



红灯女特务

RED LANTERNS



Two Short Games on Chinese Women Spies in 1939

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INTRODUCTION

RED LANTERNS is a double feature of short, live action, freeform theatre games for 5 players. Both of these short games are about Chinese women spies circa 1939.

The title of this collection has a number of layered meanings. Most obviously, the modern Beijing opera that inspires one of the games is called *The Red Lantern*, though the lantern doesn't feature in the game. Also, there was an all-female group of rebel fighters during the Boxer Rebellion called the Red Lanterns, which could be viewed as a predecessor of these revolutionary women. The games themselves are loosely inspired by classic works of modern Chinese literature that focus on female spies.

You will find instructions for playing ON LEAVE on the left-hand even-numbered pages and instructions for playing THE CODE on right-hand odd-numbered pages. The pages for THE CODE are also colored light gray to make them easily distinguishable.

I have included these two short games in the same book so that you can choose to (A) play one or the other of them, (B) play both of them back to back, or (C) get really experimental and play them both at the same time, switching back and forth between them by following the instructions in order, page by page.

However you decide to approach these games, I hope you find them meaningful and provocative.

ON LEAVE

On Leave is about a famous leftist and feminist writer who is invited by one of her revolutionary comrades to spend some time relaxing in the comrade's rural home village, staying with the comrade's family. While the writer is visiting, a young woman currently working as a spy in the Japanese-controlled areas also comes home to the village, and the spy's presence ultimately makes the writer's visit more stressful than she might have hoped.

In terms of style, *On Leave* is a game somewhere in between a live-action role-playing game (larp) and a partially improvised one-act theatrical play. The game is structured around specific scenes and guidelines on how to play out those scenes, but the exact details of how those scenes unfold is left up to the players.

On Leave is loosely inspired by the short story "Wo zai Xiacun de shihou" [When I Was in Xia Village] (1941) by the renowned writer and former underground intelligence worker Ding Ling. There is an English translation of this story in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Literature* (2007). Many scenes, details, and characters are very different in this game than they are in the original story, so I highly recommend reading the original.

THE CODE

The Code is about a teenage girl who lives with her granny in a Manchurian city occupied by and under the control of Japanese military and civilian officials. The girl soon learns that her granny is secretly an agent for the underground Communist Party and, furthermore, is responsible for making sure that a critical coded message reaches the leftist rebels hidden in the hills outside the city. However, a Japanese paramilitary police officer is also hot on the trail of this coded message, creating complications.

In terms of style, *The Code* is a game somewhere in between a live-action role-playing game (larp) and a partially improvised one-act theatrical play. The game is structured around specific scenes and guidelines on how to play out those scenes, but the exact details of how those scenes unfold is left up to the players.

The Code is loosely inspired by the libretto for the revolutionary opera “Hong deng ji” [The Red Lantern] (1965, rev. 1970) by Weng Ouhong and A Jia. There is an English translation of the libretto in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama* (2014). Many scenes, details, and characters are very different in this game than they are in the opera, so I highly recommend reading the libretto or—even better—watching a live performance or video recording.

Safety for ON LEAVE

Please warn potential players that the female character known as the Returnee was previously kidnapped by a group of soldiers, which raises the possibility that she was raped or forced into sexual slavery prior to becoming a secret agent. However, **it is not necessary to include any explicit mention of sexual violence in the game.** Perhaps the Returnee was protected by the way that she handled herself or by the intervention of someone else. The player portraying the Returnee is also intentionally given full authority to determine what's true about her experiences, regardless of the perspectives and gossip of the other characters.

Before play begins, the players should collectively decide whether the possibility of sexual violence in the Returnee's past should (A) be explicitly excluded from the game, (B) be left vague, or (C) be left up to the player portraying the Returnee. Please fully support players in excusing themselves from the game if they need to, and be prepared to halt, stop, or change things if play becomes uncomfortable for someone. Real people come first!

In addition, be careful and move slowly when acting out scenes in the play area. Even if your character is frightened or furious, don't rush about knocking people and things over. Also, remember to ask players' permission first—out of character—each time you need to touch them during the game. It's okay to say no!

Safety for THE CODE

Please warn potential players that the possibility of torture is strongly implied in the game—though it need not be acted out—and that characters may be threatened with death or shot and killed. Please fully support players in excusing themselves from the game if they need to, and be prepared to halt, stop, or change things if play becomes uncomfortable for someone. Real people come first!

