



You are the Central Committee.

Together, you rule the Soviet Union.

The year is 1953.

THE DEATH OF STALIN

A larp about conflict, intrigue and mobbing,
inspired by the political satire black comedy film
"The Death of Stalin" (2017).

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with quite some help from good friends
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DURATION

3–4 hours

YOU NEED

1. One person (game master) to read this entire document before the larp.
If you are okay with secrecy and intransparent larp design, pages 7 and above are meant exclusively for the game master (the larp was designed that way).
2. 4–8 participants (excluding the game master).
3. A room, table, chairs for players.
4. This design document, printed out (one-sided printing).
5. A scissors, maybe paper-clips and about 15 minutes preparation time to cut and arrange the various cards.
6. Name tags for each player.
7. If you want, a short song to play between acts.
8. Optional: White chalk for drawing the shape of a body on the floor;
A handgun.

If you feel like changing aspects of this larp before or during the performance, feel free to do so – make the larp your own!

THE FIRST RULE

Every decision of the Central Committee has to be carried unanimously. You can vote as often and on anything you want, but each scene will end with a specific vote.

This game mechanic has a sense of authenticity to it. Factionalism, as it was called, was frowned upon in the Communist Party. One needed to appear strong and united to the outside world. And if you found your position isolated, it was usually best to just vote with the crowd, even against your own best interests, rather than fight a hopeless battle without any allies, as standing out as an unruly, factionalist antagonist would only damage your career opportunities in Stalinist Russia - and in the Central Committee.



Illustration and graphic design: alexanderneubauer.at

РЯСРДЯДТІФИ

Using the scissors, cut all cards in single pieces, to be later re-arranged and selected by the participants. Each single card is marked by a black frame around it (See page 5ff.). Openly arrange the cards →(1) to →(5) on a table to be easily picked up by the participants.

WORKSHOP A

Together, watch the trailer to "The Death of Stalin" (2017)

- Find it on youtube, f.e. [here](#).
- Try to get into the mood of the trailer.

1) Everyone creates an official title for their character

- First, take a moment to look at the various combinations.
- Then, pick a combination you like. You can cross out the wrong gender form, if applicable.
- We don't attempt to recreate the complicated system of government of the Soviet Union here, so you can all make up your own title and develop its meaning as you go along.

2) Everyone creates the character's defining ability or authority

- First, take a moment to look at the various abilities.
- Then, pick a combination you like.

Everyone creates the character's first name

- Just find a proper Russian first name and remember it.
- Say them out loud one after another to make sure you each found unique names.

3) Everyone creates a dangerous secret about another character for which they have (authentic or fabricated) evidence

- First, take a minute to look at the various combinations.
- If you find any trigger topics you want excluded from the game, you can say so now.
- **The Game Master removes any trigger topics.**
- Pick a combination you like.
- Feel free to flesh them out in more detail by yourself.
- After memorizing it, staple the dangerous secret, with the character's title visible on top.
- **The Game Master puts the staples aside.**

4) Everyone creates a reason to live for

- You need to make your character sympathetic to yourself, even if they may appear mean to the outside world.
- Keep your reason to live card in your pocket, close to your heart.

Everyone finds out about their own character's dangerous secret

- Pick up the dangerous secret staple with the name of your own character, and memorize it.
- Afterwards, put the staples away for the remainder of the game.

5) Everyone chooses their own personal pet

- Your character should share some of its quirks and vices.
- Put your pet card in your pocket.



Everyone prepares their character

- The character's pet & reason to live for go into your pockets.
- The character's first name, title and ability/authority go onto your name tag.

How to address each other

You will address each other formally as

comrade [title]

or informally as

comrade [first name]

depending on the situation.

WORKSHOP B

My character's defining speech

- Now, you have two minutes to remember your proudest moment: the defining speech that shaped your career and secured you a seat with the central committee.
- Did you hold this speech in front of a huge audience, or with just a few people present?
- The other participants will act as the audience of the scene.

You will then present the decisive segment of your speech to the others:

- First, present your name and title.
- To memorize your name and title, the others will together address you once as "comrade [title]" and once as "comrade [first name]".
- Next, describe the setting of the speech. When and how did this happen?
- Explain the desired mood of your audience at the beginning of the scene, and the desired mood at the end of the scene (f.e. "first sad and depressed, afterwards enthusiastic applause")
- Deliver the decisive segment of your speech (less than a minute).
- The remaining participants show their mood during the scene.

