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SHARP RECOILS

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DESAPARECIDES

Under the repression of the military dictatorship in Argentina in the late 1970s, desaparecidos and their loved ones use the forbidden magic of tango to connect, to give each other hope, and to say goodbye.

Requirements

Players: 8 - 18

Duration: 4 hours

Props: Programmable color lights (minimum two) and speaker

Summary

The year is 1977. A far-right military dictatorship has taken over Argentina and established a series of secret concentration camps throughout the major cities. All over the country, people are taken by soldiers on the bus, in their workplaces, from their beds in the middle of the night. Some of them will be released, battered and hollow-eyed, weeks or months later. The rest will never be heard from again. These people taken away without a formal arrest, charges or trial are known as desaparecidos.

In the world of this larp, there is a magic in tango. Forbidden by the dictatorship, tango allows people who love and care for each other to dance together in a space beyond physical reality, no matter how far apart they may be.

Desaparecidos is a dance larp that alternates between verbal scenes with partnered tango and nonverbal freeform dance scenes. You will play as an ausente (one of the desaparecidos) or a presente (someone whose loved one

is a desaparecida.) You will also play a side character one-third of the time who is the opposite of your main character (a presente if your main character is ausente or vice versa.) If you wish, you may like to sign up with a trusted co-player so you can play an ausente-presente pair.

This game carries a content warning for torture. All players will play a character, either the main or the side, who experiences torture during the larp. You will hear a list of descriptions of torture and decide which ones your character experiences, then react to them. No one, PC or NPC, will be playing a torturer. The larp also has content warnings for state terrorism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, antisemitism, sexism, pregnancy, and tragic outcomes of pregnancy (most of these CWs vary by character.)

Game Structure

1. Background and Positionality
2. Go over the game structure
3. Talk about safety
4. Tango lesson
5. Break
6. Choose partners and characters
7. Develop connections and side characters
8. Develop the Baile de les Ausentes
9. Break
10. Develop the Baile de les Presentes
11. Break
12. Game
13. Moment of silence for the 30,400 desaparecidos
14. Debrief

El Tango

Characters are in pairs: one desaparecido, or ausente, and one presente. The presente is a loved one left bereft by the disappearance who is reaching out to the ausente with the magic of tango.

During tangos, you always dance in the same pair, ausente and presente. You may talk as much or as little as you like. The dance starts with the presente standing on a mark holding out their right hand. The ausente takes their hand and leads them into the dance.

El Baile de les Ausentes

In the Baile de les Ausentes, everyone dances to the same song each time. The ausentes play themselves, and the presentes step in to play ghosts of people who have already died at the black site, who the ausentes can see even if their captors cannot. Their dance routine represents their suffering at whatever black site they've been taken to. Each Baile after the first, they may make changes to their dance routine to show how they've been changed by the tango.

Prompts:

1. You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.
2. Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.
3. As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

El Baile de les Presentes

In El Baile de les Presentes, everyone dances to the same song each time. The presentes play themselves, and the ausentes step in to play other loved ones in the presentes' lives. Their dance routines represent their daily lives under the repression of the dictatorship. Each Baile after the first, they may make changes to their dance routine to show how they've been changed by the tango.

Prompts:

1. You wake up and go about your regular routine
2. Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and still affects your daily life

3. You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Ending Scene

In the ending scene, the pairs have one last dance. The ausentes decide whether they died or came home. For the last minute of the song, the lights go dark, and all the couples sway to the music in place. If the ausente is still in physical contact with the presente at the end of the song when the lights go up, that means they came home. If they died, the ausente breaks contact before the end of the song and takes a small step back..

Background and Positionality

In the year 1976, my father was a medical student in Buenos Aires. One day he came home from medical school to the apartment he shared with his friend and roommate, a socialist activist. The apartment was ransacked and his roommate was missing. My father, who was secretly a socialist himself, knew that he would be next. He fled the country while he still could. Later, my father's roommate was confirmed dead, murdered by the military dictatorship. Many people still don't have that closure on exactly what happened to their friends and family.

This story may seem very distant to you. It was decades ago, on another continent. The reason why I want you to play this game is that it is not very distant at all.

It is very close because I was born in the USA, and the USA is complicit. Argentina has gone through over a dozen regime changes since 1940, and all the right-wing coups d'état among those, including the one in 1976, were carried out by men trained in state terrorism by the USA, especially the CIA's School of the Americas.

It is very close because Buenos Aires in 1976 was not very different from any city you know. It had universities and shopping malls, drag balls and synagogues and sports stadiums. It happened there, and it could happen here, too.

It is very close because, in the words of the desaparecida Emilce Moler, "The past is not a series of stagnant dates that the calendar brings us every year. It is with us every time we decide, choose, and legislate." (translation mine.) This is true not only of other times, but other places. They are not just stagnant markers on a map. Every time we make a political decision, we stand at the gate of a concentration camp.

So here is what happened in Argentina in 1976, in a time and place that are not distant at all. The democratically

elected government was toppled by a right-wing coup, which installed a military dictatorship. Large swaths of the population were happy about the regime change. The previous years of democracy had been violent, chaotic, and bad for the economy. Some people welcomed any change. Others welcomed an end to Communist uprising and a restoration of good Catholic values

In the name of suppressing Communism and restoring moral order, the government waged war on its own people, targeting left-wing activists and union organizers, especially those who posed threats to “Catholic values”: Jews and LGBTQ people. Approximately 30,400 people were kidnapped to black sites, tortured, and most often killed by sedating them and dropping them from helicopters into the water. Pregnant people who were taken were forced to give birth in captivity and had their babies stolen from them and given up for adoption. Those people were called desaparecidos, the vanished ones, because no official records were kept of what happened to them. They simply disappeared, leaving their loved ones in agony. 30,400 people, and that figure does not include the injured and haunted survivors, or the people who still don’t know what happened to their loved ones.

The only people with the courage to resist the regime in public were the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, a group of women whose pregnant daughters had been taken. Every Thursday they marched in front of the Pink House, the seat of government, demanding to know where their families were. Otherwise, silence reigned.

