

**Tiger Cage** by J. Tuomas Harviainen, 2011/2018 (Beta version, with 4 deployments done before).

The goal of this larp is to model an oppressive human situation from which there is no way out. It is set in the prison at Kerava, where a group of 12 violent offenders has been gathered from other prisons in Finland. They all want to get on parole. As a part of the system, after having served half of their sentences, they all have to take part in a ten-session therapy intended to lower their violent behavior. If one passes the course, it is possible to be set free soon after the last session. Even one act of physical violence, however, is an automatic fail. It is known that the programme works well, and that its leader, Dr. Kay, is a brilliant therapist. She has however fallen ill, with her key colleagues, at a dinner last night. Therefore, a completely inexperienced substitute has been recruited to lead this group's first meeting, at an hour's notice. And everyone here knows just how inexperienced that person is.

The group includes violent offenders of many types and severities, from murderers with life sentences (which in Finland actually tend to mean 12 years) to bar brawlers with short tempers. There are no sex offenders in the group, as they have their own rehabilitation programme (called "STOP").

The purpose of the game is to play anger, agitation and hate, but it will not contain any violence. Something will ALWAYS stop things from escalating that far – if not words by others, than the character's own desire to be set free. Revenge that takes place after the session can of course be sworn, and probably will. Feel free to immerse in unpleasant behavior, but please avoid insults that may also hurt a player (e.g., comments about weight, speech impediments, and so forth). Due to the topic of the game, however, a completely safe space cannot be guaranteed. Because any violent behavior will cause a character to lose their chances of parole, any touching of other characters that is not a supporting hug or a friendly handshake is IMPOSSIBLE during the duration of the game.

Tiger Cage was originally designed as an education tool to be used in Belarus.

The characters (Last names, each depicting the character's nature. Invent your own first name):

Sparrow, the therapist  
Hyena, the drug dealer  
Wolf, the outlaw biker  
Crow, the genius  
Eagle, toughest of them all  
Shrike, the torturer  
Shrew, seething with rage  
Fox, the asshole  
Mosquito, the parasite  
Horsefly, the pursuer  
Hound, the protector  
Lynx, the uncaring

Select the character you want and mark it in the sign-up form. The characters know each other by reputation, if at all. Everything that is not described in the material you may fill in as you see fit.

**Sparrow, the therapist**

*"What do you think you could have done differently in that situation?"*

You are a competent therapist, just one inexperienced with actual situations. You ask questions like "How do you feel about...", "Describe your emotions...", "Tell me of when you..." and so forth. The problem is that your authority level is still low and you feel the urge to step back when dealing with aggressive people. You do not really fear these criminals, but you do understand how risky the situation is. You always try to solve problems verbally and you believe everyone is good person at the core. It is thus very important that people admit the wrongs they have done and express sincere regret. You are not interested in punishment, just rehabilitation into society. You do have the power to have someone fail this course, should they turn out to be too aggressive or refuse to talk. You are married and have a six-month old child. Your spouse sometimes beats you.

**Hyena, the drug dealer**

*"What we do next is that you shut the fuck up."*

You are a drug dealer in their thirties, from Eastern Helsinki. You are currently serving a six-year sentence for beating up a snitch. Your violence is cold and rational, but you do get some kicks out of it as well. In every situation, you are the one in control, and you do not grant authority to anyone else. Anyone who tries to dominate you gets spoken or beaten down to the ground. Today, you will unfortunately have to settle on just the talking, because you want to get out of prison as soon as possible. You are good at making deals and with judging the trustworthiness of others, as well as lying in cold blood when necessary. You do not like getting your own hands dirty, so you're always out to recruit people to work for you. You laugh a lot, typically with a mean tone.

**Wolf, the outlaw biker**

*"You don't know how to appreciate freedom."*

You are a classic example of a biker gang member with a temper control problem. That is why you have not risen very far in the ranks of your club, but you are very proficient in both drug trade and in debt collection. You have a very negative view on any formal authority, but to your own people you are 100% loyal. You have no respect for the personal space of others, and stand too close to people whenever you are talking to them. This way, you emphasize your own strength and power. You have a spouse and two children, all of whom you miss a lot. You are currently serving an eight year sentence for a murder that your club's lawyer managed to explain away as a manslaughter taking place in the heat of the moment.

**Crow, the genius**

*"Each act of violence is a rational decision."*

You are utterly calculating, arrogant, and brilliant. To you life is a series of challenges, which you will all solve. For your engineering brain, things are easy to disassemble into smaller tasks, and then just pull the right strings to get each part done. Unfortunately, your partners are not always as smart, and now you are serving a five-year sentence for beating up a companion who tried to cheat you when you were embezzling a significant amount of money from the estate of a recently deceased person. You enjoy violent behavior by others, because you can often benefit from its results, so you provoke it when you have a chance. You are incapable of forming meaningful relationships and thus despise them, but you like to chat online with other geniuses like yourself.

### **Eagle, toughest of them all**

*"I'm above all that. But if you continue, I'll rip your eyes out."*

You are the toughest person here. You have pride, charisma, refinement and the capability for incredibly brutal violence. You can turn in the fraction of a second from stillness to a hurricane of rage. You have killed five people during your life, all in fits of fury, but been caught only once. That guy really should not have ran his mouth in the middle of the street. Now you are spending eight years in prison. You regret nothing, but you will have to pretend that you are calm and remorseful, in order to get out. You cannot help your temper, however, so you try to stay out of the line of direct fire. You will not let your status be challenged, nor your personal space breached, though.