In addition, be careful and move slowly when acting out scenes in the play area. Even if your character is frightened or furious, don't rush about knocking people and things over. Also, remember to ask players' permission first—out of character—if you need to touch them during the game. It's okay to say no! You might ask, "May I hold your hand?" or "May I grab your arm and drag you away?" And if they say no, that's fine; just mime it instead.

For example, if you're taking someone prisoner but can't touch them, threaten them with a fist or a finger pointed to look like a gun or knife, and then gesture in the direction you want them to go. Feel free to be a little melodramatic; this is based on an opera!

Even if you have another player's permission to touch them in a particular way, remember to be gentle. You're in this together!

Casting ON LEAVE

Casting the players as characters of different genders is fine and encouraged. However, particularly if some of the players have never played before, it's recommended that the Writer and the Returnee be played by women (cis- or trans-women).

The five character in *On Leave* are:

- **The Writer**, female, who is famous in the cities but almost totally unknown in the countryside; people out here don't often read radical feminist fiction or essays. You have never been married, but your long-time partner was captured and executed by the Nationalists eight years ago.
- **The Comrade**, female, formerly had bound feet, inflicted on you as a child by your mother and granny. Your feet have been unbound for years, but walking is still fairly slow. You are a Party courier and informant. Do you have a boyfriend?
- **The Mother**, female, is older but still quite vigorous. Your biggest hope is not the revolution but seeing both of your children married before you die. You are a ceaseless gossip.
- **The Brother**, male, is quiet and hardworking, and has a serious crush on the Returnee, despite everything.
- **The Returnee**, female, was taken away by the Japanese army 5 years ago and spies for the Party in enemy territory.

Casting THE CODE

Casting the players as characters of different genders is fine and encouraged. However, particularly if some of the players have never played before, it's recommended that the Granny and the Girl be played by women (cis- or trans-women).

The five character in *The Code* are:

- **The Granny**, female, is older and has been an informant and courier for the Party for many years. When the Girl's parents were killed at a labor demonstration, you became her only family, but the revolution is more important than any single person's life, even yours or hers.
- **The Girl**, female, is a teenager but already eager to do her part for the revolution and the Communist Party. Your parents were martyrs and you plan to make them proud.
- **The Officer**, male, is a Japanese paramilitary policeman who has been charged with uncovering spies in this city and, in particular, intercepting valuable communications.
- **The Agent**, any gender, is a local ex-Nationalist currently risking your life for Communist leaders who don't trust you. Plus, it sure looks like the Japanese are winning this war.
- **The Messenger**, any gender, is a loyal Communist agent on the run from trouble, carrying the coded message.

Structure of ON LEAVE

On Leave takes place over the course of 9 distinct scenes, each of which is described on one of the subsequent pages. The scene chart below shows which characters are in which scenes. If the players want to take a short break in the middle of play, I suggest doing so after Scene 5A, but otherwise playing straight through.

If you are playing both games at the same time, note that the Writer is in every scene of *On Leave*, so you may want to give that player a smaller role in *The Code*. Also, there are additional optional breaks after Scenes 3A & 7A during an interwoven double-game.

Scene	Writer	Comrade	Mother	Brother	Returnee
1A Arriving	X	X		X	
2A Welcome	X	X	X	X	
3A Explanation	X	X			
4A Gossip	X	X	X		
5A Lunch Guest	X	X	X	X	X
6A Friendship	X				X
7A A Proposal	X	X	X		X
8A Regrets	X			X	
9A Departing	X				X

Structure of THE CODE

The Code takes place over the course of 8 distinct scenes, each of which is described on one of the subsequent pages. The scene chart below shows which characters are in which scenes. If the players want to take a short break in the middle of play, I suggest doing so after Scene 4B, but otherwise playing straight through.

If you are playing both games at the same time, note that the Messenger has a small role in *The Code*, so you may want to give that player a larger role in *On Leave*. Also, there are additional optional breaks after Scenes 3A & 7A during an interwoven double-game.

Scene	Granny	Girl	Officer	Agent	Messen.
1B At Midnight	X		X		X
2B A Visitor	X	X			X
3B In the Gruel Line	X	X	X	X	
4B Flipped			X	X	
5B Family History	X	X			
6B Another Visitor	X	X	X	X	
7B Interrogation			X	X	
8B Delivered		X	X	X	X

1 A. Arriving

In the first scene, the WRITER and her COMRADE are slowly making their way down a dirt road leading to the home village of the COMRADE, who hasn't been home in many months, maybe as much as a year. The going is slow, because the COMRADE formerly had bound feet, the terrain is hilly, and it is beginning to get dark, but they are almost there.

