



‘Heroes’

A scenario for Fastaval 2016

By Mo Holkar



*Dedicated to the memory of David Bowie
(1947–2016) – comedian, chameleon,
Corinthian and caricature.*

*He was a huge influence in my life (as he
was in the lives of millions of others), and
his work inspired this scenario.*

‘Heroes’

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Introduction

*“And the shame was on the other side
Oh we can beat them, for ever and ever”*
David Bowie, ‘Heroes’

Practicalities

Heroes is a freeform/semi-live game for four or five players and one GM. It lasts approximately four hours, including pre-game workshop and post-game debrief.

Summary

Heroes is a group drama of conflicting loyalties. It is set in East Berlin in the mid-1970s, in two locations: a room in a derelict building that overlooks the Wall, and a room in a guardpost that protects it. It is realistic in tone.

The freeform is made up of five acts followed by an epilogue. In Acts 1, 3 and 5, players take the roles of a group of five disaffected young East German friends and lovers who meet to talk about crossing the Wall into West Berlin. In Acts 2 and 4, the players take the roles of a squad of five border guards whose duty is to prevent such escapes, using deadly force.

The border-guard characters are designed so as to resemble alternative versions of the escaper characters – what each of them might have been, had their lives taken the path of service to the State rather than dissatisfaction with it.

At the climax of the game, each escaper character will have to decide whether to make their bid for freedom. And each guard character may have to decide whether or not to shoot them.

Player design input

The characters and their interrelationships are predesigned in skeleton, with players adding their own content to flesh them out during the pre-game workshop. The design intention is to ensure a tight network of bonds and tensions, while giving each player sufficient design input to give them emotional ownership of their own characters.

Scene structure, techniques, and the GM’s role

Each act is framed in a scene in the act’s canonical location (the escapers’ room, or the guard room). The GM introduces the scene and judges when to introduce stimulus material, selected from suggestions provided, as required to manage the pace of the game.

Within the action of the main scene frame, the GM decides when to call for short spotlight meta-scenes involving subsets of the players – flashbacks, internal monologues, side conversations – in such a way as to

deepen and intensify the characters' individual and mutual background and their relationships with each other. Within these spotlight scenes the GM may play NPCs, or ask other players to do so, as required.

Apart from internal-monologue meta-scenes, and the epilogue which is resolved in narration, scenes are played in real time and with naturalistic action. Real-time sections are marked by playing background music (pop hits of the period, simulating a radio station).

The GM also facilitates a pre-game workshop and a post-game debrief.

Climax and epilogue

The five acts build in narrative tension towards the climax of the game. At the end of Act 5, each of the escaper characters will have to decide – individually or as a group, as they prefer – whether they will take the opportunity to make an attempt to cross to the West. Ambition, aspiration, love and hope may urge them to try. Caution, cowardice, ties to loved ones, or pressure from outside may keep them from doing so. Either way, they must commit their fate one way or the other.

The action then shifts back to the border-guard characters. Each guard whose 'opposite number' – the character to whom their life is a parallel – is trying to cross the Wall must decide whether or not to shoot that person dead. If they choose to do so, they will kill the escaper. If they choose not to fire, the escaper will make it across the Wall into West Berlin.

Those who chose not to escape must decide: will they resign themselves to accepting the power of the state, perhaps even working with it? Or will they continue to rebel and to suffer?

Players then briefly narrate their envisaged future for the surviving characters. Immediately, what will they aim to do with their lives next? In 1989 when the Wall falls, how will they respond? And in the Germany of 2016, how might they form part of its modern identity within a troubled Europe?

Politics

The politics of the historical situation are presented in a balanced and nuanced way, in contrast to the traditional Western view of the DDR as a stifling tyranny. The escapers are not simply heroes driven by the urge for freedom: they have a mix of motives, some venal, some down to misinformation. And the border guards are not simply repressive thugs: their mix of positive and negative motivations, and their loyalty to their duty and to their state, are as sympathetic and playable as are the drives of their escaper counterparts.

Themes

'Heroes' explores the tension of loyalties pulling people in different directions. Loyalty to dreams versus loyalty to loved ones. Loyalty to friends versus loyalty to family. Loyalty to the cause versus loyalty to one's

conscience. And how different life situations show different perspectives on choices.

Inspirations

'Heroes' was inspired initially by the David Bowie song of that name (made more poignant by his recent death), and more immediately by the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is also informed by reflection on the united Germany's role and power within present-day Europe. Today's German statespeople and senior figures were the young people of the 1970s and 80s, of both East and West: how did their experiences of life in a divided land inform their attitudes and behaviour now?

Schedule

This is the expected schedule for the timing of the different sections of the scenario. Timings will vary a lot between player groups, but these sorts of targets will keep you on track to finish in 4 hours.

- Introduction (*5 minutes*)
- Safety and comfort (*10 minutes*)
- Historical background and setting, and 'Heroes' (*15 minutes*)
- Act 1, including building the Gang (*60 minutes*)
- Act 2, including building the Squad (*50 minutes*)
- Act 3 (the Gang) (*30 minutes*)
- Act 4 (the Squad) (*20 minutes*)
- Act 5 (the Gang) (*20 minutes*)
- Climax (*10 minutes*)
- Postscript (*10 minutes*)
- Debrief (*10 minutes*)

Introducing the game

Explain the game's basis and themes to your players, and outline the structure to them, in as much or as little detail as you think appropriate.