You will be playing the desaparecidos, or the loved ones of desaparecidos, like my father. Your characters will get the chance their real life counterparts never got: to use the secret magic of Argentine tango to connect to their loved ones and seek closure.

How to Play an Argentinian

Most of you playing do not have an Argentinian background. Hopefully your character sheets will help you fully realize your character, but here is some additional advice.

- Do make 1970s references, if they would help ground you in the historical period. Your characters are aware of Che Guevara, the Vietnam War, and Led Zeppelin, should you wish to discuss them.
- Do react to tango in character. Tango became popular in the 1940s. The golden age of tango was the 1950s. Are you old enough to have gone out dancing with your lover during the golden age of tango, or is it your parents' nostalgia music? Do you have any tango-related memories, positive or negative?
- Do make your best effort to pronounce place and character names correctly. We will go over pronunciations together before the game starts.
- Don't speak Spanish in game unless that is authentic to your experience. Your characters are assumed to be speaking Spanish in fiction.
- Don't put on an accent unless that is authentic to your experience.
- Don't try to "act Argentinian" or "act Latine." Argentina is a diverse country, and I guarantee that there are Argentinians who look just like you. You already look Argentinian enough.

Workshops

Safety

We will use the double-tap check-in method. If you want to check in with someone, double tap them on the shoulder. Please double-tap from the front so as not to startle. You double-tap back on the shoulder to indicate that all is well. If the person does NOT double-tap back, assume that something is up and invite them to the side, out of the way of the dancing, to find out what.

You can also use the double-tap check-in to express a need that you have. Double-tap someone to get their attention, wait for the double-tap back acknowledgment, and indicate your need. There will be music playing throughout the larp so it might be hard to hear each other talk. Either indicate your needs with gestures, like a sweep of the arm to show you need personal space, or gesture them to the side out of the dancing so you can hear each other talk.

Remember, unless something has gone wrong and you need to communicate that, double-tap back when someone double-taps you.

Another safety point: during the tango lesson, if you would like the GM to come and correct you on tango, raise your hand to ask. Indicate whether you are okay with being touched to correct your stance. Otherwise, the GM will correct you without touching you.

Tango Lesson

Please note that this guide is of necessity written for a game-master who already knows how to tango, because it is very difficult to communicate tango stances and steps in a text format. If you want to run this game and do not know how to tango, you must go out and learn so you can teach your players.

1. Teach tango stance: feet together, knees together and soft, weight forward on the balls of the feet. “Sway to the music and feel the rhythm in your body.”
2. Teach tango walk, forward then backward, walking across the room to the music. “Your weight goes with the first foot, then you collect the trailing foot. Tango walk is about sweeping and trailing, not bouncing.”
3. “Find a partner. Choose one to be leader.” Demonstrate the open embrace. Emphasize the points of connection. Explain that this is the hardest embrace to dance in because you have fewer points of connection.
4. “Leaders, sway to the music. Followers, feel the shift in your leader and sway with them. Try closing your eyes to focus on the feeling. You can do this during the larp, too. How is it different for both of you when you sway with the follower’s eyes closed?”
5. “Switch roles. If you are comfortable with it, you will try the intermediate embrace with your partner.” Here, demonstrate standard tango embrace. Emphasize the push-pull: the clasped hands push against each other, while the hands on each other’s backs pull closer. Have them try swaying like this. “Try changing the amount of push or the amount of pull in the embrace. How does swaying together feel different when you do this?”
6. Now demonstrate the fully closed tango embrace. Explain that this is the easiest embrace to dance in. Suggest that partners try this embrace if they’re comfortable.
7. “Switch partners.”
8. “Decide with your partner who will lead and which embrace you want to be in. Remember the tango walk we did? Walk with your partner to the beat in a straight line (choosing a line that won’t collide with anyone.)”
9. “Now let’s try doing a side step together.” Demonstrate the side step.

10. “Leaders, you can decide whether to walk on the beat or on every other beat, and thus change how fast you’re traveling. Try stepping with your partner, forward, to the side, etc., and change your pace as you step.” Demonstrate this principle with a follower.
11. “Another thing you can do is change whether you are walking head-on, as we have been doing, or on the outside. When you walk on the outside, you don’t make direct eye contact.” Demonstrate how this works. “How does it feel different with your partner when you do this?”
12. “Switch partners. Now we will learn the carousel. Leaders, you invite the follower into carousel with a twist.” Demonstrate this. “Followers, when you feel this twist, cross one foot behind the other and put all your weight on your front foot. Leaders, walk backwards to spin them in place.”
13. “Now we put it all together. Imagine you are a vampire and a werewolf and you’re deciding whether to become allies or eat each other. Use all the tools in your arsenal you’ve learned in this tango lesson to express yourselves. Use the level of embrace and the push-pull tension. Use the sway in place, the walk, the side step, and the carousel. Use changes in speed and the alignment of your bodies. Go!”
14. “Switch partners. Now you are friends living under the junta and you each suspect the other of being a communist.”
15. Here, if you chose not to cast the characters in advance, have everyone choose a partner and their characters.

Connections & Side Characters

1. Divide the players into presentes and ausentes.
2. Read to them the prompts for the two bailes.
3. Within their own group, they should find someone to have a connection with. Their character sheets have suggested connections they can use for inspiration, or they can come up with their own. Tell them to keep the baile prompts in mind and form a connection that they can play on during the bailes.
4. Now have each of the presentes pick an ausente who is not their partner. They will form a side character who they will play during the Baile de les Ausentes. Tell them they are playing ghosts who haunt the black site, re-enacting their trauma in life. They could have known each other before the black site, or they could have met when the ghost was already dead. Repeat the prompts for the Baile de les Ausentes and make sure they form a character who they can play on during these prompts. Suggested connections can also be an inspiration here. By the end, have everyone pick a name for the side character from the list of suitable names (see Appendix).
5. Now, the ausentes each pick a presente who is not their partner. They will create a side character based on the presente's suggested connections. Read the prompts for the Baile de les Presentes and make sure they make a connection they can play on during the nonverbal baile. Make sure everyone picks a name for their side character from the list (see Appendix).

