

BEHIND THE WALLS



JOHN ADAMUS

A WORLD OF
ADVENTURE FOR

FATE
CORE SYSTEM

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Behind the Walls

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the person standing at your counter can make copies of this
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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible,
impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this
work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, prisoners, Richard Nixon,
wardens, or survivors of the 1950s nuclear apocalypse that never happened,
is purely coincidental, but kinda ... well, disturbing, man. Cut that out.

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The year was 1951, and you were in prison. You were in prison when the bombs streaked through the sky and fell. You were in prison when communication with the outside world turned from panicked cries of help to static. You were in prison when the riots broke out, riots over whether you deserved to stay in prison, especially if there was no society left on the other side of the stone walls. You were in prison when they started rationing the gasoline for the generators. And you've stayed in prison.

The year now is 1959. You were supposed to be paroled by now, but funnily enough, with all the bombs and the phones going out, the complete collapse of any media and order, your paperwork must have slipped through some bureaucratic cracks. You're beginning to think you'll never get out or, if you do, it won't be for another few decades.

The year is 1959, and you're behind the stone walls of Collins Park Correctional Facility.

A NOTE BEFORE BEGINNING

This is a story about a prison and the people inside. Great care has been taken to avoid the overused and more negative tropes of prison—sexual assault, violence, and such—and while this story features men, it is entirely adaptable to include issues of gender or orientation.

This is also a story set in a fictionalized 1951. We've done our best to eliminate segregation and racism from this text. No characters presented here have to be white, nor do they have to be racist or phobic.

Please be respectful of your fellow players, whoever they might be.

THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN

The world changed radically in 1951, when Russia and America went toe to toe with escalating nuclear devices and ultimately a series of invasions and insurgencies, followed by more mass bombings. The back and forth of war was the last broadcast that radio and television carried. Then it all went silent.

What caused the war is unclear. Some people speculated that it started over a diplomatic faux pas. Others thought it was a response to failed espionage. Many believed that Russia felt they didn't "win enough" during the Second World War, so they wanted to have one more go at it. People still debate this years later, though most of these conversations end in resigned sighs and frustration.

The war left us with both social and technological fallout, creating scarcity in both population and resources, and making both harder to recover. While many large cities can continue to function to some degree, many small towns dependent on commerce or their inhabitants have decayed into ghost towns, the slowly crumbling buildings now barely husks of what used to be burgeoning suburbia.

Cities like New York or Chicago held up pretty well, as their large populations insulated them from collapse. The war cost three-million US lives, with estimations around twice that for Russia. What that means for smaller cities like Cincinnati or Buffalo is that they either condensed to just essential buildings or they absorbed the surrounding towns and boroughs to bolster their numbers. Much of the suburban sprawl shriveled up and died before it could really bloom.

When the Russo–American War (as it was labeled) really began entering its terrifying puberty, the American war machine from the 1940s never got a chance to shift from materiel production to social improvement. It became clear that war rationing needed to return, a change which hampered much of the growth in suburbia and in the middle class. Television had begun to saturate life, but rather than focus on entertainment and commerce, the medium was used to buoy patriotism and advocate for community building.

Aspects like *Proud American* are workable, but *Proud Gold Coaster* or *Hell's Kitchen Made Me Who I Am Today* focus on the finer details of the characters. Getting specific can provide excellent hooks to help personalize the story.

The war created a vacuum in the middle class. The majority of soldiers who returned home never had enough time to invest in their families and communities; most were called back to service in less than five years after they last saw combat. When the casualties began to climb, it became clear that a good economic chunk of the population wasn't coming home.



This gap was quickly filled by those people ineligible for the draft during the Second World War, mainly academics and those too young at the time. President Truman did not bring the draft back, believing that limiting the number of available fighting men would incentivize a shorter conflict. Instead, this error—called “Truman’s Folly”—provoked the transition from ground invasion forces to aerial bombing and hydrogen bombing campaigns.

The Russian bombing destroyed many major cities, military installations, and large sections of America’s heartland. This cut into American food supplies and forced people to stricter rations. Conversely, American bombing targeted only Russian cities, giving precedence to collateral damage and civilian deaths over military destruction. This strategy drove Russians away from the cities, inclining them to take up nomadic, guerrilla lifestyles. When the Americans invaded—led by Eisenhower, who would not survive to become Truman’s presidential successor—they were met with an enemy talented in stealthy, aggressive tactics, who pushed the Americans into several losing campaigns and ultimately advocated for bombing campaigns of their own.

With Eisenhower’s death at the Battle of Penza, Omar Bradley, then the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, succeeded him. Bradley urged a complete cessation of hostilities following years of bombing raids and failed negotiations with Nikita Khrushchev. (However, it’s unclear as to whether or not he encouraged a few skirmishes before calling it to end.) The murder of Khrushchev’s son Sergei during an in-color televised negotiation is considered to be the gruesome capstone to the war.

Richard Nixon was sworn in as President in 1958, promising to “steer the United States into a future rebuilt from the ashes of war.” His presidency is fraught with accusations of espionage, deceit, and corruption, with most people believing Nixon would orchestrate a return to the Russian War within five years.