Tell the players that this is not an adventure game – they are not trying to work out the best way to escape, drugging the dogs with poisoned meat, searching for secret tunnels, etc. It's assumed that their characters have done the best preparation and planning that they can; and the details of that shouldn't form part of the scene material. Instead, the game is about looking at the emotional pulls on the characters, and how they respond to those.

Safety and comfort

Lines and Veils

Tell the players:

There is a risk with largely improvised scenarios, like this one, that people will unwittingly introduce material that another player finds distressing or otherwise unpleasantly disturbing. But it's important that you know you can trust the other players to care about your emotional welfare. So we use the Lines and Veils technique to flag up certain topics or actions as 'off limits' from the start.

A **Line** is a topic that you personally don't want to be included in the game at all. Perhaps because it's painfully triggering for you, perhaps because you think it's generally inappropriate for a game such as this, or for any other reason: you don't have to explain or defend it. So, for example, you may not want to deal with the idea of suicide in any way at all: this would be declared as a 'line' and so will not appear in the game. You might not want the game to involve cruelty to animals. You might not want violent racism to play a part.

Then a **Veil** is a topic that you're OK to have included in the game, but you'd like a veil to be drawn over its actual enactment, ie. play shouldn't go into blow-by-blow detail. Again this can be for any reason. A common one is in-game sex – if two characters want to have sex in the game, it can just be accepted that they have done so, and they will refrain from describing it. Or you might prefer to not have the nature of physical injuries described in detail. Or if someone finds a spider, you don't want it described or brandished about. And so on.

Invite the players to individually write down any **Lines** and **Veils** that they wish to flag up, on the [forms provided](#). They should then pass those to you, and you should copy them into a list (together with any of your own) – in random order, so it isn't obvious who suggested which item.

Read out the list. Then put it prominently on the table for the players to refer to during play and interludes, should they need to.

Cut and Brake

(You can skip the details of this if players are already familiar with Cut and Brake: just say that they can use them as normal.)

Sometimes when people are improvising freely during play, their memories will not be perfect, and someone may accidentally introduce Lined or Veiled material. This is not a problem – you shouldn't hold yourself back from improvising material for fear of having forgotten something. If it does happen, other players can if they wish use **Cut** or **Brake** to indicate that you should back up and go again. No blame will attach, we are all human. (Hopefully.)

Cut and Brake are two common safety techniques for use during play. Saying "Cut" creates an instant time-out – play stops and the subject is dropped. Saying "Brake" signals to a player that they should ease off the direction in which they're taking the narrative, and tone things down. In both cases, you absolutely don't have to explain why you've called it. (Although you can if you want to.)

The Door is Open

And finally while we're talking about safety, the last rule is that **The Door is Open**. This means that any of you can leave the game at any point. If it's getting too much for you, or you aren't enjoying it, for any reason – you can step out, without any blame or criticism or needing to explain yourself. And then you can come back and rejoin later, or not, as you prefer – either way is fine. Basically there's no pressure on you at all to stay in the game if you don't really want to.

Historical background and setting

(You can skip this if your players are already familiar with it; although if any of them are younger than about 40, probably at least some of this will be new to them.)

General history

At the end of World War II, in 1945, Germany was divided into regions under the control of the victorious nations: the UK, USA, France and the Soviet Union. In 1949 the British, American and French sectors were combined to form the Federal Republic of Germany, also known as West Germany; the Soviet sector became the German Democratic Republic, also known as East Germany.

The German capital city, Berlin, was also divided into four sectors, and in 1949 combined in the same way. As Berlin lay within the new East Germany, that meant that West Berlin – the former British, American and French sectors of the city – was isolated within East German territory. And it meant that East Berliners – those living in the former Soviet sector – were be divided from their neighbours in the western part of the city.

It did not take long for that division to take a physical form. The Berlin Wall (officially known as the "Anti-Fascist Protective Wall") started construction in 1961, in response to large numbers of East Germans crossing over into West Berlin and from there to West Germany.

During the 28 years of the Wall's existence, an estimated 200 people were killed while trying to cross from East to West – shot by East German border guards, or suffering accidental fatal injury.

East Berlin at the time

We tend to have the image these days that Eastern Europe under the Warsaw Pact was a kind of hellhole of cardboard shoes, queuing for bread, and perhaps munching on the odd rat to fill a gap. Although all that was to some extent true during the later period, East Germany in the early 1970s was not like that at all. It was a developed and prosperous economy, with good distribution: living standards were pretty similar to some Western European countries, especially if you worked for the state or had good connections. Consumer and luxury goods were hard to come by, because they weren't prioritized by the state production policy. But good-quality health care, education, and social security were provided free for all. After unification, many former East Germans looked back on their youth as a time of plenty before they were cast to the wolves of capitalism.

What definitely was unpopular, though, was the apparatus of state security. The secret police – the Stasi – had a massive network of informers and agents, reporting suspect behaviour. Artistic works were censored by the state, and freedom of expression was limited. Exposure to West German media (there were radio and television stations in West Berlin,

which the East German authorities were unable to prevent their citizens from receiving) meant that the lack of cultural and political freedom was keenly felt by many.

This feeling was countered, in loyalists, by the feeling that the people of East Germany were united in a good cause – resisting the forces of capitalism and neo-fascism. Sense of community was a vital glue holding the nation together. This is why those who turned their back on that community by seeking to leave – who betrayed their fellows – were seen by many as rightly deserving of whatever fate befell them.