### **Shrike, the torturer**

*"Does it hurt? Good."*

You have your whole life enjoyed the unwilling suffering of others. That shows both in your words and your past crimes. You have partaken in debt collection and in violent robberies, among other things, but not so much for the loot as for the chance to inflict harm. You do not kill, because it is much more fun to make people carry the damage you caused for the rest of their lives. You are good at making up excuses for your actions, but you also like to gloat about them. You are currently serving a sentence of ten years, for multiple assaults in which the victims suffered permanent brain damage.

### **Shrew, seething with rage**

*"You're still not getting it???"*

Since you are never the strongest or toughest person in the room, you respond to situations with hyperviolent behavior. Today, however, you are trying to keep your temper under control, because you want to get away from the constant need to defend yourself against stronger prisoners. You spent your youth in many containment facilities, and as an adult, this is not your first time inside. Luckily, your violence is usually brief and meant to just incapacitate, because otherwise you would be here for murder instead of just assault. You do not trust anyone, you are unable to sit still and need to constantly move around. When you speak to someone, you get very close to that person and wave your hands in front of their face for further emphasis. If you think you cannot get your message across, you repeat your words.

### **Fox, the asshole**

*"That guy just insulted you. Did you not notice, or are you being nice?"*

You know your place in the hierarchy and play thus to your true strength: intrigue. You have a long career in burglary, as a part of a solid team, but unfortunately once a person was at home and you are now doing four years for assault and battery. You know that people find you nice, so your plan is to make a couple of others here lose their tempers, so that you'll look good, innocent and easy to release. You have good self-control and know how to be nice and to support the therapist. You do your best to point out the flaws of others, so that conflicts between them would escalate, while trying yourself to appear as innocent as possible.

### **Mosquito, the parasite**

*"What was yours is now mine. Makes you annoyed, doesn't it?"*

You are incredibly annoying. You constantly complain about things, have no respect for the personal spaces of others, and you are very directly aggressive. If everyone else is silent, you will start talking, in your whiny tone of voice. You look for vulnerabilities in everyone and are completely void of any empathy. The easiest way to earn your scorn and mockery is to divulge personal vulnerabilities or to show any remorse. This is your third time in prison. Each sentence came from attempted murder of your drinking buddies, after a heavy night of drinking. When someone there revealed a weakness, your knife arose. You frequently change spouses, and keep each in line with your fists, until you get tired and move to the next partner.

### **Horsefly, the pursuer**

*"Of course I killed him. He was in my way."*

You are a really restless individual, constantly on the move. You like to walk around people, or very close to them, provocatively. You talk a lot, usually about completely unimportant things, and enjoy that it annoys other people. You are in prison for manslaughter, after stabbing the partner of a person you had an unrequited crush upon. This is your first time in prison, but your sentence is long because the judge thought you exhibited exceptional cruelty in the act. You yourself think that you are rational, cold and very intelligent, and the act was completely logical. You are in fact proud of the fact that in that too, you were a person who does not let things stand in their way. You have no empathy and enjoy the way in which the weak become your prey, mentally or physically. Like today's therapist. You do not think you will get out on parole, but are trying anyway. Your main reason for behaving today is that some of the others present are much more dangerous than you are, and will swat you easily if you annoy the wrong person too much. Yet you cannot completely resist your nature.

### **Hound, the protector**

*"Hey, at least I have faith in you."*

You had bad luck. You were in line to a club with your new spouse, when drunken idiots started groping. You pushed one of them away, and he hit his head on the curb and died. It was called manslaughter and not self-defense, because that asshole had influential parents. Now all you do is wait until you can get out of here. You can be flexible, if there is a good reason, but you do not back away from a fight. There is no threatening you, and no one may say anything bad about your spouse. You love motorcycles and the outlaw biker lifestyle (of which you have a very romanticized picture), and you therefore admire Wolf. If necessary, you will defend the therapist against everyone, because you are extremely loyal and think that the good should be protected from the bad. You encourage others to confess their bad deeds and to heal.

### **Lynx, the uncaring**

*"You know fucking nothing. There's no point for anyone to kill without reason."*

You are a cold, yet smart sociopath who has been preying on the outskirts of society your whole life. Illegal alcohol sales, sometimes drugs, and stolen merchandise. No one may command or challenge you – it's no big deal for you to drive someone to a quarry and shoot them. You may also do that for pay. On the other hand, you despise those who kill or beat up people for fun. Violence should be a rational, controlled tool and a natural continuation for when simple words will not do. You cannot stand it when someone breaches your personal space, socially or physically, and will put such irritants in line at once. This is your second time doing life (this time, you burned a cheating drug dealer alive in his car), so nothing fazes you anymore. Everyone else here is an amateur, no matter what they claim.

### **Running instructions**

- The optimal running time for this game is 70-90 minutes, plus at least 15min for preparation and 15-30 minutes for debriefing. The game may be rough on the therapist's player, but also for some others, so debrief and de-role carefully.
- The game runs best in a small, confined space with no table and at least three chairs fewer than there are players.
- Let the players themselves choose which character they want to play.