THE PRISON

Collins Park Correctional Facility was originally built in 1883, comprising a single building that housed a maximum of thirty inmates, built where the Yard of the prison is now. It was later demolished and expanded in 1904, then again in 1926. It reached its current size in 1936, thanks to a combination of its captive labor force and funding from the Works Progress Administration. The prison now holds around eleven hundred inmates, though it can house up to three thousand without overcrowding.

Increasing the prison's density is a great way to add claustrophobia or danger during encounters.

Unlike prisons that radiate around a central building—a “hub-and-spoke” design—Collins Park is a campus of buildings, all walled in. In some places the walls are forty feet high and fifteen feet thick, the result of each prison expansion being stacked atop the last. At their thinnest and lowest, the walls are about thirty feet high and about seven feet thick. The Tower, the largest guard post in the entire prison stands almost sixty feet high on a site previously held by the prison's water tower. The walls are lined with small, flat spaces where guards can stand and observe wider sections of the Yard below. Most buildings on the campus are boxy structures of stone and cement, ornamented like cathedrals, earning the prison the name “Castle Collins.”

The prison functions using the Pennsylvania system, meaning there is no corporal punishment or enforced silence. The guards are on strict orders to check on prisoners three times a day, divided into morning and evening headcounts as well as one patrol during the workday.

Rather than confining its population to cells all day, Collins Park provides inmates with a job, generally something in the trades. Before the war escalated, these were paid positions; prisoners would make on average around fifteen to twenty dollars a week, given a six-day workweek. However, once the war intensified and the money dried up, the workforce shifted to producing things to keep the prison functioning. Lots of old stock remains unsold, littering the supply closets and storage rooms. Much of it has been repurposed for repairs and maintenance, but a lot of material is still on-hand and unsold.

WHO YOU ARE, HOW YOU GOT THERE

Who Are You?

As a prisoner behind the walls of Collins Park Correctional Facility, you've been referred to by your last name for so long, by inmate and guard alike, that you're not sure how you'd answer to anything else anymore.

You've been told what to do, how fast to do it, where to do it, and for how long for years. You were given a job your first week here, and you've worked hard at it for thirteen hours a day ever since. You had a job and a life before you came here, but that hardly matters now. It's like trying to remember what you dreamt in the morning while sitting at dinner. It might as well be someone else's story.

Tell the people around the table who you are. What's your name? How long have you been inside? What did you do to get sent up the river? (You can decide if you actually did it or not later.)

Some possible reasons for being incarcerated include:

Arson	Drug Trafficking	Mail Fraud
Assault and Battery	Embezzlement	Murder
Bank Robbery	Escaping Prison	Tax Fraud
Burglary	Kidnapping	Treason



Who You Are and How You Got Here

You've named your character and your crime. But you're not just who you were before getting locked up. You've kept busy while behind the walls. It's time to figure out who you are, what you can do, and how good you are at it.

Aspects

You've got a **high concept**, a phrase or idea that summarizes who and what your character is. It includes their time in prison, too. It's been such a large part of their life, so pervasive and formative, that it needs to be represented. Maybe they're a *Prisoner No More* or an *Unrepentant Murderer Back On the Loose*. There are no wrong answers, but understand that their high concept is their definition.

There's also your **trouble**, the idea that complicates your character's life. It doesn't have to come from their time in prison. Maybe they were shocked by how the world changed (*Lost Without My World*), maybe they're afraid of whatever is or isn't out there (*The Unknown Scares Me*), or maybe they're wishing they didn't have to leave (*I Was Only Alive Behind the Walls*). Whatever you choose, make it broad and evocative enough to be applied in multiple situations.

An easy, effective way to tell whether your high concept or trouble is "good" is to share it with the other people around the table. If they give you positive feedback, you're on the right track.

Along with your high concept and trouble, you get three more aspects, all up to you. They can describe your character's appearance (*Tall...*, *Short...*, *Shrewd-looking...*), part of their past (*Love Child of the Governor*), or even their aspirations (*Desperate to Escape to Zihuatanejo*). If you can't come up with three more things about your character, don't worry; you can fill them in during play.



Skills

Behind the Walls uses the skill list from *Fate Core* (page 97) with a couple changes. First, the Lore skill is often thought of as pertaining to older or forgotten knowledge. That doesn't apply to *Behind the Walls*, so it's been replaced with Knowledge. Second, we've added a new skill called Invent. You can find these skills at the end of this section.

Your character gets one Great (+4) skill, two Good (+3) skills, three Fair (+2) skills, and four Average (+1) skills. For each of these skills, don't just write the skill name. Write in a phrase, as specific as possible, that describes how your character has used the skill. So, if their knife is their perennial best friend, you might write "Fight—Stabbing Things in the Face." Or if they were a very charming bank robber who didn't need to resort to guns, you might write "Rapport—Charming People to Get My Way."

Your Great (+4) skill is likely related to why you ended up behind bars. Did you hold several bank tellers hostage (Provoke)? Escape from your last jail and lead officials on a multi-state car chase (Drive)? Maybe you just plain like stabbing people in the neck (Fight)?