WORKSHOP C

Memory Speed Dating

- Form into pairs.
- Present your names and title to each other.
- Decide on a good or an embarrassing shared memory between the two of you.
- After 2 minutes, create new pairings.
- Repeat until everyone had the chance to talk to every other participant.
- You can decide for yourself whether you want to accumulate mainly good or mainly embarrassing shared memories for your character.

WORKSHOP D

A word about safety

You should have excluded potential trigger topics during the establishment of dangerous secrets. But in larp, everyone has their own emotional or physical limits. Because this is a larp that can get messy, with characters bullying and generally being mean to each other, you should agree on a safety check to indicate whether a scene is getting too intense.

- If you want to get out of a scene for any reason, you can always **shade your eyes** with one hand and walk away. The others shall respond by ignoring you.



- During the game, you can say **“I FEEL GREEN”** to indicate that everything is fine.
- Say **“I FEEL YELLOW”** to indicate that a scene is going in the wrong direction and you would prefer to tone it down a bit. The others shall respond by deescalating the scene, without breaking the roleplay. Nobody shall ask you why you went for YELLOW during or after the larp – it is your own decision whether you want to tell the others or not.
- You can also approach others to make sure they are okay with you escalating further, by proactively asking them **“DO YOU FEEL GREEN OR YELLOW?”**, so they can respond with **“YES, I FEEL GREEN”** or **“NO, I FEEL YELLOW”**. This can actually be a very helpful tool because it establishes clarity and prevents false inhibitions.
- If you need to immediately stop the larp (for any reason), you can say **“RED STOP”**. The others shall respond by getting out of character immediately to ascertain the nature of the problem.
- Before you move on, make sure that everyone has understood the meaning of the phrases **“I FEEL GREEN”**, **“I FEEL YELLOW”**, **“RED STOP”** and **shading one’s eyes**.



GET READY TO START

You don’t have to act goofy. This larp is designed to put ostensibly serious characters into absurd situations. Part of the larp’s special humour stems from this contrast.

It is up to you whether your character has ambitions to become Stalin’s successor or whether they merely want to prevent others from grabbing too much power and become the next dictator.

You decide when you end an act by agreeing on a specific vote.

You can create conflict and dissent to prolong a scene.

The conflict of this larp will be driven by your actions.

The larp starts out rather comical, turning darker and darker with each act.

Try to increasingly escalate your interactions with each act, up to a grand, very emotional finale in the third act.

During this larp, one of the characters might die.

Don’t try to win, try to create memorable scenes. In this larp, failing is exciting.

And always remember the First Rule of the Central Committee.
(although it will be suspended at some point)

СДЯДС ТФ ЪЭ СЦТ ФЦТ

1) Everyone creates an official title for their character

General Secretary	Director	Premier
Chairwoman	Administrator	Prime Minister
Commissar	Marshal	with the Politburo
of the Communist Party	with the Central Committee	to the Council of Ministers
with the Presidium	to the Supreme Soviet	of the Party Congress
	of the Soviet Union	

3) Everyone creates a dangerous secret about another character for which they have (authentic or fabricated) evidence

The General Secretary	violated	gave money to
The Commissar	imprisoned	took money from
The Administrator	tortured	mocked
The Prime Minister	assassinated	hides
The Director	executed	hingerichtet.
The Chairwoman	falsely blamed	helped
The Premier	is related to	insulted
The Marshal	abused	the Party.
little boys & girls.	innocent civilians.	
their own spouse.	Jewish doctors.	
the starving Ukrainians.	Orthodox priests.	
Stalin's second wife.	secretly communicates with	
their predecessor.	a Chinese diplomat.	
the Bourgeoisie.	a capitalist spy.	
a foreign agent.	countless Gulag inmates.	
	high-ranking generals within the Red Army.	

4) Everyone creates a reason to live for

Before I die, I absolutely need to refind a long lost love.	Before I die, I absolutely need to uphold a promise given to my village before leaving it.
Before I die, I absolutely need to fulfill the dying wish of my mother/father.	Before I die, I absolutely need to retire peacefully to the countryside.
Before I die, I absolutely need to write a certain book.	Before I die, I absolutely need to protect my family from persecution.
Before I die, I absolutely need to travel to the Americas.	Before I die, I absolutely need to oversee an ambitious construction effort in my home province.
Before I die, I absolutely need to care for my sickly child.	Before I die, I absolutely need to uncover crimes committed by the current administration.
I want to find my own reasons...	I want to find my own reasons...

