

Four Walls and a Funeral: Roleplaying Behind Bars

This game was written for Iron Chef in 2 hours by Designer X

Four Walls is a bad idea for a roleplaying game that will no doubt attract a certain degree of interest from some of the more fucked-up members of the hobby. In this game, the players portray residents of one of the correctional facilities on Riker's Island, specifically a prison intended for adult male inmates.

Rule #1

Kids and women are not allowed to play this game. Period. Sure, start up a juve game or one set in the Rose Springer Center for women. But that's a whole 'nother game.

Fantasy

Thinking that playing an inmate is anything like being an inmate, there's your fantasy. Or do you think OZ is real?

Innocence

Nobody gives a rat's ass except your wife, your priest or your lawyer. So shut the fuck up and stop crying. Be a man. Do your own time. Don't do any one else's.

Rule #2

Players are prisoners and the GM plays the Warden, guards, counselors, lawyers, other prisoners and everyone else. The GM is not called the Warden because that's fucking stupid. He's the GM. Deal.

Character Background

The first steps are in identifying your Four Walls character.

Name: The name on your rap sheet. Doesn't matter.

Alias: What your friends/enemies call you. Doesn't matter.

Age: Minimum starting age is 18, maximum is 50. The older you are, the more coins you get for skills. The younger you are, the longer you'll last in a fight. Your choice.

Race: White, Black, Hispanic (specify Puerto Rican-American, Mexican-American, etc.) or Other (Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, etc.). Important because it limits your accessibility to certain gangs.

Prisoner ID Number: Roll eight 10-sided dice, treat 0 as zero. Doesn't matter.

Paying for your Crimes

Each coin represents a specific amount of time.

Cent: 1 year

Nickel: 5 years

Dime: 10 years

Quarter: 25 years

Dollar: 100 years ("life")

These coins are spent during the game to win conflicts.

Skill Trees

Characters are rated (using coins) in various areas. What did your character do to land in prison? Figure it out, write it down. Also figure out how many years you were convicted for each crime (see the various Skill Trees for maximums in each area). You can be a lifer or you can serve a few years...if you want a kick ass character, create a hardened criminal with a long stretch ahead of him. Your GM has the final call on conviction lengths so don't be a smartass and try to break the system. Your GM has authority to break you.

Coins are added to any skill in which the character has been convicted. Note that many crimes (such as vice, fraud and sex crimes) are not represented in the list. If you've been convicted of Grand Theft Auto and you received five years, put a nickel into Grand Theft Auto. Because Grand Theft Auto is skill level 3, each cent placed into GTA is worth 3 cents of skill.

Characters have a total value of bonus coins equal to their age – 16 (so an eighteen year old felon only has 2 bonus cents).

Placing Coins

When you create your character, you'll have a pool of coins to place into your skill trees.

The Theft Tree is used to take something from someone else (or to hide stuff from people who want to find it).

The Assault Tree is used to hurt or intimidate those weaker than yourself.

The Murder Tree is only used to kill other human beings.

The Weapons Tree is a little different. Whenever a weapon is used during a conflict, the player may use their weapon coins to add to their skill.

Theft Tree (maximum 5 x skill level)

1. Petty Larceny
2. Grand Larceny
3. Grand Theft Auto
4. Robbery
5. Armed Robbery

Assault Tree (maximum 10 x skill level)

1. Simple Assault
2. Assault & Battery
3. Assault with a Deadly Weapon
4. Aggravated Assault
5. Attempted Murder

Murder Tree (maximum 20 x skill level)

1. Negligent Homicide
2. Manslaughter
3. Vehicular Manslaughter
4. Murder 2nd degree
5. Murder 1st degree

Weapons Tree (maximum of 5 x skill level)

1. Other (damage rating= x1 – x5)
2. Firearms (damage rating= x4)
3. Blades (damage rating= x3)
4. Blunt Objects (damage rating= x2)
5. Bare Hands (damage rating = x1)

The Weapons Tree gives you an interesting fact about life inside. It doesn't matter if you're hot shit with a gun. Once you're behind cold steel, that doesn't matter at all. You learn to use your fists, clubs and shivs or you aren't going to survive for long.

Veins

Every prisoner worth his salt has something running in his veins. At the very least, you've got blood, right? But some have something a bit more. Pick one:

Blood: Maybe you were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe you're even innocent. You're still human...for awhile, anyway. You get a shiny quarter that you can use once (that's once, ever) to get out of a bad situation. Bad part: you're fresh meat.

Fire: You have fire in your blood and it has given you political power. Pick a gang and add a nickel to however many coins you decide to put into it. Bad part: not only are there enemy gangs to worry about, expect to be targeted by the Man.

Ice: You're a stone killer. Sociopath. Hard as iron and cold as ice. You're quiet and deadly as a scorpion and folks know what you're capable of. Add a cent to Blades, Blunt Objects and Bare Hands and add a nickel to the Other category of the Weapon Tree. Bad part: you know what the gunslinger complex is? Well, you're the fastest draw in town. Figure it out.

Junk: You're a drug addict and you crave the sting of the needle. Lucky for you, you know how to get stuff on the inside. Add five cents to any category in the Theft tree. Bad part: if you don't get your shit every day you lose a Fight Points every Dawn for each day that you've gone without.