Next, your two Good (+3) skills, while not necessarily the abilities that got you into prison, are likely the ones that kept you alive in prison. Spent a lot of the time in the yard lifting weights? Then write "Physique—My Muscles Have Muscles." Were you a bookworm in the library? Something like "Knowledge—Read a Lot About Rocks" would be appropriate.


Additionally, you have three Fair (+2) skills. They're things you have some talent with, but perhaps not things you've used a great deal, or even at all, since you arrived behind the walls. Can you hold your own in a fistfight (Fight—Not Bad in a Brawl)? Do you have an easy manner about you (Empathy—A Genuinely Kind Person)?


Lastly, you have four Average (+1) skills, things you maybe do once in a rare while, or things you wish you could improve if you had the time or means. Just like all the other skills, be specific about how they're applied.





Knowledge

Someone with ranks in Knowledge has studied and read about a specific concept, idea, or set of material, rather than a general body of information. For example, you might be skilled in Knowledge (Architecture) or Knowledge (Machining). Any time you use Knowledge, you can only apply information from that specific field.

 **Overcome:** When faced with a problem that requires proficiency or expertise, use Knowledge. Drawing on Knowledge (Geology), could you remember which sort of rock can be shaped into chess pieces? Could you pick the right fuel mix to get that old Packard running again, using Knowledge (Engines)?


 **Create An Advantage:** Knowledge can create advantages for you or others when you use it to develop story ideas, usually in the form of aspects. For example, if you need to scale a sheer cliff without ropes, you might call on Knowledge (Geology) to know how stable a rock formation is, producing *A Few Good Handholds*.


 **Attack:** Knowledge isn't used to directly attack. It can be used to create advantages for others to invoke while attacking, though. For example, you could know that you need to *Go For the Eyes!*


 **Defend:** Knowledge isn't used to directly defend. Though, much like for attacks, it can be used to create advantages for others to invoke while defending. For example, you could know that *"It can't see us if we don't move."*


Invent

You're inquisitive by nature—as a child you'd disassemble things, wanting to see how they worked—and now you have a lot of time on your hands. Given enough supplies and time, you can take things apart and rebuild or repurpose them as needed, creating anything from a desktop pencil launcher to a small automaton.

 **Overcome:** Use Invent to overcome obstacles where you can build or deconstruct a solution, or where you can apply that knowledge. Could you scale that wall if you fashioned a grapnel gun? Would it be easier to get across town if you built a flying car?

 **Create An Advantage:** Invent can create advantages for yourself or others either by fabricating items or by applying that knowledge to manipulate the environment. The physical objects you create are the advantages, made from the combination of what's at hand and where you are. So, if you're facing a rather angry mutated bear, and all you've got is two bottles of beer, your belt, and a bag full of laundry, you could use Invent to build an *Anti-Bear Slingshot*.

 **Attack:** Invent isn't used to directly attack.

 **Defend:** Invent isn't used to directly defend.



Stunts

Stunts are the specific talents and abilities of your character, the things they can do that no one else can do quite as well or with such flair. The stunts listed here are meant to replace those in *Fate Core*. You can use both types if you choose, but just be aware that you might end up with more stunts on the page than you'll end up using.

In *Behind the Walls*, characters have three kinds of stunts: personal stunts, cooperative stunts, and secret stunts. Characters start with one of each, and they can purchase additional stunts of any kind for 1 refresh each.

Personal Stunts

The **personal stunt** is something you do better because of a skill you have. To create a personal stunt, create a sentence with this format:

Because I _____, I _____.

To fill in the first blank, look at the descriptions you wrote when you chose your skills. From these, find the most compelling or interesting statement and adapt it. For example, if you want your personal stunt to involve your Knowledge (Rocks), you'd write:

Because I read a lot about rocks, I _____.

The second blank is trickier because you need to develop a benefit from whatever you wrote in the first blank. These stunts are closest to the *Fate Core* stunts, but rather than tying it to a specific skill, tie it to a situation, like this:

Because I read a lot about rocks, any time I encounter an obstacle with rocks, I get +1 to any action I perform related to that obstacle.

Paradoxically, broadening the description narrows the scope of the stunt, in this case because it requires that there are rocks and that these rocks are part of an obstacle. However, with the correct phrasing, the benefit can be used outside the scope of the skill you used to build the stunt. Now, *any* rock in the way gives the character some ability to overcome it, which might lead you to find more opportunities to use the stunt with different skills.

By tying the stunt to a situation rather than a skill, you don't need to be exact in how you understand or interpret whatever skill you're using, which helps prevent conflict if your interpretation or understanding differs from someone else's. Also, by tying it to the situation, you're not limiting yourself by what the skill says, but rather focusing on when it gets used.

Cooperative Stunts

The **cooperative stunt** is a talent or ability that works best when you and someone else are attempting the same task using the same skill. To create a cooperative stunt, fill in this template:

When I'm _____ with someone, we both _____.

To fill the first blank, you can use any skill to describe the action, so long as it can be done with someone else. For example, if you're a decent fighter and you do better with someone on your side, you might write this:

When I'm fighting alongside someone, we both get +1 to Fight.