For about 5 minutes, play out their interactions as they travel along, with the other players quietly observing. Then continue reading the instructions below.

Finally, the WRITER and COMRADE have come to the outskirts of the village, which has ~20 small crumbling brick houses with tiled roofs and as well as some smaller buildings for storage. There are pens outside for a few pigs and chickens roam freely. The village is surrounded by terraced hills on which the locals grow vegetables, corn for the animals, and millet. It is dark and there are no lights, except for a few oil lamps and candles burning in windows. The village seems strangely deserted and nobody seems to be home.

For 3 minutes, play out the travelers wandering through the village and heading up to the COMRADE's home, bewildered by the lack of people, but then introduce the BROTHER, have him explain that everyone's gone to the western entrance of the village and then lead them through the dark, ending the scene upon arrival.

1 B. At Midnight

It's midnight in a Manchurian city occupied and controlled by the Japanese military. GRANNY is out in the streets, despite the late hour, waiting to meet the MESSENGER who's arriving on a night train from areas further south. The MESSENGER is bringing a coded message from central Communist Party leaders that needs to be relayed to the rebels hiding in the mountains that surround the city.

Have GRANNY wait a couple of minutes alone in the street, trying to look inconspicuous while getting increasingly nervous that the MESSENGER hasn't arrived.

Then, have the MESSENGER burst onto the scene in a rush. But then have the Japanese OFFICER appear at the same time, his mere presence preventing the planned rendezvous from occurring.

The MESSENGER leaves the scene as quickly as they can, trying not to arouse suspicion.

Meanwhile, the OFFICER questions the GRANNY on why she is out in the street at this time of night. The GRANNY is on her own in terms of trying to come up with some kind of explanation.

The OFFICER is suspicious, but ultimately sends the GRANNY on her way back home, ending the scene.

2A. Welcome

The WRITER arrives at the rural home of her COMRADE, led by the comrade's BROTHER. The home is small, with dirt floors, and is tightly filled with everything the family owns. The dinner table is propped up sideways against the wall until it is needed, because it otherwise fills the entire kitchen. There are multiple beds in every tiny room. A few scrawny chickens are shooed out of the house.

First, the BROTHER shows the WRITER around with the COMRADE in tow: she's butting in, teasing, or remarking at changes to the place. The BROTHER is a little intimidated by the WRITER, who's from the city, but eventually shows her the room she'll be sharing with her COMRADE, explaining that she'll be sleeping in his bed while he sleeps at a neighbor's house.

Soon, the comrade's MOTHER comes home and fusses over the WRITER and COMRADE, making them sit down and telling the BROTHER to set up the dinner table and stools. She makes them rest and quickly prepares them some tea and rustic food. The food is an unfamiliar mountain herb freshly stir-fried in pork lard, served with thick millet porridge (warmed up from earlier) and a few kinds of cold pickled vegetables. The MOTHER talks while she cooks and after she serves food, interacting with everyone. If asked about the village being deserted, she'll put off saying too much about that, and eventually sends everyone to bed.

2B. A Visitor

The GIRL is waiting at home when GRANNY returns from a failed rendezvous with the MESSENGER. GRANNY explains what happened and together they try to figure out what to do next.

After a few minutes, the MESSENGER knocks on their door, once again in a rush and worried because the Japanese OFFICER seems to have sent out soldiers and police to search for him.

Before having a conversation, GRANNY insists on going through the proper code words with the MESSENGER (pass this booklet back and forth between the GRANNY and MESSENGER, with each reading the proper lines):

GRANNY: Who are you?

MESSENGER: I come selling ribbons.

GRANNY: Do you have any red ones?

MESSENGER: Yes, they are frayed but still strong.

Once the code words are traded, both parties are willing to talk freely. The MESSENGER gives the coded message for the rebels to GRANNY, telling her to hide it somewhere safe until she can safely get it to the Party's AGENT in the city.

Then, the MESSENGER leaves to catch another train back south, wishing them good luck, and the scene ends.