5) Everyone chooses their own personal pet

Two overweight cats	A Siberian Tiger	A terrarium full of praying mantis	A colony of mealworms
An arctic fox	An ageing turtle	A bald eagle with clipped wings	A shit-talking parrot
A spoilt poodle	A white stallion	A Russian Bear with a bad skin rash	An overanxious black rabbit
Goldfish in a tank	A pair of sloths	A well-trained German Shepherd	A hamster for the kids

2) Alle definieren die zentrale Kompetenz ihrer Rolle

Commands the Red Army
Controls the NKVD (Secret Police)
Can convene the Party Congress
Organizes the centralized economy
Leads the ministry of foreign affairs
Manages the upcoming Olympic Games
Oversees the Gulags (prison camps)
Supervises the Moscow Military District
Shapes the Soviet Union's cultural policy
Leads the International Communist Movement

! THE FOLLOWING PAGES ARE FOR THE GAME MASTER ONLY !

On **pages 8 to 11**, you will find

cards

and information that you will reveal to your participants during the larp.

On **pages 12 to 14**, you will find the description of the three acts, which you can present to your participants one after another.

Page 15 contains instructions for the final stage of the larp..

And the appendix (**after page 15**) includes a scathing indictment.

6) Name tag addons

At the end of each scene, some people receive a special attribute. Prepare to stick them (best with paper-clips) to the appropriate name tag after the corresponding scene.

7) Secret information to be given before act 2

Randomly distribute these cards to the participants before scene 4 begins (they are all the same).

8) Ballot Papers to be given out before act 3

Tell your participants to fill them out in secret. Collect them when they are filled out.

9) Agendas to be given out after the Ballot Papers

- The person playing the character with the most votes in →(8) receives **Agenda C**.
- If there is a tie, the person with more name tag addons receives **Agenda C**.
- If this is still a tie, THE OPPORTUNIST receives **Agenda C**. (or you decide for yourself)
- Who has been the most outspoken opponent of the character with Agenda C so far? The outspoken opponent receives **Agenda B along with the scathing indictment paper (→ page 16)**. (Or they can write down their own indictment onto an empty sheet of paper, if they prefer.)
- For their conspiracy to work, they should have all (except one) signatures on the indictment before the larp ends.
- Give each other participant one of the remaining agendas (they are all the same).
- After a minute, make everyone read out the letter of their Agenda so everyone knows who has **Agenda C**.



6) Name tag addons

Prepare to stick them (best with paper-clips) to the appropriate name tag after the corresponding scene.



THE HERO	THE UNLUCKY	THE OPPORTUNIST	THE VICTIM
THE ORATOR	THE ORATOR	THE SCAPEGOAT	THE VICTIM
THE VICTIM	THE VICTIM		

7) Secret information to be given before scene 4



You have received confidential information from your informants: Some members of the central committee are plotting to depose and possibly murder you.	You have received confidential information from your informants: Some members of the central committee are plotting to depose and possibly murder you.
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8) Ballot Papers to be given out before scene 6



Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?	Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?	Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?	Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?
Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?	Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?	Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?	Which character in the Central Committee does your character fear the most?

9) Agendas to be given out before scene 6



<p>AGENDA A</p> <p>The character who received Agenda C has become too powerful. For some reason, your character is aware of a common effort by multiple members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.</p> <p>Is your character merely a halfhearted bystander or a zealous plotter? Will their resolve hold when the vote is called? It is up to you.</p> <p>After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.</p> <p>Your character might have some qualms, but not supporting the majority plot against the power-grabber at this point could also endanger your character.</p>	<p>AGENDA B</p> <p>The character who received Agenda C has become too powerful. Your character is deeply involved in a common effort by most members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.</p> <p>After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.</p> <p>After a successful vote, the plan can proceed:</p> <p>The plotters have armed guards waiting outside. You have prepared a scathing indictment against the power-grabber (the game master will hand it to you), which you need to get signed by all (except the power-grabber, of course) in order to secure the full support of the Central Committee.</p> <p>But be careful: The power-grabber might also have his minions nearby!</p>
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AGENDA C

You have become an influential member of the Central Committee, and now is the time to consolidate your power.

You will soon reorganize the Central Committee by imprisoning or otherwise “vanishing” certain unruly members.

Use this meeting to assess who shall remain part of YOUR future Central Committee, and who needs to be removed from power.

After the meeting has ended, you will give out instructions to your minions. Your opponents must be securely apprehended before they can manage to leave the capital.

AGENDA D

The character who received **Agenda C** has become too powerful. For some reason, your character is aware of a common effort by multiple members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.

Is your character merely a halfhearted bystander or a zealous plotter? Will their resolve hold when the vote is called? It is up to you.

After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. **The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.**

Your character might have some qualms, but not supporting the majority plot against the power-grabber at this point could also endanger your character.