How you describe the cooperation or its outcome during play is up to you, and how you use the stunt needs to make sense to the GM. Otherwise, there are only two hard rules:

- Only two people can be involved in a cooperative stunt
- Both people must be ranked at least Average (+1) in the skill improved by the stunt

Capping the cooperation at two people prevents the temptation for all the players to start cooperating simultaneously (“I’ll join in!” “Me too!”), giving everyone a bonus, possibly undeservedly or unnecessarily. GMs, you may find it necessary to make sure the players’ cooperative stunts are distinct from one another, so that every player can use their stunt to contribute to the story in a distinct way.

Cooperators need to have at least Average (+1) rank in the pertinent skill, as someone with a Mediocre (+0) rank or worse would do more harm than good, slowing the team down and leaving the other person with an unfair share of the work. The actual rank doesn’t matter because the point of cooperation is to show that a pair of people can do something better, not to show how well they do it individually.

As with the personal stunt, you can write the cooperative stunt for a situation rather than using a specific skill. For example:

When I am trapped with somebody and have no way out, we both gain +1 to our attempts to Fight our way out.

By naming the skill outright somewhere in the stunt, you can avoid writing awkward sentences where the skill feels shoehorned in. It doesn’t matter where it goes in the sentence, so long as the sentence contains the name of a skill, a condition it gets used in, and the benefit.

Secret Stunts

The **secret stunt** is something you can do that no one knows you can do. Maybe you don't even yet know you can do it until the opportunity presents itself.

A secret stunt is as potent, if not more so, than other stunts. It lets you do something unbelievably cool or powerful, but with a catch or complication. Make one by filling in these blanks:

I _____, but I _____.

Both sides of a secret stunt have to balance out. If the first blank lets you do something entirely mechanical, the second blank must be mechanical as well.

Secret stunts are only limited by the type of story being told. For example, it wouldn't make sense for you to be in prison if you could fly. Suppose you want to take a few extra punches in a fight, but you're a sucker for a pretty face. You'd write this:

I can take a few extra punches (+1 physical stress box), but I will always concede in Deceive challenges.

Yes, this example makes the character completely vulnerable to deception. Yes, that means they lose. It's okay to lose. It's okay to not win flawlessly. Remember, you're sitting around the table to tell the best story, and sometimes it's more interesting to lose challenges, take some bumps and bruises, and work hard for the victories.

When creating secret stunts during character creation, the GM and players face a decision: who knows the secret?

If the secret isn't known by other players and the GM, then the player must be honest and consistent in using the stunt. This has the highest risk of abuse and requires the most trust.

If the secret isn't known by the other players, but the GM knows, then the GM can act as a gatekeeper to make sure the stunt fits with the type of story being told. Revealing this stunt through play is then a surprise for those involved: the GM to see how it gets used, and the players to see what it is.

If the secret is known by both the players and GM—meaning it's being discussed openly with an agreement that characters act surprised as it develops over time—then the “hiding” of information becomes more a vehicle for excitement (“How will this play out?”) rather than a covert competition to see who can keep a secret longest or best. This has lowest risk and high potential for making great stories, since a known secret will drive people to collaborate in ways that let everyone use their stunts.



Using the secret stunt essentially reveals it, making it no longer secret. However, the context of the reveal becomes important here: for the example stunt, it might be easy to demonstrate its benefit during a fight, but the stunt's downside isn't likely to show up in that same fight. This is the chief benefit of the secret stunt, as it means two different scenes and challenges get affected by it.

By not rewarding the secret stunt's use, there's no temptation for the players to make a competition of using secrets stunts. There's no reward for keeping the secret longer than someone else, and there's no penalty for revealing it first.

These stunts deviate from how stunts are used in *Fate Core*. These deviations are important because they speak to the style of game being played: You might play "small," with minimal bonuses or very specific situations, as part of a very realistic or gritty game. Or you might play "large," with a wider range of bonuses or broader situations, as part of a game with hyper-competent characters that stand out in significant ways. By adjusting the stunts, you adjust the volume of the story to a level everyone enjoys.

Secret

Each character has one **secret**, some profound and possibly life-altering revelation, either about themselves or about someone else. You could have known it all your life, even before your time in prison, or maybe you found it out while behind the walls. In any event, you don't want your secret to be public knowledge.

To create your secret, think about something you wouldn't want other people to know. Is it about your personal life before you ended up here? Did something happen to you while you were inside? Did you witness something, only to be sworn to secrecy? Are you being paid for your silence?

For more on secrets, read page 18.

Gang Membership

Finally, select an allegiance to one of the three major groups in *Behind the Walls*.

The Red Angels: The Red Angels are made up of people you'd expect in a prison gang. They're strong, fit, unafraid to get physical in a confrontation, and confident because they know they have the muscle to back up any threats. They started out as a bunch of guys who just lifted weights together, and slowly grew into a set of thick-necked toughs who'd provide you protection if you were willing to do them a favor later.

