choose one of these options, either right after reading them or during the game, with the context to guide you.

- 1) The building you live in was already raided once, a few months ago. They came for those two homosexuals. They lived in the apartment next to yours. You could have warned them. You would have had the time and they could have tried to flee. You could have given them a chance to get to safety. But you chose to stay out of it instead. You did it out of fear, but also because you knew that if the agents took them, they would leave soon enough, without asking any questions. Now, they are no longer. They've taken them away, off to some camp somewhere. And you are responsible, you know. You acted like everyone else. You were part of the problem.
- 2) In the factory you met someone you fell in love with. But a third person got in the way and you gave in to the pain. Why do you, why do the Jews have to be the only ones to suffer and get the blame for every bad thing happening in the world? This time you blew the whistle, to get your rival out of the way. You wanted that love to yourself. Now the third wheel has been fired and slammed in prison: you got what you wanted. But your love did not run into your arms like you had hoped. On the contrary, they read into your heart and they were disgusted by what they saw. They understood right away that you acted just like everyone else. You were part of the problem.

You may be part of the solution. Choose one of these options, either right after reading them or during the game, with the context to guide you.

- 1) Nazism has sunk its roots deep, its followers are endless and its machine well-oiled. You know you cannot defeat them in the present. But you still can do it in the future. Sooner or later the world will see its terrible mistake and then it will need a vaccine, it will need a tale, it will need something to explain what happened. This is why you are writing your memoirs. You have penned thousands of pages already, filled with newspaper clippings on everything that happened in Germany and commented by you. A faithful recollection, a titanic task that fills your every day. It is your only goal, your refuge, your mission. But for the memoirs to get to the rest of humanity, you need to survive. To keep it hidden you are forced to stash it in the boiler room of the building, and each morning at dawn you must get it out before they are turned on, to keep it from going into flames. Only you know of its location and your work will be lost forever if you do not go get it tomorrow morning. It is your last chance to redeem yourself, to be part of the solution.
- 2) You are tired of hiding away. How many people just like you live like recluses, waiting for the day they will be taken because of yet another betrayal? You need a gesture to shake the mind of the world, something that will strike at the heart of Germany. You will go to Alexanderplatz and strip in front of everyone, to demonstrate that a Jew is no different from any other human being. Then you will wait for them to come get

you under the good citizens' puzzled gaze. But someone else will see and understand that hiding is not a solution, that the world needs eye-opening gestures. You know you will pay dearly for this affront, but you will leave a mark. It is your chance to redeem yourself, to be part of the solution.

Loosely based on the life of Friedrich Kellner.

Berthold / Bathilde

Your mother worked in a grocery store, your father was a quiet, aloof farmer. A rigidly protestant family, poor and proud to be. You spent your youth in a small, provincial town. When your parents died of consumption, you gathered your few belongings and left. You came to Berlin to build yourself a new life. You began work, first as a clockmaker and then as a wood- turner in the big city. You acquainted yourself with solitude and privation. A hard life, with little to offer in terms of fulfillment. You admired the workers who toiled by your side, as strong and steady as you could only dream of becoming. Until one day, during your lunch break, you heard them talking to each other in hushed whispers. They were communists. You found yourself a second family, you finally felt like you had a home again. You remembered what it means to have something to fight for. You could never stand injustice and oppression, not even as a child: first in line in the workers' union, you defended your rights and those of your comrades. Then you entered the Alliance of the Red Front, a communist organisation that opposed the Nazist government.

You went into hiding when you learnt that the Reich was coming for you and many of your comrades. You were preparing for something big, something that would solve the problem at its root. But you haven't been able to get in contact with the others. Were they taken? Betrayed, perhaps? Everything was almost ready... But you will not be able to carry out the plan alone.

Inclination: Blunt, determined.

You were part of the problem. Choose one of these options, either right after reading them or during the game, with the context to guide you.

- 1) You were forced to relocate for your safety, you felt like you were being watched. So you found a well-paid position in the assembly line of a huge armament factory. You knew what they were building, you knew those bombs would kill many people, yet you went along with it. You needed the money. You did it for your own convenience. Then the Nazi troops invaded Poland, a few weeks ago. The bombs, YOUR bombs, were used on the civilians. They killed comrades, innocent people, so many Jews. You acted like everyone else. You were part of the problem.
- 2) A Jewish family moved into an apartment near the Red Front hideout a few months ago. They stuck out like a sore thumb, and sooner or later someone would have called the police and they would have wound up arrested and deported. But the Nazi wouldn't have been satisfied with them, they would have combed through the whole neighborhood, found you out, and dismantled the whole organisation. So you made your proposal: blow the whistle yourselves and clear the area until the storm quieted down, then come back and resume the operation. The Alliance can make a difference, a family of Jews cannot. The fight always comes first. The others listened to you and everything went as planned. The family was deported. Now the hideout is safe again. But you cannot help but regret what you did. You acted like everyone else. You were part of the problem.

You may be part of the solution. Choose one of these options, either right after reading them or during the game, with the context to guide you.