AGENDA E

The character who received **Agenda C** has become too powerful. For some reason, your character is aware of a common effort by multiple members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.

Is your character merely a halfhearted bystander or a zealous plotter? Will their resolve hold when the vote is called? It is up to you.

After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. **The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.**

Your character might have some qualms, but not supporting the majority plot against the power-grabber at this point could also endanger your character.

AGENDA F

The character who received **Agenda C** has become too powerful. For some reason, your character is aware of a common effort by multiple members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.

Is your character merely a halfhearted bystander or a zealous plotter? Will their resolve hold when the vote is called? It is up to you.

After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. **The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.**

Your character might have some qualms, but not supporting the majority plot against the power-grabber at this point could also endanger your character.



AGENDA G

The character who received **Agenda C** has become too powerful. For some reason, your character is aware of a common effort by multiple members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.

Is your character merely a halfhearted bystander or a zealous plotter? Will their resolve hold when the vote is called? It is up to you.

After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. **The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.**

Your character might have some qualms, but not supporting the majority plot against the power-grabber at this point could also endanger your character.

AGENDA H

The character who received **Agenda C** has become too powerful. For some reason, your character is aware of a common effort by multiple members of the Central Committee to remove the dangerous power-grabber before it is too late.

Is your character merely a halfhearted bystander or a zealous plotter? Will their resolve hold when the vote is called? It is up to you.

After everyone has gathered at the table, one of you must ask to amend the agenda, raising an ad-hoc topic of gross misconduct against the power-grabber. **The others can support the motion and also raise various accusations, followed by a vote of no-confidence.**

Your character might have some qualms, but not supporting the majority plot against the power-grabber at this point could also endanger your character.



Д МЭЛФЭДЭМД И ТНЭЭ ДСТ

First Act

First Scene [A room, in front of a door]

It is the late morning in Stalin's Dacha (villa) near Moscow. To everyone's great bewilderment, Stalin hasn't yet answered to knocks on his bedroom door. The Central Committee have gathered outside Stalin's bedroom.

- They are deliberating what might have happened, and what to do next.
- They are discussing who should enter and check on Stalin, but nobody wants to risk incurring Stalin's wrath by intruding uninvited.

The scene will end when the Central Committee agrees on a person to send inside Stalin's bedroom.

**The person entering the bedroom receives a name tag add-on:
THE HERO**

Second Scene

[A room. On the floor, the chalk shape of a body. On it, some water.]

Stalin is lying next to his bed, unconscious, in a puddle of his own urine. The Central Committee are gathered around Stalin.

- Some might be more distraught than others at the sight of their leader lying unconscious on the floor.
- Who is to temporarily take over Stalin's agendas while he is incapacitated?
- They are discussing whether to call for a doctor, but Stalin deeply mistrusts doctors! His own personal physician is currently suffering in the Gulag.
- If Stalin gets well again, he might punish everyone who saw him in this miserable state.

The scene will end when the Central Committee agrees on who has to go call for a doctor.

**The person calling the doctor receives a name tag add-on:
THE UNLUCKY**

Third Scene [A room, with a representation of a bed.]

Despite the doctors' best efforts, Stalin has died. The Central Committee are assembled around his deathbed.

- Are you joyful about the death of the evil dictator or truly saddened by the loss of your leader?
- Either way, you need to mourn his death and openly show your deep sorrow.
- At the same time, you need to move on: Who is to organise Stalin's funeral?
- And everybody wants to return to Moscow as quickly as possible to either arrange Stalin's succession or prevent the others from outmaneuvering them, but they can't just impolitely leave the solemn gathering without a proper excuse.

The scene will end when the Central Committee agrees on who may travel to Moscow first and officially announce Stalin's death.

**The person announcing Stalin's death receives a name tag add-on:
OPPORTUNIST**



If you are ready to begin, reveal the first act (this page) for your participants to read.

Set up and start each scene when you are ready.



The game master will now randomly hand out a secret note →(7) to each player.

Second Act



Now, reveal the second act (this page) for your participants to read.

Set up and start each scene when you are ready.

Fourth Scene [A table representing a coffin, in the middle of a room.]

For three days, the coffin with Stalin's body will be displayed at the Hall of Columns. From all over the country, huge crowds are pouring into Moscow. You are standing honor guard around Stalin's open coffin as the masses stream past you to bid their last farewell.