3A. Explanation

As the COMRADE and WRITER settle down for the night (the BROTHER is away sleeping elsewhere), the COMRADE tells the writer that everyone else has gone to see the RETURNEE, who also just come back to the village. The COMRADE might be a little jealous, since she's also doing intelligence work and in the company of the famous WRITER, and yet nobody came to see them.

Hand this booklet to the player of the COMRADE. The COMRADE tells the WRITER some or all of the following about the RETURNEE, elaborating and speculating as much as she wants, since the actual facts are unclear or unknown (feel free to consult this list as needed during the scene):

- The RETURNEE spies on the Japanese for the Party.
- The RETURNEE is from a family in the village.
- The RETURNEE and her BROTHER were once very close.
- The RETURNEE was captured and taken away by a group of Japanese soldiers who ransacked the village.
- Most people fled into the mountains when it happened.
- Several people in the village were killed.

After this conversation, they go to sleep and the scene ends, though it's likely that the WRITER has trouble falling asleep.

3B. In the Gruel Line

Due to the war, food supplies in the city are limited and basic staples are semi-regularly distributed to the population by the civilian government that serves the occupying Japanese army.

GRANNY and the GIRL are waiting line for bowls of rice gruel that the civilian authorities are passing out in various neighborhoods. The AGENT is the one serving the gruel, but GRANNY and the GIRL start at the end of the line and slowly work their way to the front (imagine that there are a number of other people in line). The coded message for the AGENT to relay to the rebels is concealed in GRANNY's bowl.

As GRANNY gets to the front of the line, the OFFICER bursts in (with a group of imagined soldiers) and begins searching everyone there, looking for the coded message. No one is allowed to leave.

Before the OFFICER can get to them, GRANNY gets the AGENT to ladle some gruel into her bowl, hoping to bury the message in rice gruel to hide it from the OFFICER.

Then the OFFICER can confront all three of the other characters, questioning them suspiciously and having (imaginary) soldiers search them, but finding nothing but gruel.

In the end, the OFFICER decides to take the AGENT in for further questioning, but lets GRANNY and the GIRL go. The scene ends.

4A. Gossip

The WRITER and COMRADE sleep much later than the villagers, waking up in the late morning. The MOTHER has just come back from gathering fresh vegetables and being given extra food for her guests by the other villagers, so she is preparing to cook a large meal for lunch. The visitors have completely missed breakfast.

Hand this booklet to the player of the MOTHER. As lunch is being prepared, the MOTHER initiates gossip about the following topics (feel free to consult this list as needed during the scene):

- No, you're a guest; you can't possibly help with cooking.
- The RETURNEE spies on the Japanese for the Party.
- People say the RETURNEE married a Japanese officer.
- The RETURNEE supposedly has some painful disease.
- The RETURNEE's family is worried she'll never get married.
- She feels very sorry for everyone involved.
- The BROTHER is off fetching a someone to join them.

After 10 minutes, lunch is ready—rustic like yesterday but with meat, several fresh vegetables, and actual white rice instead of millet porridge—but the conversation suddenly shifts when the BROTHER walks in with another guest for lunch: the RETURNEE.

4B. Flipped

The OFFICER has taken the AGENT back to police headquarters and is questioning the AGENT further.

The OFFICER will first start with questions about who the AGENT is and what they are up to, attempting to catch the AGENT in a lie.

If questions don't work, the OFFICER will escalate to threats and promises (pick freely from the list below):

- The AGENT will be imprisoned and starved.
- The AGENT will be sent to work camps in the far north.
- The AGENT will be tortured until they confess everything.
- The AGENT and everyone they know will be executed.
- The AGENT could be given wealth and power.
- The AGENT could help make a better future for China.
- The AGENT could be on the side that's actually winning.
- The AGENT could be sent abroad, away from all this.

Eventually the AGENT will be flipped and agree—at least for now—to work with the OFFICER to recover the message. If it doesn't make sense for the AGENT to agree in this scene, the scene can end with the OFFICER sending the AGENT away to be tortured.

5A. Lunch Guest

There are brief introductions and then everyone sits down for lunch. Note that you're eating family style: everyone freely picks up food with their chopsticks out of a bunch of central serving dishes, dropping the food into small, individual, rice-filled bowls in front of them. Then you eat your food off the top of the rice and eat the rice too. The hosts also drop food into their guests' rice bowls, encouraging them to eat more, especially of the good stuff.