Death: You're dying. AIDS, cancer, whatever. You're not ever getting out and it's made you brave, stupid and reckless. Add a nickel to any goddamn Weapon Tree category any time you want. When Dawn comes, feel free to place it in any other Weapon Tree category at any time – you're unpredictable. Bad part: you don't ever regain Fight Points.

Madness: You're crazy. Not crazy enough to get out of here, though. But all but the dumbest inmates know better than to mess with you. You have a floating pool of six cents that you can spend on any conflict against another prisoner. It refreshes at Dawn. Bad part: you have to act crazy, even if you're not. And you won't be allowed to join any gangs.

Prison Gangs

The following six groups are major prison gangs with members all across the United States. The benefit from membership in a gang (besides status) is to gain protection and support when facing enemies and/or enemy organizations.

In game terms, any member is able to trade coins freely with any other member of their gang, up to their coin rating in that gang. To gain a rating, dump some of your coins into that gang (you can only belong to one gang). A rating of one cent means that you're a new recruit. A dime or more is a seasoned member with many contacts. Once you've "borrowed" your rating in coins, you can't gain any more until they've been paid back.

I can't stand info dumping so do your goddamn homework and learn more about these groups on your own.

Neta: Puerto Rican "cultural organization" with the motto "Independence for the Island" (ie: Puerto Rico).

Aryan Brotherhood (AB): Apolitical white supremacist gang mainly interested in "getting high and getting over."

Black Guerilla Family (BGF): Politically-motivated, anti-government black gang.

Mexican Mafia (EME): Urban Hispanic gang motivated by ethnic solidarity and control of drug trade.

La Nuestra Familia (NF): Rival gang of the EME with similar goals, just coming from a rural background.

Texas Syndicate (TS): A gang formed to protect Hispanics from the neo-nazi inmates of the AB.

Game Mechanics, or, Getting Shit Done

Whenever you want to Get Shit Done, you need to spend coins to do so. Simple tasks require between one and three cents. More difficult tasks require at least a nickel and as much as a dime. Near-impossible tasks are called "near-impossible" for a reason. We're going to err on the side of caution and just say that you're out of luck and no amount of money is gonna get something like that done.

To accomplish a general Theft task, spend at least one cent so that the total of your skill level x the spent coin is equal to your greater than the difficulty of the task.

When facing an opponent (stealing from someone, intimidating them, beating them down or trying to kill them), spend some of your coins to set an initial bid. Your opponent may then counter with his own bid. This continues until one person runs out of coins or doesn't want to bid any more.

The winner of the conflict is the guy who wanted to win it more than the other guy.

Replenishing Coins

Unless otherwise noted by the rules, all coins replenish at Dawn.

Fights

Everyone has 118 Fight Points minus their age at the start of the game. When you're jumped, stabbed, poisoned, beat up or cowed, you lose those points. Forever.

When you hit 0 Fight Points you are a dead motherfucking duck. Moral of the story is, keep to yourself.

When a fight breaks out, it's handled as normal. But after the winning bid is declared, every person who bid any coins at all suffers a loss of Fight Points. The loss is equal to the number of cents bid by the other guy (or guys) times the damage rating of the weapon used. So if someone bids a dime and is using a shank to carve you a new asshole, you lose 30 Fight Points. And man, a dime ain't all that much.

The Other weapon category is reserved for weird shit like homemade garrotes, poison, electrocution, etc. Good luck getting hold of a firearm, much less something that will actually work without blowing off your fingers.

Punking Out

You want Fight Points back? Well you're going to have to become someone's bitch. First, you GIVE them 5 Fight Points. Then they'll loan some of their Fight Points to you when and if you need them. What else do you have to do for them? Well, that's up to them, isn't it?

If you're someone's punk-ass bitch and you kill them, that takes care of the problem, doesn't it? You don't get your Fight Points back and you lose any they loaned to you.

Risking Rep

You can risk your reputation in order to add coins to an Assault or Murder conflict. To do so, spend extra coins from either the Assault Tree or the Murder Tree. If you win, great. If you lose, those extra coins you bid are lost. Permanently. Well, more specifically, you lose them permanently until you regain your rep (how you do it is between you and the GM).

Bribes

It's possible to bribe the GM or the other players (and vice versa). The GM may ask you to perform certain tasks in exchange for a reward (an example would be to kill a high ranking member of the AB in exchange for a nickel now and a dime on completion). The GM has five cents per player in his "Bribe Pool."

Improvement

Gain 1 Fight Point every time Dawn breaks and you didn't lose any Fight Points the previous day. Gain one cent every time you wake up at Dawn and you're still breathing.

Playing the Game

Ah, my favorite part. This is basically a prison sim based around "true crime" fiction and stuff like OZ and The Shawshank Redemption. Stuff like that. So create the characters, populate your prison with colorful individuals and just play until shit starts happening. People are going to die...in horrible ways. Bad things are going to happen to good people and bad people are going to prosper. That's life. I can't say to you "play this game" with a straight face. The rest is up to you. Stay out of trouble.