CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Primo (the prisoner)**

Primo is only 24 years old when he's captured by the Italian Fascist forces. He's been hiding out with a group of rebels in the woods, and is rounded up with a lot of other Jewish prisoners (rudely referred to as "pieces") and taken to Auschwitz. He's stripped of all his belongings, literally stripped naked, and has all his hair shaven off. Even his name is even taken away from him. Like all concentration camp inmates, he's assigned just a number for identification: 174517.

**Alberto**

Alberto is Primo's best friend and is with him for almost his entire imprisonment in Auschwitz. Levi sums up his character nicely:

*Alberto entered the Lager with his head high, and lives in here unscathed and uncorrupted. He understood before any of us that this life is war; he permitted himself no indulgences, he lost no time complaining or commiserating with himself and with others, but entered the battle from the beginning. (5.6)*

**Steinlauf**

Steinlauf is another of Primo's friends, an older man of 50. He's Hungarian, had served in the Austro-Hungarian Army, and was even awarded the Iron Cross (a prestigious medal).

**Charles and Arthur**

These two are French political prisoners who share a hut with Primo in Ka-Be toward the end of the book. The pair also have scarlet fever (like Primo), and they join him after the Nazis abandon the camp, helping to keep each other fed, warm, and clean. They also expand their efforts beyond their own hut to share the meager food they find with the others.
Schepschel

Schepschel has had time to learn how to survive because he's been in the camp for four years. He's lost his wife and five children, and now lives his life as "a sack which needs periodic filling" (9.20).

Alfred L.

This guy was really successful before being sent to the camp; he was an engineer and ran a chemical factory. He came from the upper classes of society, and even in the camp strives to return to that position. He manipulates appearances (he stays clean, makes himself look like he's working harder by belittling the other prisoners, and showily takes the worst ration from the soup kettle) to give the higher-ups the impression that he's respectable enough to get the more prestigious jobs. Because of this, he ends up as a "specialist" in the Chemical Kommando.

Elias

Elias is an example of extreme situational irony. He thrives in the camp: "he carries six bricks at a time balanced on his head; he knows how to make a spoon from a piece of tin, and a knife from a scrap of steel" (9.31). He's an accomplished thief, which keeps him in black-market goods.

Henri

Of all the prisoners in the Lager, Henri is the one bothers Primo the most. This guy is the Poster Child for a master manipulator: he's able to play on people's sympathies to get what he wants and no one is immune from his maneuvering.

Alex

He's the Kapo of the Chemical Kommando, and wears a green triangle, showing that he's "a professional delinquent" (10.3). Kapos were the prisoners who were often the most brutal to the Jews. Alex is cruel to those on the Chemical Kommando, and has a lot of disdain for them because they're intellectuals. He often berates Primo for being a "messy recruit" (10.24).

Shmoop Editorial Team. "Survival in Auschwitz (If this is a man) Questions." Shmoop. Shmoop University, Inc., 11 Nov. 2008