Crutch has led the Angels since he founded it. He shepherded the group through its earliest days as a group of mercenaries to its current position as a feared entity, though the Angels never got much higher than midway up the prison's social hierarchy. Crutch knows the faction is where it is because of the menace it projects, and he cultivates this image by dropping references to made-up fights so they seem even more ruthless.

The Thorns: The Thorns started as an effort to organize small-time gambling and item procurement within the prison. Over time, its members lied or manipulated their way into administrative positions, where they could flex the rules or obtain contraband in quantities just large enough not to be noticed. They grew without provoking much suspicion, a collection of office workers and managers who took strength and comfort in the fraternity of not quite being in charge.

Numbers has led the gang for several years now, and his Napoleon complex has grown as the gang has been given more latitude by the guards and more responsibility in their jobs. Numbers never cared about power—since he never had any—so any notoriety the Thorns have gained has gone straight to his head.

The Unaffiliated: These people aren't in a true gang, and this group isn't associated with either of the two major powers. They're the "everyone else" in the prison, a motley confederacy of killers, thieves, con artists, and reprobates. Both the Angels and Thorns draw on this "talent" pool from time to time, so if the PCs aren't already members of one gang, they could be "drafted" before the story gets too far along.

Guards

Prison guards have existed as long as prisons have, soon followed by the tropes that guards are either apathetic or brutal sadists. How much truth those tropes hold depends on the type of *Behind the Walls* game you want to play, but we give some guidelines below on making the guards less one-dimensional.

The guards will be dressed and equipped about the same: Any sidearm would have four or five shots. A baton is almost always at their hip. If they have keys, they'll be for whatever building the guard's in. Not all guards have "master" keys; those are reserved for the Warden and the most senior or trusted guards.

The guards listed have "Some Aspects" so you can tailor or add to them as needed. These are by no means the only types of guards, and we encourage you to amend them to suit your stories.

Guards come in three types: routine, hostile, and lazy.

Routine guards do their job, don't look to cause trouble, and only act when there's a legitimate threat of violence or prisoner injury.

Guard (Routine)

Aspects: *Another Day, Another Dollar; I Keep the Peace; It's a Prison, Not a Zoo*

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Fight or Shoot

Good (+3): Physique

Fair (+2): Deceive, Rapport, Athletics

Stress

Hostile guards take their job a little too seriously. They're willing to provoke violence so they can dispense retribution. They don't need much in the way of a reason to insert themselves into any altercation or situation they feel should not be happening. Whenever they act, the force they use is almost always excessive.

Guard (Hostile)

High Concept: *Prison Guard*

Trouble: *Disrespected and Angry About It*

Other Aspects: *Willing to Crack Some Skulls; Intimidation*

Breeds Respect; I Do What Needs to Be Done

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Fight or Shoot

Good (+3): Physique or Provoke

Fair (+2): Athletics, Notice

Stress



Lazy guards do the bare minimum to be considered a guard. Sure, they patrol, but more often than not they turn a blind eye toward anything short of inmate violence or a full-scale riot. They won't act decisively or aggressively in any situation where they personally aren't in danger.

Guard (Lazy)

High Concept: *Prison Guard*

Trouble: *I Turn Too Many Blind Eyes*

Other Aspects: *That's Not in My Job Description;*
I Keep the Peace; Overworked and Self-Assured

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Rapport or Empathy

Good (+3): Deceive

Fair (+2): Shoot or Fight or Will

Stress

All guards can use the stunt **Call for Backup** by spending a fate point: Any guard can summon up to 2 guards of a type other than his own.

SECRETS

Everyone keeps secrets. Sometimes they're good; we don't tell people what they're getting as gifts, after all, or that they're going to their surprise party. Sometimes they're not good, whether it's a grave infidelity or just keeping up appearances.

In *Behind the Walls*, secrets act for both game and narrative functions. But before we can talk about how they're used, we should talk about the kind of secrets available in play: **world secrets**, **NPC secrets**, and **PC secrets**.

World Secrets

A world secret is something the GM holds back from the players in order to create tension or mystery. It's a setup to be paid off later. This could be revealing that the NPC they've been talking to is really the Warden and that, years ago during some riot, he was locked away so that an inmate or guard, posing as the Warden, could get what they wanted. Or it could be something as simple as suggesting that there's a town nearby unaffected by the collapse of society.

World secrets let the GM carry the story out from a starting adventure and progress into a fuller campaign. Yes, for a session or two the players are involved in the plot at the prison, but the world secrets get them outside. Maybe there's *A Radio in the Guard Tower* and the guards have been *Tracking Transmissions for No Known Reason*. This turns the guards into a more pointed enemy and gives the players new things to explore: Why are the guards keeping this info secret? Where are the transmissions coming from?



NPC Secrets: Actions and Intentions

Giving a secret to an NPC helps the PCs invest in the NPC or connects the NPC to the story in a way beyond their initial purpose, which is often useful as a source of information or as a bridge from one part of the plot to the next. For example, take an NPC—let's say the prison's Warden—and give him a *Terminal Illness*; suddenly you're giving the situation some color. It also provides an opportunity for roleplay, taking advantage of the secret for dramatic scenes.

There are two types of NPC secrets: **actions** and **intentions**.