Developing the Routines

1. Start with El Baile de les Ausentes.
2. Explain the structure of the routine, that they get a minute per prompt, and which colors go with which prompts. Say that ghosts are included in the routine, re-enacting their trauma in life.
3. For the first prompt: You are woken at 5 in the morning to the sound of screams outside your cell. Your day of horror begins. These are some things your character might experience in the course of their day. You don't have to directly represent any of these things in your dance if you don't want to. The dance can be an abstract representation of your suffering. Whatever works. Please be advised that I am about to read you a list of tortures.
 - a. Tortured by electrocution with a cattle prod, on the nipples or tongue or anywhere
 - b. Your cell might be deliberately flooded with cold filthy water
 - c. Plunged headfirst into cold sewer water until you nearly drown
 - d. Obligated to perform sexual favors in exchange for food
 - e. Food doused in salt with no water provided
 - f. Crusts of bread thrown on the dirty floor for you to eat like a dog
 - g. Brought to a priest who says you must confess to your torturers to be absolved by God
 - h. Women may have their hair shaven off or torn out
 - i. Forced to give birth in a bathroom and then immediately clean up the mess

- j. Forced to cook food for their torturers
 - k. Forced to keep the torturer's records for them
 - l. Forced to clean up the blood from rooms or cars where other prisoners were killed
 - m. Forced to help with constructing new expansions to the concentration camp
 - n. Beaten when they ask to see a lawyer or judge
 - o. Guards may bring you things they stole from your house or a family member's house to frighten you
4. For the second prompt: find or do something that reminds you that you're still human. Some suggestions based on real stories:
- a. Scratch a message into your cell wall.
 - b. Mouth off to your captors.
 - c. When you're done washing a sheet for the guards, give it to another prisoner.
 - d. Help a pregnant prisoner give birth.
 - e. Save up food and give it to a worse off prisoner.
 - f. Charm, collaborate, or steal things from guards and use them for your own comfort, or give them to other prisoners.
 - g. Try to make another prisoner laugh.
 - h. Reassure a prisoner who is blindfolded.
 - i. Beat up another prisoner for the rush of power it gives you.
 - j. Talk to each other through the walls, or tap Morse code if the walls are too thick.
 - k. Try to keep your baby alive in this place.

5. For the third prompt: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people who you loved and lost. This is a good time to interact a lot with your ghost.
6. Repeat the routine a couple of times until it is well established. Encourage people to interact with their connections during the routine.
7. Give everyone a break, then proceed to El Baile de les Presentes.
8. Explain the structure of the routine and the light color changes that go with each prompt.
9. For the first prompt: you go about your normal day, as normal as things can be when you carry a secret that your friends and colleagues are too scared to even acknowledge.
10. Second prompt: Something happens to remind you of the dictatorship that reigns in Argentina. How does this affect the rest of your day? Some examples based on true stories:
 - a. On the bus, another passenger is hauled off the bus by soldiers in civilian dress
 - b. You're walking along the river and a dead body washes up on the bank
 - c. You're walking through the city and you hear screams coming from behind a barbed wire fence
 - d. You have to pass through a military checkpoint on the way to work
 - e. There is a patriotic parade waving symbols of the dictatorship and photos of the generals
 - f. You see the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo (have any Abuelas characters wave) marching in protest

- a. You see a Ford Falcon without a license plate pull up along the street where you live and stop.
 - b. You tune into the radio and hear a general brag about how safe he's made the country under his rule.
 - c. You see someone wearing a fascist decal on their coat.
 - d. You come home and see your place has been tossed.
 - e. You get a call from a soldier who says he'll tell you where your loved one is in exchange for a bribe.
 - f. You beg a lawyer to write a writ of habeas corpus for your loved one and they refuse.
 - g. You go to the Missing Persons Office at the Pink House and they tell you your loved one is on vacation.
11. In the evening, you gather with your loved ones and remember the person who was torn away from you.
 12. Repeat the routine a couple of times until it is well established. Encourage people to interact with their connections during the routine.

Runtime Guide

Play Schedule

1. Baile de les Ausentes (“Código de Barra” by Bajofondo)
2. Baile de les Presentes (“Tanguera” by Mariano Mores)
3. Tango (“La Cumparsita” by Astor Piazzolla)
4. Baile de les Ausentes (“Código de Barra” by Bajofondo)
5. Baile de les Presentes (“Tanguera” by Mariano Mores)
6. Tango (“Desde el alma” by Francisco Canaro)
7. Baile de les Ausentes (“Código de Barra” by Bajofondo)
8. Baile de les Presentes (“Tanguera” by Mariano Mores)
9. Tango (“Ojos negros” by Gran Orquesta de la Plata)
10. Baile de les Ausentes (“Código de Barra” by Bajofondo)
11. Baile de les Presentes (“Tanguera” by Mariano Mores)
12. Tango (“Libertango” by Astor Piazzolla)
13. Baile de les Ausentes (“Código de Barra” by Bajofondo)
14. Baile de les Presentes (“Tanguera” by Mariano Mores)
15. Tango (“Volver” by Estrella Morente)

Lighting Design

Tango

Purple and yellow (except for the last minute of the last tango when everything goes dark)

El Baile de les Ausentes

All white (0:00 - 00:51)

You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. It's another day in the Banfield Pit.

Orange and yellow (00:51 - 2:01)

Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink (2:01 - 3:00)

As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

El Baile de les Presentes

Blue and orange (0:00 - 1:01)

You go about your regular routine.

Blue and red (1:01 - 1:47) (add siren lights or a searching spotlight if possible)

Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Grass green and gold (1:47 - 3:00)

You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost.

Debrief

For our debrief, we are going to split into two sides of the space. One side is for people who want to do debrief activities on their own. The other side will go through some GM-led debrief activities as a group. Please do not talk to the people on the solo side until the debrief is over. People may switch between sides at any time.