‘Heroes’

Ask the players to remain quiet while you play the song [‘Heroes’](#). This will transition them into the start of the game.



Act 1 – establishment and hierarchy

Briefing (5 minutes)

First of all, read out the page headed **The situation of the Gang**, and put it on the table so the players can refer to it later.

Characters (10 minutes)

Spread the five Gang character sheets on the table, or hand them round, so the players can read all of them and decide which one they want to play.

Once they've chosen, tell them to read it through again, and to answer the questions to themselves. Tell them not to worry about answering all of them in depth now – in some cases, answers will emerge during play.

Group building (20 minutes)

Carry out the exercises in the page headed **Group building for the Gang**.

Calibration (10 minutes)

Ask the questions in the page headed **Introductory calibration for the Gang**.

Say that the purpose of Act 1 is to establish their characters and their relationships to one another, to see what their internal hierarchy is like, and to establish their usual routine.

Tell them the [events](#) that you've chosen for this Act.

The scene opens with all of the Gang in their lair, late on a cold spring evening as the sun sets over West Berlin. Someone is preparing food.

Start the [radio soundtrack](#), and signal the players to start play.

The situation of the Gang

The East German government drove the Wall right through the heart of Berlin – in places following the rivers and roads, but elsewhere just cutting straight across streets and gardens. All buildings close to the Wall have been demolished, to make escape more difficult.

The cut-off streets have created small dead zones, where no citizen has any reason to go any more: and the houses in these areas have been abandoned and left to rot.

The Gang have made their lair in an apartment building in one of these dead zones. There is no electricity or water, and the windows are cracked and broken: but there is shelter from the wind and rain, and some old furniture to sit or lie on. Someone brought in a small gas-canister-powered fire to keep the cold at bay, and candles can provide more light. Food can be scavenged from the market, not far away.

There are plenty of empty buildings, so there should be no need to compete for territory: but even so, sometimes other groups try to scare the Gang out of their lair. This has not yet succeeded. It might be that the lair is particularly desirable because it has a view out over the Wall into distant West Berlin.

The Gang are all aged between 18 and 20, and they have been together for several months.

Toni – the Gang

Charismatic leader

You see yourself as the leader of the Gang, and the others usually agree with that. You are the inspiration and the source of most of the ideas. You like creating fun and excitement for other people! Especially if it also causes trouble or annoyance for the authorities.

You come from a settled, respectable family, and as the oldest child you were expected to set a good example and get a responsible job. But after trying hard work for a while, you realized there was nothing you hated more than having to be in a certain place at a certain time every day and being told what to do by people who you didn't respect in any way.

You moved on to petty theft and acts of minor vandalism, and gradually a few other disaffected local kids joined with you. Your Gang has been in its present makeup for about a year now.

You all recently decided together that you would try and leave East Germany and escape to the West, by crossing the Wall. However, it is understood that when it comes to the time, each of you will decide individually whether you actually want to go through with the escape attempt or not. The escape will take place in two weeks from the start of the game.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What is your physical appearance like?
- What was the job that you tried for a while? What happened when you left it?
- How much do your family know about what you're up to with the Gang, and what do they think about it?
- What most appeals to you about the West?
- What, or who, might you regret leaving behind here?

Elke – the Gang

Nurturer

You see yourself as the heart of the Gang – the one who holds things together. The others are often pulling in different directions, and it needs someone who cares – who doesn't get involved in the silly rivalries and annoyances.

You were a lonely child, with your mother out at work most of the time (your father died when you were young). Your friends have become the most important thing in your life – although you also hope to find a happiness that's truly your own, some day.

You took up with the Gang because they seemed like decent people who were likely to get into serious trouble if they weren't given some direction in life. You have done your best to keep them sane and together.

You all recently decided together that you would try and leave East Germany and escape to the West, by crossing the Wall. However, it is understood that when it comes to the time, each of you will decide individually whether you actually want to go through with the escape attempt or not. The escape will take place in two weeks from the start of the game.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What is your physical appearance like?
- Who is there, outside the Gang, that you really care about?
- How did your father die? How did your mother respond?
- What most appeals to you about the West?
- What, or who, might you regret leaving behind here?

Gustl – the Gang

Questioning identity

You drifted into the Gang, because here you feel slightly less of a misfit than you do in the outside world. Your family don't understand you at all, and didn't seem really even to try to. At least here people aren't always asking you stupid questions and then getting angry with you.

You dropped out of school without having made any real friends, but you'd heard that there were other 'weirdos' who hung out in the abandoned buildings near the Wall. You couldn't say that you've found your home here – that would be putting it too strongly. But at least there's an acceptance, and room to be yourself, as much as you dare.

In the West, though, perhaps you could do better: people there are more open-minded and embracing of difference. That's what it seems like from their TV and radio, anyway.

You all recently decided together that you would try and leave East Germany and escape to the West, by crossing the Wall. However, it is understood that when it comes to the time, each of you will decide individually whether you actually want to go through with the escape attempt or not. The escape will take place in two weeks from the start of the game.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What is your physical appearance like?
- What is it about you that's weird and different?
- Who, outside the Gang, once showed you sympathy and understanding; and what happened to them to break off your contact?
- What most appeals to you about the West?
- What, or who, might you regret leaving behind here?

Kai – the Gang

Cynical rebel

You've always kicked against the system, even as a youngster – and here in the Gang, there's a focus for your discontent. You left home after having a massive row with your family, about the iniquities of the East German system. They frequently ask you to come back, but you've resisted these entreaties.