A secret action is what the NPC has been doing while the PCs haven't kept an eye out or while they've been "off-screen." The action could be positive or negative, depending on how the GM needs to develop the story, but always significant enough to warrant mentioning. Use these secrets to propel the players toward more storytelling and play opportunities.

It's not enough that the Warden has been off-screen learning to knit, since that doesn't afford many opportunities to drive the story into new scenes. But if the Warden has been *Buying Personal Medical Supplies from a Town Outside*, you give his terminal illness a sense of gravity while also opening up a debate over whether his action qualifies as selfish. It also gives an easy hook: the PCs could go find this town if the opportunity arose: for example, if the town stopped communicating with the Warden just when he needs medicine the most. Secrets can fuel the story once they're revealed, but we'll talk about that more later.

A secret intention is the genesis for action. It's a perceived want or need an NPC is motivated to fill: the Warden's need for medicine to treat his terminal illness, or a guard's want to become the new Warden. The actions bred from intentions shape the story directly or indirectly, as the story needs. Direct action can appear linear; for example, many players are familiar with the trope of an NPC sending PCs out on a quest to deliver a Macguffin to somewhere or someone. In contrast, indirect action can provide color to situations and characters. All the machinations of the guard wanting to assume control of the prison—anything from rallying other guards to planning the current Warden's killing—are made partially off-screen, only exposed if the PCs stumble onto them, which the GM can ensure happens when the PCs or the plot needs a boost of action.

The danger with indirect action is that, if there's no discovery or reveal, the transition from indirect to direct can be confusing. Furthering our example, if the guard *Wants to Be the New Warden, and Will Kill the Current One to Do It*, but the PCs never overhear any part of this, or never stumble across clues to help them piece this together, that moment when the guard makes his move for power will seem to come out of left field. A GM can mitigate this confusion by hinting at the plan, but doing so in small enough portions to avoid pausing the main plot or diverging from it radically while the PCs resolve this issue—or worse, mistake this side plot for the next act of the main plot.



PC Secrets

Before we can talk about a secret's reveal, we need to talk about giving the PCs secrets of their own. PC secrets can fly in the face of conventional gameplay, where the players share information equally, usually while creating characters before kicking the story off. In *Fate*, character creation is collaborative, which lets all the players tailor and develop the story to suit their needs, but there is an underlying assumption that “collaborative” means “full disclosure.” It doesn't.

The challenge with keeping secrets is one of keeping player knowledge separate from character knowledge. Ericka, for example, might know that Matt's character has feelings for her character, but her character is oblivious to them. Her character's obliviousness stems from her own awareness of her and Matt's agreement, and she is tacitly tasked with keeping that division of knowledge in place until such time as the plot warrants the secret's revelation. How long it takes for one secret or another to be revealed is never the same, and some ideas might never come to light, depending on how the story moves from beat to beat and act to act. That's alright, though not ideal.

Ideally, PC secrets function like NPC intentions: they are signposts and maps that express an idea without stating it outright. Your birthday gift isn't a surprise if you know what it is, so your gift-giver acts in an effort to keep that information away from you. They avoid discussions; they don't provide hints; they're careful in hiding the gifts. Actions are built on intentions, so a PC's secrets sit at the heart of what that PC does throughout the story.

This all means it's important to give the secret some weight, but not so much that the whole plot derails around someone *Secretly Building a Robot Army*, for instance. While that secret might work in a story of high pulp or science fiction, it's out of place in *Behind the Walls*. Set boundaries to the secrets based on the feel and story that the table agrees on.

Also, be sure to discuss whether secrets can be talked about openly in play. If the players can keep player knowledge separate from character knowledge, if the secret has an appropriate nature or tone, and if the GM believes sharing the secrets will contribute to building the characters, then go for it. Sharing secrets in this way can connect characters and make the play experience all the more enjoyable and memorable.

For example, during character creation you might have a really good idea for a secret, maybe *I Have a Long-Lost Sibling*, and if you share that with the table, maybe another player will make a character who *is* that brother or sister. If it makes for a better story, share it.

A caution: If the players spend too much time trying to eke out secrets, they might stop working with each other toward the story's resolution. So, GMs, make sure the players agree to use their secrets fairly, so they keep the plot's momentum sustainable and regularly stoked.

To prevent abuse of secrets, the obvious step would be to disallow them entirely. But doing this can backfire, robbing NPCs and plot alike of much-needed motivation, justification, and explanation for their actions and their consequences. The players need access to at least two of these elements in order to feel like they aren't in a predetermined, linear story, making secrets a useful tool in shaping play away from the traditional "Go here, do a thing, then go there" type of story.

The Mechanics of Secrets

Secrets can be handled in many ways. No single approach suits all maturity levels or desires, so here are a few options to consider. In all three of these methods, it's easiest to assume that, by the end of play, all the PCs will know the others' secrets. The secrets need not be described during character creation, but can be doled out and revealed during and through play. Doing secrets this way will help people who can't decide on a secret during creation and want to figure it out on the go.