Solo Debrief

Provide the following materials for the solo debriefers to use:

- The “What Happened After” text (below) as print-outs.
- Solo debrief activities (below) as print-outs.
- Blank paper and writing utensils.
- Postcards or envelopes and stamps.

Here are the solo debrief activities people can do:

- Check in with your body. Is there anything your body needs right now? A stretch? Some water?
- You’ve been moving as your character for a while. Now try moving as yourself. How do you move through the world? How is it different from your character?
- Close your eyes and imagine your character standing in front of you. Bid goodbye to them in whatever way makes sense to you, then imagine them turning around and walking away.
- I have provided envelopes, stamps, and cards for you. Write a card to your future self with something you want to remember about the larp.
- On the provided paper, write a letter to your character saying goodbye.

- On the provided paper, write an epilogue for your character.
- On the provided paper, draw something about your experience at the larp. This could be an image that sticks in your mind, or an abstract expression of movement and feeling.

Group Debrief

- Let's all shake off our characters together.
- Read aloud "What Happened After" (below.)
- We will go around the circle and say something we need right now, whether that's a hug, a nap, or information about the person your character is based on.
- Let's break into smaller groups of about four. In our smaller groups, go around and share something you learned from the larp. This could be something profound, or something as simple as having learned some new words in Spanish.

What Happened After

The junta's reign of terror lasted for five more years after the time of this larp. It did not end because of a popular uprising. It ended because the junta waged a disastrous war against the UK and lost so badly that they had to step down. The trials of the generals began two years later. If you want to learn more about these trials, I highly recommend the film *Argentina 1985*.

The trials were put to a halt by two laws that were passed in 1986 and 1987, which declared an expiration date after which crimes by the junta could not be prosecuted, and which declared all members of the military to be beyond prosecution if they were just following orders. These were deemed necessary to "keep the peace" and "reconcile" after the dictatorship.

Thanks to tireless activism by the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo and others, these laws were repealed in 2003, and trials of the surviving oppressors and torturers continued in 2006. Testimonies, depositions, and reparations continue to this day, as groups that had been ignored in previous rounds of trials, especially LGBTQ+ people, have been recognized as particular victims of the regime and now get their own chance at justice.

The current president of Argentina, Javier Milei, has repeatedly cast doubt on the estimate that 30,400 people were disappeared, demanding concrete proof where of course none can be found. He has engaged in “both sides” rhetoric about the dictatorship, saying that the dictators were bad, but so were the “Communist terrorists” they suppressed.

Characters

Content Warnings

Here I provide some character-specific content warnings to help match players with content they will be fine playing. If a character is not listed, they have no additional content warnings.

Emilce: transphobia, rejection by family, sex work

Cecilia: Catholic trauma / internal conflict

Analía: ableism

Néstor: ableism

Mariano: homophobia

Floreal: homophobia

David: anti-semitism, former supporter of fascism

Gabriel: anti-semitism, refugee status, exile

Leonel: collaboration

Paola: mental illness

Rosita: pregnancy and bad outcomes thereof, anti-semitism

Shlomit: anti-semitism

María: fascist character

Cupido: fascist character

José: fascist character

Mercedes: fascist character

Emilce (ausente)

Presente: Cecilia (younger sister)

Age: 19

Gender: Butterfly*

Profession: Street sex worker

Why You Were Taken: You're active in an informal union of sex workers, but to be honest, you don't know whether they took you because of your union organizing or because you were still wearing a feathered dress a week after Carnival. Even before the junta took over, your body was illegal for most of the year.

How You Feel About Cecilia: Your parents kicked you out a couple of years ago for being a butterfly. Your younger sister's love and acceptance mean the world to you, even if she disapproves of the sex work. You're worried what will happen if she tries to materially support you now, though. She's only sixteen. If your parents don't make her life hell for this, the cops will. And what kind of lawyer will help a butterfly anyway?

What You Would Do If Freed: You wish you could buy a house in Delta del Tigre, the gay vacation spot on stilts in the river delta. On the bottom floor you'd have dances and drag contests, and on the upper floor, any butterfly could stay who needed to get away. Not that you have the money for any such thing.

Your Greatest Fear: That you will die here, and your parents will hold a funeral for a man you never were.

Suggested Connections: an estranged family member, another trans sex worker from your union, a client you grew fond of, the priest who you still wish would give you redemption

*mariposa, butterfly, is a term used in the 70s and now to refer to feminine queer people (like queen, pansy, or fairy.) It is an insult but has been reclaimed by some.

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Emilce)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Emilce): purple and yellow light

Cecilia (presente)

Ausente: Emilce (older sister)

Age: 16

Gender: Girl

Profession: Student

How You Feel About Emilce: You have known she was a butterfly* for years now, and you love having an older sister. Your parents... didn't feel the same. They kicked her out of the house two years ago. You used to be their perfect obedient Catholic daughter, but they now despise you for loving Emilce as she is, and you find yourself less and less perfect and obedient to the church that rejects her.

What You've Done Since She Was Taken: You were never any kind of activist or radical, but if your parents won't help Emilce, you will. You should have done something to help her before. You are working after school, saving up money to pay a lawyer. You're starting to talk quietly to the student activists so they can help you find a lawyer who will take Emilce's case.

What You Would Do If She Were Freed: You would take back everything you've ever said about her sex work being sinful. You would move out of your parents' house and share a flat with her. You would ask her to help you find out who you can become someday besides a good Catholic wife.

How You Found Out She Was Taken: A butterfly sex worker friend of hers came to your house and told you.

Suggested Connections: a teacher, an extended family member, a classmate, a younger sibling, someone who attends your church

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Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

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Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Cecilia)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Cecilia): purple and yellow light

Analia (ausente)

Presente: Néstor (your son)

Age: 36

Gender: Woman

Profession: Worker at a rehabilitation center for people recovering from injuries

Why You Were Taken: You are a disability rights activist. You fought hard to pass a law in 1975 that required all companies to have at least 4% disabled employees. It was one of the first laws struck down by the junta. Fighting for your rights apparently makes you a threat.