To be honest you don't suppose things are much better over on the other side of the Wall – but at least they'll be different. You'll have a new range of things to complain about, and there won't be the danger of getting locked up for it, like there is here!

You don't think all that much of the rest of the Gang, but you joined them because they also are disaffected.

You all recently decided together that you would try and leave East Germany and escape to the West, by crossing the Wall. However, it is understood that when it comes to the time, each of you will decide individually whether you actually want to go through with the escape attempt or not. The escape will take place in two weeks from the start of the game.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What is your physical appearance like?
- What did your favourite piece of graffiti that you've painted say?
- What was it that made you realize that Communism was a gigantic fraud?
- What most appeals to you about the West?
- What, or who, might you regret leaving behind here?

Sasha – the Gang

Impressionable youngster

The child of immigrant workers from the Ukraine, you feel as though you're still looking for your place, here in Berlin. You respect your parents and the sacrifices they have made for you, but you can't both live up to their expectations and also fit in with the German kids around you – it's too much!

You started spending time with the dropout kids who hang around the abandoned buildings near the Wall, because they don't ask too many questions and they don't seem to really expect anything of you. And they're really cool!

It was only after that that you started thinking about maybe going to the West. Over there, it's so much more cosmopolitan – you can live anywhere in the European Community, people will be glad to hear about how you escaped from the hell of communism... you'll be exotic!

You all recently decided together that you would try and leave East Germany and escape to the West, by crossing the Wall. However, it is understood that when it comes to the time, each of you will decide individually whether you actually want to go through with the escape attempt or not. The escape will take place in two weeks from the start of the game.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What is your physical appearance like?
- What would your parents like you to grow up to be/do? Why that in particular?
- Who is your personal pop-culture idol, or favourite?
- What most appeals to you about the West?
- What, or who, might you regret leaving behind here?

Group building for the Gang

Ask the players to each introduce their characters, saying their name and a sentence or two about what is publicly known. The characters all know each other, and have done for a while, but it isn't established how open they have been with one another – the players can decide that for themselves as they progress.

These questions should all be answered honestly for the character – they show that character's true feelings – but the answering is out-of-character, ie. it is just the players who see the answers. They can use this information for steering in the game, but their characters themselves don't know it.

Sit the players in a close group – around a table, or on the floor, etc. Ask each of them in turn to answer this question, about one of the other characters (their choice as to which):

- What is it that you admire, or envy, about X?

(So, for example, Elke's player might say: "I admire Gustl because of (his/her/their) bravery in the face of ridicule". Then Kai's player might say "I envy Toni's apparently effortless self-confidence.")

The spirit should be one of offer/acceptance, so you can invent something that the other player hasn't yet said is true about their character – and if they like it then it becomes true, but if not then they can ask you to change it.

They don't have to all choose a different X – it doesn't matter if two people choose to admire/envy something about Gustl, and nobody does about Kai – but in general players usually try and keep it fairly even.

When they've all answered that, ask each of them in turn to answer about a different other character:

- What is it that you find annoying, or entertaining, about Y?

Then for these next three questions, for each question they should all close their eyes while you tell them what they're to do, and then simultaneously, after you've counted 1-2-3, carry out the instruction. Then tell them to open their eyes so they can see the results:

- Reach your arm across towards the person who you might be in a sexual and/or romantic relationship with – or two arms, if there are two such people.

Each 'target' of this now has the option to agree to or disagree with the suggested relationship. Let the two people decide whether it should be romantic, sexual, one-directional, non-existent, etc.

- Reach your arm across towards the person who you care most about – or two arms, if there are two people who you really care strongly about.

Wait a moment so the players can see who has reached to whom (and who hasn't!) If two people have each reached to the other, they should hold hands/arms for a little while, to show their mutual caring.

- Point your finger across towards the person who you could happily lose from your life – or a finger of each hand, if there are two such people.

Introductory calibration for the Gang

These questions are intended to agree a common reality for the group. If any player doesn't like an answer that another player has suggested it, they may veto it, without needing to explain why (although they can explain if they wish). The other player should then think of a different answer. The spirit of this should be accepting and forgiving, not fussy – so don't veto an answer just because it isn't what you would have said – only do so if you're uncomfortable with it, or there's a good reason why it won't work.

Ask the players in turn one of these questions (if you only have four players, then just skip the last question):

- What sort of building is it that you can see most clearly, as you look into the West?
- What's your favourite piece of graffiti on a nearby building?
- What sort of food do you cook on your gas burner?
- Where do you put rubbish, cigarette ash, empty bottles, etc?
- What do you use to catch the rain that comes in through the broken window?

Then:

- Ask each player to make a statement about the lair (its layout, situation, décor, etc).

Act 2 – establishment and routine

Briefing (5 minutes)

First of all, read out the page headed **The situation of the Squad**, and put it on the table so the players can refer to it later.

Characters (5 minutes)

Hand out the character sheets for the Squad, giving each one to the player who plays that character in the Gang (so give Toni to the player of Toni, etc). When they've had a moment to take them in, explain that these characters are in a sense alternate versions of their Gang characters. With the same start in life, but (for whatever reason) their lives took a different path, and they are servants of the state rather than its opponents. They should each have the same basic appearance as the corresponding Gang character, although of course clothing and any superficial things (tattoos, piercings, scars) will be different.