- The members of the Central Committee are positioned around Stalin's coffin, facing outwards.
- One question is in your minds: Who gets to hold the important opening speech at the upcoming public funeral, and who will hold the equally prestigious closing speech?
- You can use the long hours of your honor guard duty to forge alliances and agree on who will hold the opening and closing speeches.
- Because this is a solemn occasion, you can't just leave your position around the sarcophagus. The people are only meters away, this is a very public place!
- You may only talk (quietly) to the two persons directly to your left and right, but never across Stalin's coffin!
- You can relay verbal messages to people further away.
- Or, if you want to directly talk to different people, you will have to somehow swap places, but you need to make it look like it's part of the ceremony!

The scene will end when the Central Committee agrees on who will hold the two speeches. The speeches will not be part of the larp, so you don't need to prepare for them.

The persons holding the speeches receive a name tag add-on:

THE ORATOR

Fifth Scene [An empty room.]

It's the eve of Stalin's grand funeral. Sadly, on Moscow's crowded streets a mass panic has occurred within the mourning masses, leaving more than hundred civilians trampled dead in the streets.

Someone has to publicly take the blame for this tragedy, but this could seriously hurt their career.

You are now gathering in an empty reception room close to the funeral hall.

The scene will end when the Central Committee agrees on who will take the blame for the deadly riots.

The person taking the blame receives a name tag add-on:

THE SCAPEGOAT

Third Act

Sixth Scene

[A room, with a table and chairs for the Central Committee.]

After the period of mourning, the Central Committee will soon convene to discuss their next steps.

The set voting agenda for today's meeting:

1. Proposed wheat deliveries to North Korea
 2. Releasing political prisoners as a gesture of goodwill
 3. Commencing work on the next 5 year plan
- The scene starts with everyone standing, scattered around the room in small groups, doing casual conversation.
 - Everybody will sit down at the table once they are all ready to begin with the official agenda.

A single vote of dissent is now allowed, overriding the First Rule!

This is the last scene. It will end when you decide to conclude the meeting (for whatever reason) and open the doors to leave the conference room.

Some people might receive a name tag add-on:

THE VICTIM



Now, reveal the third act (this page) for your participants to read.

1) The game master will now hand out a secret Ballot Paper (8) to each participant,

2) take a look at the results,

3) and then hand out the appropriate hidden Agenda (9) to each participant.

We advise players not to discuss the following scene beforehand out-of-character, as it might make the scene more chaotic and thus, more interesting. (But if you prefer to, feel free to do so!)

Set up and start the scene when you are ready.

Notes for the Game Master

ENDING A : The vote of no-confidence succeeds

If the plotters succeed in their vote of no-confidence against the power-grabber in Act 3, you can rush into the room as the “armed guards”, rough up and arrest the power-grabber, then lead him out of the room. End the larp when the others leave the conference room as well.

When does the vote succeed? Ideally, the plotters should manage to stage a unified vote of no-confidence, with all-but-one voting in favor of the motion, and they should also manage to get the scathing indictment signed by all remaining members of the Central Committee, but ultimately, it is up to your discretion to decide whether the plot has gained enough momentum to succeed.

Careful, though: Don't rush in too soon, as your entry will put an immediate end to the player-driven conflict in the room by abruptly shifting the balance of powers. Let them have their moment!

Afterwards, line everyone up and read out the following lines to them:

Historically, Lavrentiy Beria, First Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and chief of the Soviet secret police apparatus, was removed from power in a coup d'état led by Nikita Khrushchev during a meeting of the Central Committee in June 1953.

Accused of being a spy in British pay and of 357 counts of rape, he was apprehended and quickly transferred to an undisclosed military bunker before his loyal security forces could intervene.

In a secret trial, he was convicted of treason, terrorism and counter-revolutionary activity. He was sentenced to death and executed on December 23, 1953.



ENDING B: The vote of no-confidence fails

When the meeting concludes without a successful vote of no-confidence (as described above) and no proper indictment, end the larp when people are leaving the room.

Afterwards, line everyone up in front of the person who played the power-grabber (Agenda C). This person can then call out his verdict on every member of the Central Committee, describing their fate in the days and weeks ahead.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED:

The Animal Workshop to end on a positive note

- For two minutes, everyone will assume the identity of their pets, strolling or rolling around the room.
- You can greet each other in your animal form.
- And be sure to give everyone whose character you mistreated a good animal hug!

If you did play this larp, I am very interested in your thoughts and experiences.

Please send me a short note to robin@1000atmosphaeren.at

DE C R E E

The Central Committee accuses Comrade

of centralising power within their jurisdiction at the expense
of the Party and Central Committee,

of plotting against the Soviet Union with the goal of forwarding
the interests of foreign powers,

and of further crimes, for which they are to be removed from
the Central Committee effective immediately,

and brought to trial.

Signed

.....

.....

.....

The Central Committee of the Soviet Union.