The Quick Method

The simplest way to reward using secrets is to add either a flat +1 bonus to any challenge taken either because of or in support of a secret. However, this method requires the secrets to be known at least to the GM. If one player just takes a bonus without saying why, often the others will start taking bonuses without justification as well. In this way, it's to a player's advantage that the secret be applicable throughout play. Note that a secret won't be applicable if it's about something that wouldn't come up in play, like being royalty or having superpowers.

Matt's character has feelings for Ericka's, and Matt and Ericka agree that her character is unaware of them. His character's secret, *I Want Her to Notice Me*, manifests any time he takes a leadership position, risks himself, or otherwise distinguishes himself in front of her. The +1 bonus here only makes his feelings more apparent. The drama comes from her character choosing either to acknowledge them or not.

The Open Narrative Method

In this method, secrets do not confer a fixed numerical bonus, but instead offer more situations for roleplay. When an advantage is created because of a secret, give it another free invoke. The additional invoke can add tension (or relief) to a narrative and propel the PCs forward.

Mark's character has a ***Fear of Confrontation***, but the group has found themselves stuck at the far end of a hallway with angry guards approaching. He volunteers to "handle it," using every non-combat skill he can think of to create ***Distracted Guards***. Because he created this aspect in support of his secret, it gets another free invoke, giving the other characters time to sneak away.

The Combined Method

This way of handling secrets combines the two previous methods together. When a character acts in a way motivated by a secret, give that action a +1 bonus. Using this method can be more work for the GM, who must track secrets and available invocations, but not much more.

Revealing Secrets

The reveal moment for any secret can either be a stroke of deft play or a chance for ideas to fall flat. If the secret has woven its way into how a character acts and reacts, then its revelation will only serve to feed the story and make things all the more exciting. However, if the secret hasn't been in play, or it's been played for more for comedy than tension, then the reveal won't be all that stunning.

To set up an effective reveal, use the right secrets. If you are playing a darker, grimmer game, then the secrets should emphasize that. If the story is spotted with moments of levity or comedy, the secrets can be farther ranging, exchanging dolor and angst for irony and laughs.

A secret doesn't need to be revealed if it never comes up or if doing so would just water down the story. Both of these situations are signs that the secret likely wasn't as significant as first thought. Sure, it might inform how you play the character, but if it motivates the character to get involved in specific parts of the story, then the secret isn't as pivotal as it should be.

Reveal a secret when...

- It increases the immediate stakes.
- It explains, rationalizes, or justifies exposition.
- It will elicit a response from the table.

Increase the Stakes

Manipulating the stakes in *Behind the Walls* can turn a simple story about life in prison into a dramatic opportunity for players to explore ideas of institutionalism, culture, and aggression. While you might increase the stakes by having a gang fight in the prison yard, for instance, it's easier done by zooming in on individuals. The more that the players know, can relate to, and care about an NPC, the stronger they'll react when that NPC is at the heart of a situation. The injury or death of someone the players all care about can cohere a group like nothing else, so toy with their heartstrings and keep people attached to people right before they get yanked away.

Explain, Rationalize or Justify

Villain monologues are the stuff of legend. They are the modern soliloquy. They are also, when done well, something players talk about after the game. But they are not without their shortcomings: They can be interrupted, they can fall flat, or—worst of all—they can be completely undersold or confusing. Why the megalomaniac wants to take over the world might be summed up in a single emotion like greed or envy, but how that emotion gets conveyed to players is often not as simple.

Secrets make great answers to the often-asked question—Why?—but they can be tricky to connect to the plot. Thankfully, keeping the story intimate and playing with emotional heartstrings can easily tie an explanation to a secret. Harder still are giving the rationalizations and justifications for a secret, since doing so requires the secret to first elicit some amount of empathy from the players. This can be difficult for a player to do, especially if they're being asked to think of the megalomaniac who's been trying to kill them all session as really just a person, just like them, who sorely needs a few more hugs and pats on the back. Humanizing an antagonist can be seen as a shortcut, so it's often easier to use the secret as a springboard to more tension, especially since revealing an NPC's secret is seldom without cost. In the case of the megalomaniac, for example, if the PCs discover her secret, she might be driven to try even more to kill them.

Elicit a Response

For many people, the measure of a “good” game is how many times people laughed or the number of memorable lines or jokes. For many others, it's whether or not a particular emotional button was pressed and, if so, how often. The oohs and ahhs around a table are often badges of pride, all part of the enjoyed collaborative experience. Secrets make for great badge-fuel here, especially if their reveal leads to more great roleplaying.

Is It Good or Bad to Reveal?

One of the harder questions surrounding secrets is whether they have value once revealed. Answering that question begins with accepting the idea that protecting this knowledge from discovery fuels actions and behavior that may result in an unexpected path toward the eventual revelation.

Depending on the rules you use for secrets (page 18), keeping them hidden might be a great way to rack up consistent bonuses to rolls. However, even the secrets that most define a character will not find purchase in some situations, at least not without a lenient GM or a lengthy and convoluted explanation.