Tell them to answer the questions to themselves. For some characters most of them are the same as or similar to their Gang questions; others are not.

Group building (10 minutes)

Carry out the exercises in the page headed **Group building for the Squad**.

Calibration (5 minutes)

Ask the questions in the page headed **Introductory calibration for the Squad**.

Say that the purpose of Act 2 is to establish their characters and their relationships to one another, to see what their internal hierarchy is like, and to establish their usual routine.

Tell them the [events](#) that you've chosen for this Act.

The scene opens with all of the Squad in their guardroom, late on a cold spring evening as the sun sets over West Berlin. This is the same night as Act 1, slightly later.

Start the [radio soundtrack](#), and signal the players to start play.

The situation of the Squad

There are watchtowers dotted along the length of the Wall, each commanding a view of a section of this rampart that keeps capitalism at bay. According to the particular local geography, some are taller, some are built into existing buildings, some are isolated: no two are the same.

The Stresemannstrasse watchtower, where this squad performs its duty, is unusual in that it doesn't have line-of-sight to any of the other towers. This is not an operational issue, as there are secure telephone and radio links: but it does give it the reputation of a lonely posting.

The tower is purpose-built and overlooks the Wall in two directions from its corner position. Guards must climb 36 steps, within a protected walkway, to the guardroom, which has windows in all four sides.

On the West German side here, a mix of shops, apartments and civic buildings can be seen. The East German side has a clear demolished area, a group of abandoned buildings in what is now a dead-end street, and some apartments a little further into the city. There is also a small park.

Border guard duty is quite dull – significant events are very rare. But you have to remain alert at all times, because if something does happen, you will have to react quickly and decisively. The usual pattern is to have two people standing on watch and actively scanning through the windows at any given time, with rifles in hand; while the other three sit ready to be called upon (and talk amongst themselves, etc), their rifles in a rack nearby.

You are watching for military-relevant developments on the West Berlin side, but more realistically you are here to prevent East Berliners escaping over the Wall. Over the years, a few thousand have done so, mostly young people: and a few hundred have been killed (by border guards like yourselves) while attempting it.

Toni – the Squad

Responsible commander

You are proud to be the sergeant leading the squad, and want to discharge your responsibility to the nation capably, as well as to your comrades. You like the feeling that people are counting on you for leadership, and that they are right to do so.

You come from a settled, respectable family, and as the oldest child you were expected to set a good example and get a responsible job. But after trying ordinary work for a while, you realized that it was the Army that would suit you best, and so you joined up.

The ordered, disciplined life of the Army seems to suit you, and there's no reason why you shouldn't rise high, if you don't slip up. You realize that not all your soldiers are like you: but they all have their duty to perform, and their role to play.

Although border guarding isn't the most glamorous posting available, it's vital for the republic's security. Several times already this year guards have had to take swift and decisive action against people trying to get over the Wall. Next time it might be your squad's turn. Up till now, none of your squad have yet had to challenge or fire upon an escaper. You are not sure if you will actually be able to make yourself do so: it will be hard to take the life of a fellow-citizen, even if they are a misguided traitor.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What was the job that you tried for a while? What happened when you left it?
- How do your family feel about you being in the Army?
- What do you like best about living in East Germany?
- What do you think of people who try and escape to the West?

Elke – the Squad

Cautious planner

As corporal you are the #2 in the squad, and (you feel) the main brains. You specialize in thinking actions through, and evaluating their consequences. The others are often pulling in different directions, and it needs someone who cares – who doesn't get involved in the silly rivalries and annoyances.

You were a lonely child, with your mother out at work most of the time (your father dies when you were young). The Army and your comrades have become the most important thing in your life – although you also hope to find a happiness that's truly your own, some day.

You respect Toni as your superior officer, but you worry that sometimes the sergeant seems to make impulsive decisions. You occasionally have to try and delicately talk up an alternative course of action.

Although border guarding isn't the most glamorous posting available, it's vital for the republic's security. Several times already this year guards have had to take swift and decisive action against people trying to get over the Wall. Next time it might be your squad's turn. Up till now, none of your squad have yet had to challenge or fire upon an escaper. You are not sure if you will actually be able to make yourself do so: it will be hard to take the life of a fellow-citizen, even if they are a misguided traitor.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- Who is there, outside the squad, that you really care about?
- How did your father die? How did your mother respond?
- What do you like best about living in East Germany?
- What do you think of people who try and escape to the West?

Gustl – the Squad

Ideologue

You are a devoted child of the Democratic Republic, and follow politics closely. It causes you great pain to think that some of your fellow-citizens want to hurt or betray this great communal social enterprise.

You left school early so you could join up in the Army, feeling that here was the best place to serve your people. You were quickly also recruited as a Stasi agent, reporting to the secret police on any dangerous thoughts and deeds among your comrades. It's a vital job, making sure the troops are all dedicated men and women, and not infiltrated by traitors.

You've recently joined this squad, and from what you can see they all seem to be decent citizens and comrades. It's too early to tell for sure, though: sometimes treacherous undercurrents only come out when someone's put under pressure.

Although border guarding isn't the most glamorous posting available, it's vital for the republic's security. Several times already this year guards have had to take swift and decisive action against people trying to get over the Wall. Next time it might be your squad's turn. Up till now, none of your squad have yet had to challenge or fire upon an escaper. You are not sure if you will actually be able to make yourself do so: it will be hard to take the life of a fellow-citizen, even if they are a misguided traitor.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What aspect of Communism most appeals to you personally?
- Who, outside the squad, are you keeping an eye on for the Stasi?
- What do you like best about living in East Germany?
- What do you think of people who try and escape to the West?