How You Feel About Néstor: Nothing is more important to you than making sure Néstor feels proud to be himself: proud to be blind, like you. You've always danced with him, sung with him, played soccer with him. Now that you and your husband have been taken, you don't know who will teach him to love himself. The militaristic culture of the new Argentina will view his beautiful, athletic body as broken.

What You Would Do If Freed: Fight alongside your activist friends to get your husband out, of course. Then get out your Braille typewriter and write down everything that's happened to you. They want to erase you? You will make sure everyone hears your story.

Your Greatest Fear: That the junta will erase everything good you have ever fought for.

Suggested Connections: Your husband, a disability activist friend, a dance partner, someone you helped at the rehab center, someone who pities you and you resent it

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Analía)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Analía): purple and yellow light

Néstor (presente)

Ausente: Analía (your mother)

Age: 11

Gender: Boy

Profession: Student

How You Feel About Analía: You love both your parents. But it's been especially hard without Mamá. She's blind since birth like you, and she just gets it. Everything is so different now under the junta and you wish she were with you to help you understand. You don't know what those soldiers are doing to her but you know it must be bad.

What You've Done Since She Was Taken: You go to school with mostly seeing kids, and you feel weirder about school now, since a lot of it now is about getting boys excited to serve Argentina in the military, which you can't do. You used to love running and gymnastics but you hate that it all feels like army training now. You don't know how to talk to other kids because no one wants to talk about your missing parents. Your grandparents take you to the Library for the Blind and you try to read books that will explain all of this.

What You Would Do If She Were Freed: Beg her to move out of this country. You know she wants to make Argentina better, but you hate it here, and you read in books that things are better in Europe. Even Uruguay would be better than this.

How You Found Out She Was Taken: You were visiting with your grandparents. When they took you home, your parents were gone, and half your things had been stolen.

Suggested Connections: a classmate you used to like but now feel estranged from, a grandparent, a teacher, a librarian at the Library for the Blind

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Néstor)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Néstor): purple and yellow light

Mariano (Ausente)

Presente: Floreal (your boyfriend)

Age: 32

Gender: Man

Profession: Lawyer

Why You Were Taken: It was either your activism with the Homosexual Liberation Front or all the writs of habeas corpus you've written to free desaparecidos. Or both.

How You Feel About Floreal: When you first met Floreal, he was embracing another man. You'd run into a gay cruising spot to shout a warning because you'd seen cops nearby. He thanked you after and asked you how to be brave himself. You invited him to join the Homosexual Liberation Front, and he flourished. He thinks you taught him to be brave, but you think he taught himself. He lives openly with you as your boyfriend despite the risk to his job as a schoolteacher.

What You Would Do If Freed: Just keep your head down and live quietly from now on. You don't know what's happened to Floreal since you were both taken, but you do know that if you try to help, you'll just end up back here. You will retreat to the closet and take only boring cases to court. You can't do this again.

Your Greatest Fear: That your mother will hear you died here and celebrate that you finally got what you deserve.

Suggested Connections: a former lover, a fellow prisoner you're having an emotional affair with, a gay friend of yours who you never would have thought was a radical

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Mariano)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Mariano): purple and yellow light

Floreal (presente)

Ausente: Mariano (your boyfriend)

Age: 28

Gender: Man

Profession: Schoolteacher

How You Feel About Mariano: You met Mariano when you were at a cruising spot and he ran in to warn everyone the cops were coming. You fled right behind him, then you thanked him and asked how you could become brave like him. He told you about the Homosexual Liberation Front. That was five years ago, before the coup. You've lived together openly as a couple for four years.

How You Found Out He Was Taken: You were taken with him. You were walking home together from a Homosexual Liberation Front meeting when a Ford Falcon pulled up beside you and took you.

What You've Done Since He Was Taken: The soldiers released you after a week of torment. There was still no sign of Mariano. You have no idea why you were released and not him; you're both gay activists, after all. You have returned to work, but not to activism. Without Mariano's bravery, you can't. You wonder if your students notice what you've been through.

What You Would Do If He Were Freed: You're a very reserved person, except when you do drag to cut loose. You wonder if he knows how much you love him. If you got him back, you would say "I love you" every day. You would treasure him every way you know how.

Suggested Connections: a student, a relative who doesn't really accept you but keeps up appearances, someone you talk to about your week of hell, a fellow drag performer

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Floreal)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Floreal): purple and yellow light

David (ausente)

Presente: Gabriel (close friend, flatmate)

Age: 30

Gender: Man

Profession: Journalist

How You Feel About Gabriel: Gabriel washed up at your synagogue's Seder looking like he'd been wandering through the desert himself, and when he told you he'd just been chased out of his provincial town for his politics, you knew you had to help. You turned your home office into a small bedroom and invited him in. You've never regretted it. Gabriel is a visionary architect who wants to design better cities for everyone.

Why You Were Taken: You are sorry to say that you welcomed the coup at first, because the last government had been so awful. But then people from your synagogue sought you out for any news about their loved ones who had disappeared. Horrified, you gathered the names and published them as a magazine feature. That's when they took you.

What You Would Do if Freed: You have to redeem yourself for supporting the coup. (Gabriel always knew it would be a nightmare.) You have to keep gathering information on the junta's secret crimes so you can send it to a human rights group.

Your Greatest Fear: That Gabriel fled an unthinkable fate in his hometown only to face the same fate in the big city. And you cheered it on.

Suggested Connections: a relative who you never thought would end up in a black site, someone who told you early in the coup that you got it wrong, a mother who begged you to help find her child

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play David)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play David): purple and yellow light

Gabriel (presente)

Ausente: David (close friend, former roommate)

Age: 25

Gender: Man

Profession: Architect

How You Feel About David: You owe him everything. You had to flee your home, the farming province of Tucumán, 3 years ago when the democratic government cracked down on Communists there. When you were lost, alone, and terrified in vast Buenos Aires, David took you, a near stranger, into his home. You have tried in so many ways to repay him but it's never enough.