The others are somewhat wary of the RETURNEE, but hand the RETURNEE's player this booklet. As the meal is shared, you should feel free to speak confidently and unashamedly about the following topics (feel free to consult this list as needed during the scene):

- You spy on the Japanese for the Party.
- You were sent home to try to recover from your illness.
- You were captured and taken to the Japanese-controlled areas by a group of Japanese soldiers.
- Your parents worry about you, but you're doing pretty well.
- You've experienced some terrible things, but so have many other people during this war.
- You are glad to contribute useful work for the revolution.

After 10 minutes, wrap up the meal, say thanks, and end the scene.

OPTIONAL BREAK

If the players want to take a break in the middle of playing *The Code*, you should do so now. I suggest no more than 10-15 minutes, if possible, just to keep everything fresh.

(If you are playing through both games at once, alternating, you only get one break here, not two! But if you are playing through both of them back-to-back, you get a break in the middle of each one, plus whatever break you like between games.)

OPTIONAL BREAK

If the players want to take a break in the middle of playing *On Leave*, you should do so now. I suggest no more than 10-15 minutes, if possible, just to keep everything fresh.

(If you are playing through both games at once, alternating, you only get one break here, not two! But if you are playing through both of them back-to-back, you get a break in the middle of each one, plus whatever break you like between games.)

5B. Family History

Back at the house, GRANNY and the GIRL clean off the gruel-covered coded message and try to find a new place to hide it.

As they do this, GRANNY decides that it's time to tell the GIRL more about her true history. Hand GRANNY's player this booklet and have her explain some or all of the following points to the GIRL, answering any questions the GIRL has to the best of her ability (feel free to consult this list as needed during the scene):

- The GIRL's parents weren't actually related to GRANNY.
- The GIRL's parents didn't die in a labor protest.
- GRANNY doesn't know who the GIRL's parents were.
- GRANNY simply found the GIRL when she was a baby, in the chaos following the Japanese takeover of the city.
- The GIRL reminds GRANNY of what her grandchildren might have been like, if her own children had lived.
- GRANNY's own children were actually killed, as young adults, for participating in a labor protest.

The GIRL is free to react however she likes, from being upset to being understanding, or maybe both.

However, their attempt to come to terms with this revelation is halted when there's a knock on the door. The scene ends.

6A. Friendship

The WRITER and the RETURNEE have gotten to know each other a little better over the past few days and are now sitting together on a wooded hillside overlooking the village. No one else is around.

The RETURNEE's illness, which was barely noticeable earlier, has flared up a little, so she seems weaker and a little more fragile, but she's still the same dauntless young woman.

The WRITER finds herself still surprised by and interested in the RETURNEE, and over the course of this scene, they can discuss any of the following topics (along with other things):

- The RETURNEE is proud of working in intelligence, though she can't discuss the details of what she does.
- The RETURNEE wants to retire from spying—it's bad for her health and not pleasant—but still be part of the revolution.
- The RETURNEE doesn't feel like she belongs in this village anymore; nobody really understands her. At least the WRITER knows about city life and intelligence work.
- Her illness tends to come and go. Sometimes it's okay and sometimes it's bad. She needs to see a medical specialist.

After about 10 minutes, they hear the voice of the BROTHER down in the valley below, calling for them to come to dinner. They begin to descend the hill and the scene ends.

6B. Another Visitor

The AGENT, distraught and incredibly frightened, is knocking on the door of the home where GRANNY and the GIRL live. The AGENT is not supposed to know where they live or come to their home, but they let him inside.

Immediately, the AGENT seems strangely obsessed with the coded message and pleads with both GRANNY and the GIRL to hand it over. The GIRL is about to retrieve the message from its hiding place when GRANNY stops her, making the AGENT go through the same code words that she used on the MESSENGER earlier (pass this booklet back and forth between the GRANNY and the AGENT, with each reading the proper lines):

GRANNY: Who are you?

MESSENGER: We don't have time for this!

GRANNY: WHO ARE YOU?

MESSENGER: I come selling ribbons.

GRANNY: Do you have any red ones?

MESSENGER: Yes, yes, I have red ones!

This is not correct, so GRANNY orders the AGENT to leave. But the OFFICER—who has been watching everything—immediately barges through the door and arrests everyone. The scene ends.

7A. A Proposal

This scene starts with the RETURNEE storming out of a somewhat heated and/or embarrassing conversation with the MOTHER and the COMRADE, with the BROTHER chasing after her. Both the RETURNEE and BROTHER leave the scene as the WRITER enters to try to find out what's just happened.