Kai – the Squad

Cynical accommodator

You realized early on that kicking against the system would only get you kicked back. Joining the Army and serving the state directly is perfect protection. You just have to make the right supportive noises, and no-one will ask you awkward questions: your loyalty is assumed.

To be honest you don't suppose things are much better over on the other side of the Wall – they're probably just differently unpleasant. You'd have a new range of things to complain about, and you wouldn't be given a load of things for free, like you do here!

You don't think all that much of the rest of the squad, but you serve alongside them patiently enough. You don't suppose they're all diehard believers in Communism.

Although border guarding isn't the most glamorous posting available, it's vital for the republic's security. Several times already this year guards have had to take swift and decisive action against people trying to get over the Wall. Next time it might be your squad's turn. Up till now, none of your squad have yet had to challenge or fire upon an escaper. You are not sure if you will actually be able to make yourself do so: it will be hard to take the life of a fellow-citizen, even if they are a misguided traitor.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What minor acts of rebellion have you committed? Does anyone else know about them?
- What was it that made you realize that capitalism was a gigantic fraud?
- What do you like best about living in East Germany?
- What do you think of people who try and escape to the West?

Sasha – the Squad

Driven youngster

The child of immigrant workers from the Ukraine, it took you a while to find your place here in Berlin; but in the Army you are welcomed and equal. You are determined to prove that you can serve the Democratic Republic as well as, if not better than, any soldier whose family has been here for centuries.

You feel at home in the Army, where your comrades don't ask too many questions and just expect you to be a good soldier. And when you're in uniform, people respect you!

Since your posting here, you've been thinking about those who try to cross over to the West. They've been seduced by the propaganda, most likely, and don't appreciate the way that the state here looks after you. You can travel anywhere in the Warsaw Pact countries, and people are glad to see you because you're defending their front line!

Although border guarding isn't the most glamorous posting available, it's vital for the republic's security. Several times already this year guards have had to take swift and decisive action against people trying to get over the Wall. Next time it might be your squad's turn. Up till now, none of your squad have yet had to challenge or fire upon an escaper. You are not sure if you will actually be able to make yourself do so: it will be hard to take the life of a fellow-citizen, even if they are a misguided traitor.

Questions to answer to yourself

(Don't announce the answers to the other players, but you can bring them out during play if you like. You don't have to answer all of these now: leave open the ones that you aren't yet sure about.)

- How is your gender generally perceived? Is that also your own view of it?
- How would you describe your sexuality? How widely known is it? How comfortable do you feel about it?
- What would your parents like you to grow up to be/do? Why that in particular?
- Who is your personal pop-culture idol, or favourite?
- What do you like best about living in East Germany?
- What do you think of people who try and escape to the West?

Group building for the Squad

Ask the players in turn to answer these, as before:

- What do you respect, or resent, about X?
- What would you criticize, or forgive, about Y?

Then tell them to all simultaneously with eyes closed, after the count of 1-2-3:

- Reach your arm across towards the person with whom you have a relationship that goes beyond being comrades-in-arms – or two arms, if there are two such people.

And let each 'target' of this confirm or deny the relationship.

And then:

- Reach your arm across towards the person who you would risk your life trying to save – or two arms, if there are two such people.

As before, wait so everyone can see who has reached out to whom.
And then finally:

- Point your finger across towards the person who you would happily see suffer a minor unpleasant fate (such as being reprimanded, or catching a finger in the door) – or a finger of each hand, if there are two such people.

Introductory calibration for the Squad

Tell the players to introduce their characters with a couple of sentences.

Ask each player in turn one of these questions:

- Which watch does the squad most often take – day, evening, or night?
- What sort of group diversions (games, betting, storytelling, etc) does the squad favour, during quiet periods?
- What interesting or entertaining things happen in the East Berlin apartments into which you can see from your watchtower?
- How do you feel about not being able to see any other watchtower from your position?
- How often does your watch commander drop in on the squad to check up; and what sort of impression do you make on them?

Then:

- Ask each player to make a statement about the guardroom (its layout, situation, décor, etc).

Act 3 – exploring commitments

This act is intended to explore and deepen the Gang characters' interrelationships, and to find out what are their commitments – to each other, or to outside people or forces. Use [meta-scenes](#) judiciously to draw this material out of the players.

Generate new events as before, and brief the players accordingly.

This act takes place a week after Act 1. The weather is wet and foggy. The date set for the escape is now only a week away.

There is no clear place to end this act – you'll have to judge it by how the players are going. They will probably dry up after 30 minutes or so, but if not, cut it then anyway, or the game will risk overrunning.



Act 4 – tensions and pressures

This act looks at the tensions between the Squad characters, and the pressures upon them. The weight of their duties and the emotional difficulty of the task they might have to perform should be brought to the fore. Use [meta-scenes](#) to draw this material out of the players.

Generate new events as before, and brief the players accordingly.

This act takes place on the same night as Act 3, slightly later.

As with Act 3, there is no defined end to this act – stop it after about 20 minutes.

Act 5 – preparing for the escape attempt

A brief act whose purpose is for each Gang character to commit to either be part of the escape attempt, or to stay. They should say how they feel about it early and clearly enough that they have a chance to argue with each other if they disagree.