What You've Done Since He Was Taken: You should have stayed and tried to get a lawyer to help. Instead, once more, you fled. You finished your architectural degree, which was almost done anyway, in Uruguay, then moved on*. You frequently stay in touch with your comrades back in Argentina by phone and by mail, and you choke on your guilt that you are safe and they are not.

What You Would Do if He Were Freed: Finally repay your debt to him by helping him get a visa and come live with you in your new home. It would be your chance to redeem yourself.

How You Found Out He Was Taken: You came home from a late night study session and found your shared apartment ransacked, every corner searched.

Suggested Connections: Argentinians you call/write to from abroad, a fellow exile in your new country, an activist who goes back and forth between countries to help other people get out

*You may decide which country Gabriel ultimately emigrated to.

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Gabriel)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Gabriel): purple and yellow light

Leonel (ausente)

Presente: Paola (your wife)

Age: 36

Gender: Man

Profession: Engineering professor

Why You Were Taken: You are no Communist, but you have been very clear with your students that the dictatorship should stand down and hold elections immediately. The junta hates academics, so you suppose that was enough.

How You Feel About Paola: If she had been given the same opportunities as you, she would be a better engineering professor than you. You often ask her for critique on your lesson plans. In a way, you feel guilty for setting her on a housewife's path—but you do both love your children*, and she would have so much schooling to make up for.

What You Would Do If You Were Freed: You have been helping your jailers, repairing their radios and their electrical torture equipment. It gives you a reprieve from the torture and the shackles, but you don't think you deserve to live after what you've done. If you're brave, you'll bring yourself to justice.

Your Greatest Fear: That the selfish actions you've taken have damned everyone around you. Especially Paola, who must be suffering because you spoke up.

Suggested Connections: a former student, a colleague who's more radical than you, someone who knows you collaborate and hates you for it, someone who knows and is kind to you anyway

*You and your co player may decide how many children you have and their ages.

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Leonel)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Leonel): purple and yellow light

Paola (presente)

Ausente: Leonel (your husband)

Age: 32

Gender: Woman

Profession: Housewife, seamstress

How You Found Out He Was Taken: They broke into your home in the middle of the night. The kids all woke up in a blind panic. Leonel yelled at you to take them and run. When you returned, the house was pillaged and he was gone.

How You Feel About Leonel: You have lived vicariously through him, in a way. You never graduated high school because your mother needed you to look after your younger siblings and keep house. But you love math and science, and Leonel, even as an engineering professor, treats you as an intellectual equal. No one in your life respects you for your mind that way.

What You've Done Since He Was Taken: You know you should keep it together for your children*, but you're falling apart. You can't fulfill the orders for your home seamstress business. You took a huge financial blow because Leonel's kidnappers robbed your house to the floorboards. The junta banned psychotherapy so you can't see your therapist. You feel your suffering might crush you.

What You Would Do if He Were Freed: You feel awful just thinking it, but you would check out of all your family responsibilities and just focus on piecing yourself back together. But how could you possibly ask Leonel to take charge of your children and finances when he just survived the unthinkable?

Suggested Connections: your children, your mother, someone who goes to your church, someone who's helped you in your hour of desperation

*You and your co player may decide how many children you have and their ages.

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Paola)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Paola): purple and yellow light

Rosita (ausente)

Presente: Shlomit (your mother)

Age: 23

Gender: Woman

Profession: Fresh out of college

Why You Were Taken: You and your boyfriend, Arturo, were active Communists all through college. You went to poor neighborhoods and distributed food and pamphlets about workers' rights. You were kidnapped together.

How You Feel About Shlomit: You and Arturo recently learned you are pregnant. You now hope you will be the kind of mother who Shlomit was for you. You didn't appreciate her before, because she wasn't radical enough. She kept her opinions moderate, she encouraged you to follow your own path, she taught you your Jewish family heritage, and she tried to keep you safe. You threw all that away to be a hero.

What You Would Do If You Were Freed: Raise your child quietly and peacefully, with your mother's help. Try to forget what it was like to tell a mother her children would get to eat tonight, or show a factory worker how to get leverage on her boss.

Your Greatest Fear: That you will never get to meet your baby.

Suggested Connections: your boyfriend, a labor activist who you taught and radicalized, someone you cheated on your boyfriend with when the stress was getting to you, a mother who understands your fears

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Rosita)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Rosita): purple and yellow light

Shlomit (presente)

Ausente: Rosita (your daughter)

Age: 45

Gender: Woman

Profession: Housewife

How You Feel About Rosita: You didn't want her to be railroaded into a domestic life like you were, so you encouraged her to follow her own path. You didn't expect that path to be Communist activism. Your family fled Nazi Germany when you were young, so your instinct is to stay safe.

What You've Done Since She Was Taken: If Rosita could see you now, she'd find you've become quite the radical yourself. You were invited to join a group of women whose daughters had been taken. Every Thursday you march in the plaza in front of the houses of government demanding to know where your families are. You call yourselves the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo, and you're the only ones who openly resist the regime. There was a photo of you in a magazine calling you a Communist infiltrator! You're terrified but you somehow feel so free.

What You Would Do If She Were Freed: Help her raise the child she's expecting. But the Abuelas are also your family now, and you'll never stop marching until they all get their families back.

How You Found Out She Was Taken: They came to your house the next night and stole everything that had to do with Rosita: files from your file cabinet, boxes from your attic, photo albums.

Suggested Connections: the Abuela de la Plaza de Mayo who invited you to the group, a member of your synagogue, a lookout for cops when the Abuelas gather, a conservative friend who loves you but doesn't understand your activism

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Shlomit)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Shlomit): purple and yellow light

Francisco (ausente)

Presente: María (your mother)

Age: 42

Gender: Man

Profession: Priest

Why You Were Taken: You were trained in liberation theology* by the bishop who mentored you through seminary. He sent you to work and unionize at a factory, then to a parish in Goya, the rural town where you were born before your mother migrated to Buenos Aires. There, you helped the peasants organize to demand better working conditions from landowners. The Agrarian Leagues were crushed a year before the dictatorship. Still, when you visited Buenos Aires for an episcopal conference, you were taken.