The MOTHER and COMRADE explain that they were trying to convince the RETURNEE to marry the BROTHER, who obviously still cares for her, despite everything. They don't really think the RETURNEE has any other good options, especially with her disease and past history. The MOTHER was against it at first, but she's come under criticism from Party officials due to her daughter's formerly bound feet. Her son marrying the RETURNEE would strengthen the family's claim to be revolutionary rather than bourgeois.

Ultimately, the MOTHER really wants the WRITER to go talk to the RETURNEE and convince her that marrying the BROTHER is the best idea. The COMRADE may or may not be fully on board with this plan, but she agrees that the RETURNEE seems to respect the WRITER and might be willing to talk to her.

The WRITER can respond however she likes, but the scene ends in 10 minutes or less, with her going to look for the RETURNEE. She might have agreed to talk to her on the family's behalf or may just want to make sure the RETURNEE is okay.

7B. Interrogation

The OFFICER and the AGENT are alone in the headquarters of the police, discussing what to do. The OFFICER and AGENT have been interrogating GRANNY and the GIRL for hours, but they refuse to give up the location or contents of the coded message.

The OFFICER is considering torturing them, but the AGENT tries to suggest that this won't work, picking any or all of the following reasons why torture is a bad idea:

- They are Communist fanatics and won't give in to torture.
- They probably don't even know anything.
- Information from torture is notoriously unreliable, since people will say anything.
- Torturing well-regarded local women them will make the whole city's population rise up against them.

The OFFICER may be somewhat suspicious about the AGENT's hesitancy to torture them, but ultimately settles on a different plan. He orders the AGENT to have GRANNY executed but to set the GIRL free, reasoning that they will keep a close eye on the girl and see what she does after GRANNY is dead.

The AGENT may protest this plan, but the OFFICER will hear none of it. The scene ends as the AGENT leaves to obey.

8A. Regrets

In the next scene, the WRITER is looking for the RETURNEE, likely hiking laboriously up the hill on the far side of the village, heading toward where she was visiting with the RETURNEE earlier. However, she comes across the BROTHER instead, who is also looking for the RETURNEE but can't find her.

Hand this booklet to the BROTHER's player. As they look for the RETURNEE together, the BROTHER opens up a bit to the WRITER, discussing his thoughts and feelings on the following topics (feel free to consult this list as needed during the scene):

- The BROTHER cares for the RETURNEE and wants to take care of her, especially since she's sick.
- The BROTHER hopes the RETURNEE can return home for good and stop being a spy. It's dangerous!
- The BROTHER doesn't really understand what happened to the RETURNEE or the seriousness of her disease, and he doesn't really want talk about that.
- But the BROTHER doesn't want to be yet another problem that she has to deal with. She's suffered enough.

Ultimately, after 10 minutes of looking and talking, it's clear that they aren't going to find the RETURNEE. They head back down the hill toward the village, and the scene ends.

8B. Delivered

In the final scene, the GIRL returns home to retrieve the coded message and then leaves the city to head up into the mountains and find the rebels, since she can no longer trust the AGENT.

Act out the GIRL gradually making her way out of the city and up the unfamiliar mountain trails, looking for people that she doesn't know. She knows her GRANNY was executed and is upset, but she knows that there's no one else who can deliver the message now. However, the OFFICER and AGENT are secretly following her the whole time, trailing her into the mountains so they can identify and capture the rebels.

Eventually, the GIRL stops in a small snowy clearing at the end of the trails. She's utterly lost and doesn't know how to contact the rebels. Things are beginning to look hopeless.

Frustrated that she's stopped, the OFFICER and AGENT emerge and confront her, demanding to know where the rebels are and ordering her to turn over the message. The GIRL remains defiant.

Then, the MESSENGER arrives out of nowhere, armed with an imaginary rifle, and kills both the OFFICER and AGENT. The MESSENGER was captured by Japanese soldiers searching the train but was eventually able to escape to the mountains.

Together, they head off to find the rebels, message in hand.

9A. Departing

It's morning on the day the WRITER is supposed to leave the village, and she hasn't seen the RETURNEE since then. She's alone in the guest room, gathering her things for the journey, when the RETURNEE unexpectedly enters.