Generate new events as before, and brief the players accordingly. There probably won't be time or necessity for more than one or two meta-scenes, if that.

This act takes place on the night of the escape: a clear, moonless night. End the scene with the escapers slipping out of their lair into the darkness, heading towards the Wall.

Climax

Don't play the radio soundtrack during the climax.

The Squad are in their guardroom, late at night. Narrate how one of the two people on watch sees a number of shadowy figures – however many of the Gang decided to escape – making their way towards the Wall. If that person doesn't raise the alarm, say that the other person on watch also notices this. If neither of them raise the alarm, say that the other characters have noticed them both staring out at a particular location, and want to see what is there.

(Basically, it shouldn't be allowed for one of two of the Squad to decide to ignore the escape attempt. It's OK if the Squad as a whole decide to do so, but it has to be all of them.)

Narrate how they each pick out one of the escapers to aim at: they are subconsciously drawn to aim at the person who looks most like they themselves do. If there are more guards than there are escapers (ie. if one or more of the Gang decided not to escape) then the spare guards are not required to fire.

Tell all the players to close their eyes. Tell them that each of their characters can choose to aim to hit, in which case they will definitely hit fatally: or they can choose to deliberately miss, in which case their target person will definitely get across the Wall to safety. You will count to 3, and they should then all simultaneously either make a thumbs-down (to hit and kill) or a thumbs-up (to miss and spare the life).

While they still have their eyes closed, narrate that a volley of shots ring out, and (however many) bleeding bodies are left slumped across the wire, while (however many) shadowy figures flee into the West Berlin alleys. Describe the bodies that remain, so the players will know which of them it was that shot to kill. Then let them open their eyes.

Ask everyone to remain quiet, while you play the song [Helden](#). This marks the end of the main part of the game.

Epilogue

(You can skip this, or shorten it, if you've run out of time. But it's good to include it if you are able to.)

When people have recovered from the climax (there will probably be out-of-character discussion and recrimination at this point – that's fine), tell them that's the end of the main part of the game. But that it will also be interesting to speculate about what happens to the (surviving) characters as history marches on around them.

1989

In 1989, when these characters are in their mid-30s, the Wall is taken down and Germany is reunified. Effectively, East Germany is rapidly absorbed by the West and becomes a poor relative. Many of the brightest and best head west, or leave the country altogether. The East German army is disbanded – only a few soldiers are transferred into the unified German army. Ask the players of each of the surviving characters (Gang and Squad) to say in a couple of sentences: what would your character be doing in 1989? How would they react to reunification and the fall of East Germany?

2016

By 2016, Germany is the dominant nation in Europe, and the surviving characters are around 60 years old – contemporaries of Chancellor Merkel, who was a student in East Germany at the time of the main part of the game. Have they risen high, or sunk low? How do they feel now about Germany and its journey, and their place in it? How was that influenced by the experiences of their youth? Ask the players for a couple of sentences about what their characters might be doing in the present day.

Debrief

Sit everyone quietly in a circle, and, once they're settled, ask if each person would like to speak for a minute or so about how they're feeling, about the game experience and about their character. Other people may nod and smile etc, but shouldn't interrupt.

Players should refrain from critiquing the game itself – there'll be time for that. This is intended to capture and express thoughts about the personal experience.

It's fine if there are people who don't want to say anything.

Finish by speaking briefly yourself, if you have any thoughts or feelings that it would be good to share with the group.

Then thank everybody, and leave!

News and events

The GM should draw from these events, randomly or by choosing, at the start of each Act. Their purpose is to introduce new stimuli into the characters' lives, to give them things to think and to talk about.

Usually three events for each Act will be about right, but use more or fewer depending on how the pace of the game is moving. Allocate them to individual players, or to the group as a whole, according to how you feel the spotlight time is going.

Announce the events to the players before the Act starts (eg. "Sasha – two days ago, your mother fell on the stairs and broke her leg. Elke – you, or someone significant to you, has released some new music or other artistic work – you choose who and what. And all of you, the Red Flames gang has been giving you a lot of trouble lately – you had to push your way through them to get into your building tonight.") Let the players process the events and bring them out themselves in play during the Act. They can also provide a good source for meta-scenes ("Sasha, how did you react when your mother broke her leg? What was your conversation with her in hospital like, after she had been fixed?")

Don't worry if the players ignore some of the events that you announce, though: as long as they seem to be doing OK without drawing upon them, that's fine.

For the Gang

1. A family member of one of the Gang falls ill, or has an accident.
2. One of the Gang has a bad argument with a family member.
3. The Stasi are investigating one of the Gang.
4. The Stasi are trying to recruit one of the Gang as an informer.
5. Someone known to the Gang is shot dead, trying to cross the Wall.
6. Someone known to the Gang successfully crosses the Wall.
7. There is a dispute or fight with a rival group of young people.
8. Someone has broken into the lair and caused damage while the Gang were absent.
9. Someone significant to at least one of the Gang has released some new music, or other artistic work.
10. The East German government announce a new policy of toughness towards internal dissenters.
11. There is a state visit from the Soviet Union hierarchy.