How You Feel About María: She taught you the redemptive power of faith, praying for you every day and working herself to the bone in other people's houses to send you to seminary at age 12 when you said you wanted to. You will always love her for that. But she rejects liberation theology and supports the junta. Her beliefs cause you great pain.

What You Would Do If You Were Freed: You must return to help your parish in Goya, but you need to be smart about it. It's not safe to have Agrarian Leagues, but surely you can do something to help.

Your Greatest Fear: That God has abandoned you in this place.

Suggested Connections: someone who confesses to you, someone who was in your union, your bishop, someone you bless/pray for, someone you might have dated if you weren't a priest

*Liberation theology is a revolutionary Latin American Catholic movement that holds that Jesus calls for liberation from poverty and oppression as well as liberation from sin.

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Francisco)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Francisco): purple and yellow light

Maria (presente)

Ausente: Francisco (your son)

Age: 64

Gender: Woman

Profession: Maid

How You Feel About Francisco: Your husband, a soldier, died when Francisco was young. You moved from your rural town of Goya to Buenos Aires to work as a housekeeper. Life was hard, but you taught him to turn to Jesus for solace. When he told you he wanted to go to seminary, you worked even harder to make sure he could. However, his life as a priest has not been as you hoped. He follows the teachings of a radical bishop and ministers in slums. He even went back to Goya to encourage peasants to fight the government. How is this the path of God?

How You Found Out He Was Taken: You don't know that he's been taken. He was back in Buenos Aires for an episcopal conference, and when you went to meet him at his hotel, the staff said he'd vanished. You think something bad happened but you're not sure what.

What You've Done Since He Was Taken: You've asked your knitting circle at your church about what happened to Francisco. They said that the government would never hurt a holy man. If he is a subversive, he likely left the country to join his fellow radicals. You pray he didn't do such a thing without saying goodbye to you.

What You Would Do If He Were Freed: You believe he fled to Mexico. You hope to use the tango magic to beg him to come back to Buenos Aires and get a safe position in a safe parish. Wouldn't just tending to his flock be enough?

Suggested Connections: someone whose house you clean, a member of your knitting circle, your priest, a friend of Francisco's who checks in on you regularly at his request

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play María)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play María): purple and yellow light

Claudia (ausente)

Presente: Cupido (your father)

Age: 16

Gender: Girl

Profession: Student

Why You Were Taken: You are a member of a student socialist organization. You secretly used your mother's print shop to make flyers and newsletters for the organization.

How You Feel About Cupido: Your father has always involved you in everything he loves most. He taught you to dance tango, play football, fix cars. You love him for that. But as you got involved in activism, his role as chief of police began to trouble you. He used to give you rides in his cop car, and you never saw him do anything bad, but you know your local police beat up striking workers. Could your father, who has always wanted the best for you, be the enemy of the cause you hold dear?

What You Would Do If You Were Freed: You haven't had the chance to just be a teenager, not really. You've been looking over your shoulder for fascists and spies for years. You would love to just go to high school, dance with someone cute, get your nails done with friends. But to live like a normal teenager, you'd have to be able to trust your parents. Even if Dad is retired now.

Your Greatest Fear: Your parents don't know you did your "subversive activities" out of Mom's print shop. You may have put them in the junta's crosshairs—and they don't even know it.

Suggested Connections: another activist you have a crush on, someone older who tries to protect you, someone younger than you who was killed

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Claudia)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Claudia): purple and yellow light

Cupido (presente)

Ausente: Claudia (your daughter)

Age: 60

Gender: Man

Profession: Retired police chief, now working part time at your wife's print shop

How You Found Out She Was Taken: You were there. You tried to fight the masked men in your house, but one of them kicked you to the ground and held you at gunpoint. You realized he was one of your former subordinates in the police. You used to get along great. How did this happen?

How You Feel About Claudia: She's always been such a good girl, a smart student who likes to play soccer and sing tangos with you. You don't know how she got mixed up in all that kiddie Communism stuff. Did she really think that she and her little friends would change the world? You warned her that she might get hurt, and said you could protect her if she stopped agitating. She refused.

What You've Done Since She Was Taken: You've approached all your old friends in the force for help. So far, they've all called you a shit father for letting your daughter become a subversive, and slammed the door in your face. Your wife's friends won't talk to her either. It's as if they think Communism is genetic.

What You Would Do if She Were Freed: Close up the print shop and move with her and your wife to Mar del Plata, the beach town you all love. If she would even agree to live with you after all that's happened.

Suggested Connections: Your wife, a former coworker in the police, an informant or criminal you encountered often at your job, a member of your amateur football league

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Cupido)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Cupido): purple and yellow light

José (ausente)

Presente: Mercedes (your friend)

Age: 23

Gender: Man

Profession: Midshipman (navy)

Why You Were Taken: Your job was to transport captured subversives from one place to another. One of these places was the Air Force base where they'd be dropped from helicopters into the sea. The navy priest said it was humane, so you went along—until one of the prisoners looked just like your 14 year old brother. He couldn't be a terrorist. So you released all the prisoners in your truck. When you returned to base, they threw you in a cell.

How You Feel About Mercedes: You were next-door neighbors growing up. Your schoolmates teased you for being so close to a girl. But Mercedes is your best friend, so brave and sure about everything. It's her younger sister Francisca you're sweet on. It's because of your friendship with Mercedes and your shy nature that you worried you weren't man enough, and joined the navy. Mercedes strongly supports your decision.

What You Would Do If You Were Freed: You would go to the international press to denounce your superiors. Surely it's not your fault you drove innocents to their executions—it's the officers who ordered you! You'll destroy them for what they've done.