Hand this booklet to the player of the RETURNEE. The RETURNEE has news for the WRITER and gradually works through the following topics, in any order (feel free to consult this list as needed during the scene):

- The RETURNEE has been removed from her spying duties.
- The RETURNEE is being sent to the rural base camps to get proper medical treatment for her disease.
- The RETURNEE asks if she can travel with the WRITER.
- The RETURNEE is glad she can get away from here.
- The RETURNEE hopes to continue serving the revolution.
- The RETURNEE feels sorry for the BROTHER, but she feels like he's better off marrying someone else.
- The RETURNEE feels, as she said before, like she doesn't belong here anymore.

The scene ends with the two women leaving the village, saying goodbye to everyone else, who's already heard the news.

Debriefing THE CODE

The Code can potentially be a strong emotional experience for the players (though not always and not necessarily for everyone), so it's a good idea to have a brief discussion in a private space after the game is over. Maybe have a short break first and then gather the players back together.

There are many possible structures for a “debriefing” but consider doing the following, with players being free to “pass” or otherwise decline questions if they don't feel like answering them:

- First, take turns having each player say something about what they thought of the experience in general.
- Second, take turns having each player express their gratitude or appreciation for something another player did.
- Third, take turns having each player name something from the game that they found to be notable or meaningful.
- Finally, thank the other players for participating.

Debriefing can have a number of purposes, but many groups have found that having a brief post-game conversation helps provide some sort of closure to the experience, even if every aspect of the game didn't necessarily go perfectly.

Debriefing ON LEAVE

On Leave can potentially be a strong emotional experience for the players (though not always and not necessarily for everyone), so it's a good idea to have a brief discussion in a private space after the game is over. Maybe have a short break first and then gather the players back together.

There are many possible structures for a “debriefing” but consider doing the following, with players being free to “pass” or otherwise decline questions if they don't feel like answering them:

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- Second, take turns having each player express their gratitude or appreciation for something another player did.
- Third, take turns having each player name something from the game that they found to be notable or meaningful.
- Finally, thank the other players for participating.

Debriefing can have a number of purposes, but many groups have found that having a brief post-game conversation helps provide some sort of closure to the experience, even if every aspect of the game didn't necessarily go perfectly.

Photo Notes

The cover contains three historical photos from this period. The two portraits belong to Ding Ling and Zheng Yuzhi.

A renowned writer, Ding Ling wrote the semi-autobiographical short story on which *On Leave* was based. Ding's partner, the poet He Yepin, was executed by the Nationalists in 1931 for his ties to the Communists. Ding herself was imprisoned from 1933-1936, but was released as part of negotiations to form the Second United Front against the Japanese invasion. Afterwards, she left Shanghai for the rural base camps near Yan'an, where she criticized the continued mistreatment of women. This outspokenness and her involvement in WWII intelligence operations meant that she was a target during later political campaigns and imprisoned from 1957 until Mao died in 1978. Ding herself died in Beijing in 1986.

Zheng Yuzhi worked with Ding Ling in the Shanghai underground and took care of Ding's young son when Ding was imprisoned by the Nationalists. When Ding was released, Zheng was responsible for ushering her out of Shanghai. Zheng later worked as a secret messenger between top underground leaders. Zheng's husband Zhou Wen died under mysterious circumstances in 1952, and Zheng also suffered during the political campaigns of the 1950s-1970s. She passed away in the early 2000s at the age of 90.

The bottom photo is of the city of Qiqihar in Manchuria.

Acknowledgments

The two games that make up RED LANTERNS were originally meant to be one game under 1,000 words, to be submitted to a contest for possible inclusion in the *War Birds* anthology of short games about women in World War II. Ultimately this ended up being a much larger project. Also, originally it was going to focus on the many women (such as Ding Ling, Zheng Yuzhi, Guan Lu, Mao Liying, and He Zhihua) who were involved in the Shanghai underground in the 1920s and 1930s, but I couldn't quite figure out how to do justice to that topic, so it will have to wait for a later project.

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Thanks also to Professor Madeleine Yue Dong of the University of Washington for introducing me to Ding Ling's short story "When I Was in Xia Village," during an earlier research project on women in the Shanghai underground.

RED LANTERNS

is a double feature of short, live, freeform games for 5 players on Chinese women spies in 1939. Both games are loosely inspired by classic works of modern Chinese literature.

ON LEAVE sees a famous writer become entwined in local affairs while on mandatory rest in a rural village.

THE CODE follows a pair of urban residents as they help to pass a critical message through enemy territory.