- 1) Not everyone can make a difference. But you can. You are determined and unafraid to die, if only you can manage to take a piece of the Regime down with you. You are alone and this gives you strength, as it liberates you from the fear one feels when they still have a family or friends to protect. There is nothing else left to do: violence must be fought with violence. They will not stop until someone finds the strength to cut down the beast's head. This is why you are planning to assassinate the Fuhrer. All you need is a weapon, any weapon, and the right opportunity. If something happened to you, nobody would take your place. No, nobody else could. But how will you manage to do this alone? You must find a way to carry out your mission, trustworthy people to help you. It is your chance to redeem yourself, to be part of the solution.
- 2) After years of political engagement, you are coming to terms with the fact that there is no hope in armed combat. Only people count. Only Herman / Hinga counts. You met them in the factory and you fell in rough, blunt love. When you went into hiding, you had to say goodbye, both for your own good and for theirs. Now the love of your life has been convicted. They are still alive, but for how long? You could turn yourself in in exchange for their freedom, but this would only work if you come to them willingly, not if they find you during a random

search. It is your chance to redeem yourself, to be part of the solution.

Loosely based on the life of Georg Elser.

Camill /Christina

You studied in Munich: musicology, as well as psychology and philosophy. You have always loved the arts. After earning your doctorate, you became a professor at the University of Berlin. You study the folklore music of Balkan, French and Spanish traditions. There is much humanity to be found in those sounds. During one of your travels, you also found love. You have always been attracted to your own gender, but the climate of your beloved Germany has abruptly changed. That dark, ludicrous character has seized power, appealing to the ignorance of people and to their most uncontrollable urges. Hatred, rancour, racism. People have changed, now everyone that does not conform to the party diktat is seen as a danger. Even you. You, whose only fault is to be in love. When the persecution began, fear tightened its grip around your throat. You began to feel people's stares, pointing at you like accusing fingers. You never stopped showing up at work, but you know it is only a matter of time before someone at the university blows the whistle.

The regime said it clearly: homosexuals are ill people, only fit for prison and death to halt the spread of the disease. Your lover has fled to Paris, and asked you to follow them to begin a new life, but you love your students and you refused to entrust their education to the regime. You feel it is your responsibility to shape the new generation.

Inclination: Melancholy, emotional.

You were part of the problem. Choose one of these options, either right after reading them or during the game, with the context to guide you.

- 1) The faculty was asked to prove their loyalty to the Reich. You almost died of fear when they barged into your quarters in the middle of the night, but they were just looking for an accomplice, and they found one in you. They knew of your lover and in exchange for your collaboration they were willing to leave you alone. At least for a while. That same night you let them into the university library using your personal key. You helped them round up the "inappropriate" books and bring them to the square in front of the University. Thousands of volumes, true antidotes to Nazism. Who will the young minds turn to now? They spent hours looking for every last scrap of troublesome paper. Then, when enough of a crowd had gathered, they ordered you to light the bonfire. You did it. You, personally. You burned all those books in front of the petrified visages of your students. You acted like everyone else. You were part of the problem.
- 2) The faculty was asked to prove their loyalty to the Reich. You were ordered to point your finger at a student to make an example out of them. You had to, or you would end up in a bad light and they would not have to dig deep to find your faults. So you chose: a twenty-year-old boy who had confessed to you he was part of an underground communist movement. He was too proud of his ideas, he would have slipped up sooner or later anyways. This is what you tell yourself to keep the guilt at bay. They took him and massacred him in front of the other

students. You acted like everyone else. You were part of the problem.

You may be part of the solution. Choose one of these options, either right after reading them or during the game, with the context to guide you.

1) A few months ago you were approached by some students that had formed an underground network: they call themselves the White rose. They are nonviolent christians, like you. Their objective is to wake up the conscience of the people. They are right. They risk their life to publish and distribute booklets detailing the horrors of the Reich among other students. They are a collective of pure hearts. You want to contribute, you are tired of hiding like a rat. You have decided to hold a special lecture, likely to be your last: tomorrow, in front of hundreds of students gathered by the White rose, you will bare the contradictions of Nazism, its inherent evil. You will show everyone what kind of monsters they are. You are well-aware that, were the students to stand together against the regime, the Reich would certainly face a sizable obstacle. Your lecture could cause a chain reaction, capable of finally uniting opposing forces in a single front. You have spent days preparing your speech, now it is finally ripe and you hold it clearly in your mind. You have left no written record of it. You need to get to your lecture hall tomorrow, your students will be waiting and together you can change the course of history. No one can do this but you. It is your chance to redeem yourself, to be part of the solution.

2) For too long you have bowed your head to the injustice of the regime. The more months pass by, the less you can tolerate their abuse, their atrocities. You are beginning to harbor the conviction that things cannot really change anymore, because everyone's minds are far too compromised already. Morality seems to have died, there is no trace of hope left if not in few individuals. You have a ticket for Paris, where you truly will be able to begin anew. And most of all, you will go back into the arms of your love. Yes, what the world needs is love, so this will be your gesture of rebellion. You know a few journalists in France, they will tell your story so that everyone will know. Your love is the only weapon pure enough to oppose the corruption of the Reich. It is your chance to redeem yourself, to be part of the solution.

Loosely based on the life of Kurt Huber.