For the Squad

1. A family member or friend of one of the squad falls ill, or has an accident.

2. One of the squad has a bad argument with a family member or friend.
3. The Stasi are investigating one of the squad.
4. The Stasi are trying to recruit one of the squad as an informer.
5. There is an attempt to cross the Wall (near a different guard station), and the escaper is shot dead. The guards there are commended for their attention and diligence.
6. There is a successful attempt to cross the Wall (near a different guard station), and the guards there are reprimanded for their lack of attention and diligence.
7. The East German government announce a new policy of toughness towards internal dissenters.
8. There is an inspection visit from the regimental commander.
9. An important piece of equipment is missing or broken. It needs to be replaced from stores via the Army's quartermasters' bureaucracy.
10. Someone has graffitied part of the structure of the guard post.

Meta-scene suggestions

Meta-scenes should be used to deepen the players' understanding of their characters, to root them in East Berlin society, to strengthen their relationships with each other, to shed light upon their current situations, and so on. If it seems that the players are bringing out this material capably by themselves without you needing to intervene, then that's great: but most groups of players will benefit from a little help from the GM's perspective.

When a scene uses another character from outside the group, you can either play that character yourself, or get one of the other players to do so, as you prefer. In general these scenes shouldn't involve more than two players.

If you can, play out these scenes 'live' and away from the main table around which the group are playing. That will help with the understanding that they are taking place outside the main game reality. You should also pause the music while these scenes are taking place.

Keep them brief – no more than a couple of minutes.

Players may wish to request meta-scenes themselves, once they get the idea of them: this is great, and should be encouraged (as long as they don't request too many).

Meta-scenes are a good way of evening out 'spotlight time' – if some players are getting less to say and do than others, perhaps because their characters are quiet, then this can be a way to help them bring out the interesting stories and aspects of that person.

Here are some suggestions for meta-scenes:

Flashbacks

Scenes from earlier in the characters' lives, which may have been important in establishing their characteristics and interrelationships.

- The first meeting of two of the characters.
- A childhood scene within a character's family.
- An encounter with an authority figure.
- A romantic or sexual liaison between two of the characters, or between one of the characters and another person.
- A status-related confrontation between two of the characters.

Internal monologues

These are understood to be 'out of character' – although the other players are watching and listening as the internal monologue takes place, and can use it for steering purposes, their characters do not have knowledge of what's said. Ask the player to say a few sentences about what's currently in their character's mind:

- How do they feel about the behaviour or actions of one of the other characters?
- Why have they behaved or acted in the way they did?
- What person is currently on their mind, and why?
- What do they expect, or hope for, from the future?

Side scenes

These are also kind of flashbacks, but to the very recent past – things that have happened since the characters met in the preceding act.

- A generic city-street encounter, like shopping or catching a bus or train.
- An encounter with an authority figure.
- A romantic or sexual liaison between two of the characters, or between one of the characters and another person.
- A status-related confrontation between two of the characters.
- A scene with family or other loved (or not-loved!) ones.
- A secret meeting between two of the characters to discuss problems with one or more of the others.

Music

‘Heroes’

David Bowie’s song ‘Heroes’ is thematically important to this game. Written in a studio alongside the Berlin Wall, in the mid-70s, it tells (among other things) of a pair of lovers meeting alongside the Wall while border guards shoot above their heads. You will play it at the start of the game, to set the mood and to get the players thinking about heroism and where it can be found.

You can download it here:

https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/40248413/Heroes/heroes_heroes.mp3

Helden

Helden is the German-language version of ‘Heroes’, which is likely to be less familiar than the normal English one. If your players don’t speak German, tell them that it’s a pretty close translation of the original, covering the same themes and material. You will play it at the end of the game, to mark closure and to help the players fold their characters back into the gameworld.

You can download it here:

https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/40248413/Heroes/heroes_helden.mp3

Radio soundtrack

Throughout the five acts, you should have a soundtrack playing of 1970s pop hits. This simulates a radio station that both the Gang and the Squad might have been listening to. Keep it loud enough to be heard, but quiet enough that it can easily be talked over. This soundtrack serves four purposes: to make silences less awkward; to give players extra things to talk about; to root the atmosphere in the period; to mark meta-scenes apart from the main framing scene of the act.

You can make your own soundtrack of mid-70s hits if you like, or download an example one here:

https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/40248413/Heroes/heroes_radio.mp3

Lines and veils forms

The next three pages contain forms you can use to collect lines and veils (see [above](#)): five for the players, and one for your own use. Cut these pages in half along the line to use them.

Write down your lines and veils here. If you don't want to request any of either or both, please write 'Nothing' in the boxes as appropriate.

Lines:	Veils:

Write down your lines and veils here. If you don't want to request any of either or both, please write 'Nothing' in the boxes as appropriate.

Lines:	Veils:

Write down your lines and veils here. If you don't want to request any of either or both, please write 'Nothing' in the boxes as appropriate.

Lines:	Veils:

Write down your lines and veils here. If you don't want to request any of either or both, please write 'Nothing' in the boxes as appropriate.

Lines:	Veils:

Write down your lines and veils here. If you don't want to request any of either or both, please write 'Nothing' in the boxes as appropriate.

Lines:	Veils:

GM: copy the players' lines and veils here, in a random order, mixed in with any of your own: then put this out on the table so everyone can see it during play.

Lines:	Veils:



Acknowledgements

Thanks to Ole Peder Giæver and Evan Torner for early comments, and to Tracy Bose for support. Thanks also to the playtesters: Becky Annison, Josh Fox, Liz Lovegrove and Ralph Lovegrove. And thanks to Graham Walmsley and Terese M. O. Nielsen for reviewing the finished script, and to Kasper Larson for historical advice.