Your Greatest Fear: Mercedes's husband is an officer at the Air Force base where you drove the prisoners. You fear she knows exactly what you were meant to do—and thinks you're a coward for failing to do your duty.

Suggested Connections: someone you transported to the black site, someone who wants revenge on you, someone who pities you, your younger brother

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play José)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play José): purple and yellow light

Mercedes (presente)

Ausente: José (your friend)

Age: 22

Gender: Woman

Profession: Housewife

How You Feel About José: You were next-door neighbors growing up, and you were inseparable. Everyone teased you that you'd marry one day, but he only had eyes for your little sister Francisca, and he is nothing like the man you married. You're so proud of him for going into service for the country. He's always been shy and sensitive, and the navy will toughen him up. You're now married to an air force man, and you do everything you can to support the troops.

How You Found Out He Was Taken: You don't know that he's imprisoned. But he normally calls and writes you regularly, and he hasn't in a while. When you asked your little sister, his sweetheart, she said she also hasn't heard from him. You're very worried.

What You've Done Since He Was Taken: You asked your husband about it. He said José could be on a secret mission. Sometimes Naval Intelligence sends men to infiltrate Communist terrorist cells. Imagine sweet, straightforward José doing such a thing! You've channeled your anxiety into planning a veterans' parade.

What You Would Do If He Were Freed: You just want to tell José to follow orders, be brave, and do his best. When he finishes his tour, you'll throw the wedding for him and Francisca.

Suggested Connections: Your husband, the person you sleep with when your husband is away, a friend from church, your sister, a friend who you think might be a radical

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Mercedes)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Mercedes): purple and yellow light

Graciela (ausente)

Presente: Emilio (your brother)

Age: 30

Gender: Woman

Profession: Daycare worker

Why You Were Taken: When your daycare unionized ten years ago, the police broke your strike by breaking heads. That was when you decided to fight back. You joined Montoneros as a revolutionary soldier and rapidly climbed the ranks. Seven years ago, you led an op to kidnap Aramburu, who ruled Argentina with an iron fist when you were young. He never faced trial for his crimes, so you executed him. Somehow, you were never caught... until now.

How You Feel About Emilio: You are the oldest of eight, and Emilio is the second oldest. You neglected and even endangered your family during your years as a Montonera. Emilio picked up the slack, landing himself an excellent job as an accountant and supporting your working-class family. Your captors let you call him from the black site once a week, but with a navy man listening in on every call, you can't have a real conversation.

What You Would Do If You Were Freed: You no longer believe so much in revolutionary violence. Argentina needs real justice, which is not what you gave Aramburu. You want to try to discover what real justice is.

Your Greatest Fear: Your captors are trying to "re-educate" you to be a "proper woman." You pretend to be one so they'll stop torturing you. But what if you become the mask you wear?

Suggested Connections: a teenage activist you once cared for at work, a younger sibling who followed your path, someone who hero worships you for killing Aramburu (or fears you for it)

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play Graciela)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play your side character)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Graciela): purple and yellow light

Emilio (presente)

Ausente: Graciela (your sister)

Age: 28

Gender: Man

Profession: Accountant

How You Feel About Graciela: You are proud of her for her trade unionism. Your father would never have fed 8 kids without a union job. When she became a militant Montonera, your feelings changed. She somehow went from a daycare worker to revolutionary general who kidnapped the dictator Aramburu who ruled Argentina when you were children, and executed him. You feared what her actions could mean for your 6 younger siblings.

What You've Done Since She Was Taken: These days, you feel you're the one who failed her. The navy lets Graciela call you once a week, though you're sure they're listening in. A navy man showed up at your house and told you to help them cook the books and launder money stolen from victims like Graciela. You obey because you fear they'll kill her.

How You Found Out She Was Taken: You were used to Graciela disappearing sometimes to keep the cops off her trail. You didn't know she was taken until you got a phone call and heard her trembling voice.

What You Would Do If She Were Freed: You've changed your mind about Graciela's methods. The only language that tyrants understand is violence. As soon as she's able, you want to help her cut off their fucking heads.

Suggested Connections: A younger sibling, your father, the navy man who makes you launder money, the friend who drinks or gambles with you to help you vent steam

Game Structure Cheat Sheet

Baile de les Ausentes (you play your side character)

All white light: You are woken up at 5 in the morning to the sound of screaming. Your day of horror begins.

Orange and yellow light: Amidst the horror, you find or do one small thing that makes you feel human.

Purple and pink light: As night falls over the black site, you dream of the city and the people you love.

Baile de les Presentes (you play Emilio)

Blue and orange light: You wake up and go about your regular routine.

Blue and red light: Something happens to remind you that the dictadura is still in power and is part of your daily life.

Green and gold light: You gather with your loved ones to remember the desaparecidos who you lost

Tango (you play Emilio): purple and yellow light

Credits

Desaparecidos was written by July Pilowsky, with helpful feedback from Mo Holkar. The cover art was drawn by Micah Amundsen, and the cover layout is by Olivia Montoya.

The following media inspired the larp:

Bjergtaget (larp by Maria and Jeppe Bergmann Hamming)

Argentina 1985 (film directed by Santiago Mitre)

Preso sin nombre, celda sin numero (memoir by Jacobo Timermann)

A Lexicon of Terror (book by Marguerite Feitlowitz)

El Nunca Más de las locas (book by Matías Maximo)

ESMA (book edited by Marina Franco and Claudia Feld)

La larga Noche de los Lápices (memoir by Emilce Moler)

Appendix: Names for Side Characters

When players create their side characters, have them choose from the list of names below, which were common in Argentina at the time.

Masculine Names

Miguel

Juan

Carlos

Julio

Luis

Roberto

Pablo

Diego

Fernando

Ariel

Santiago

Alejandro

Sergio

Andrea

Ricardo

Feminine Names

Carolina

Natalia

Marcela

Patricia

Mariela

Gabriela

Valeria

Lorena

Romina

Karina

Susana

Julieta

Luciana

Antonia

Elena