You might counter the desire to keep secrets by giving revealing some bonuses—the obvious ideas here are giving a player a +1 on a particular skill for each scene where there’s no reveal or giving a +2 when they do reveal—but this might create a near-constant bevy of bonuses you’ll have to track. Instead, you might look to the narrative to tell you if there’s any advantage to revealing a secret; it does not have to be mechanical. Some intriguing things can happen when you don’t use dice or skills and just keep to the roleplaying.

Revealing a secret at the proper moment gives the player a chance to add a new facet to a situation. Revealing is tricky, though, because “proper” can be very subjective, and because revealing might just turn into the player stealing the spotlight. Nonetheless, if you’re careful to err toward good play, a reveal can put a nice bow on a character’s arc, the story’s plot, or both.

Leaving a secret unrevealed is great for longer play (see *Beyond the Walls*). It leaves unanswered questions of “when” and “how”—when it is going to get revealed, how will it be revealed, and how will people react—which drives play into multiple sessions.

Ultimately, GMs, the choice to reveal or not reveal is yours. There’s sufficient evidence to argue either case, but it comes down to knowing whether your own group will respond best to mechanical or narrative incentives.

WAR AND PEACE, LOVE AND HATE

Today at noon the Warden is pulling together the two largest and most dangerous gangs: the Red Angels and the Thorns. Tensions have boiled over, especially with the news from the outside world becoming less frequent and more tragic. The war likely destroyed everything outside the prison, and it's mirrored by the battles brewing inside: tensions escalating into skirmishes, people falling victim—then tense periods of silence, punctuated again by violence. This powder keg could erupt into the prison's worst all-out riot, which is why the Warden has brought members of both gangs together. He hopes to work out some kind of appeasement or arrangement to keep the groups from overwhelming the already stretched-too-thin staff. If this fails, everything will come apart at the seams.

Routine rules prison life. You're told when to get up, when to go somewhere, when to leave, and when to sleep. It sounds rigid, and it is. The schedule isn't very flexible on the whole, but if a PC has a relationship with the guards, they might be lenient on small infractions, so long as they're not habitual.

At 6 in the morning, everyone's day starts with a series of shrill buzzer clanks and morning roll call. After that, the population is moved in an orderly fashion to the Mess Hall for breakfast.



6am: The Kitchen and Mess Hall

The Kitchen is the rear half of an entire building, the front half being the Mess Hall.

The Mess Hall is filled with tables and benches, all bolted to the ground. The windows are barred, their frames stretching nearly floor to ceiling, and there's a buffet line against one wall. Stacks and stacks of plastic and ceramic food trays sit on a wheeled cart to one side.

The Kitchen is all industrial metal surfaces, long counters, and basins. Sitting against a wall is a conveyor belt toaster, somewhat functional. A pair of huge twenty-burner stoves sits in the rear. The Thorns have moved in some chairs, as they frequently use this place for anything from meetings to shake-downs to gambling.

On a long counter sit a lot of small appliances. Under that counter, sharp knives and silverware are kept in a locked drawer; it's a Good (+4) lock, pretty strong, and each guard has a key to it. The prison lacks the consistent power needed to run the many blenders and mixers, but they make sure there's hot coffee every morning and at least two palatable meals a day.

Lots of items are available in the Kitchen, including but not limited to:

- Small motors
- Small, sharp blades
- A heating coil for a toaster
- Kitchen knives
- Several feet of extension cords and power cables
- A mallet
- An icepick

The Kitchen is the home turf of the Thorns. Any Thorns here, PCs or not, are likely on Kitchen duty. Any PCs that are Thorns will receive a message on the napkin that comes with their silverware. It reads *"Be ready to go when MT happens."*

Breakfast lasts until 7am, when another (different) buzzer grates. The population is ushered out of the Mess Hall and to their labors. As the prisoners exit the Mess, they're counted again. Any Thorns working the Kitchen for breakfast remain here, under guard until 8am, cleaning up.

During breakfast, rumors spread that today's a huge day. They say the Warden has tired of the gangs' constant fighting, and that each gang has sworn to do something about it. No one is sure if that means peace or if that means violence, though, so most everyone is on edge.

A few minutes into service, each gang clusters together in the Kitchen (even if that splits the party). The Red Angels, surprisingly, aren't tight lipped about their plans—they're ready and even hungry for a fight. However, one particular member is vocal about how he really doesn't want to fight: Twisty, the largest and toughest Red Angel not in charge. He actually wants to hear the Warden out, because maybe something good can come of this. Naturally the Red Angel leader, Crutch, wants no part of a peaceful anything. He's eager to

make this fight “a big deal,” and he’s confident he can “count on Twisty, his best guy, to take out the Thorns’ best guy.”

Crutch recruits any like-minded PCs, telling them to meet him in the Yard before the gangs go talk to the Warden and to make sure they’re ready for a rumble. He’s confident that “no one’s getting searched before this thing goes down” and urges people to get their hands on some weapons before the morning is up. PCs who are more willing to side with Twisty will earn Crutch’s disapproval and some menacing glares.

At the sound of the 7am buzzer, Twisty pulls the PCs aside and urges them to support him. To demonstrate his trustworthiness, he reveals his secret: he’s in love with Wagner, the Thorn’s “best guy.” He swears everyone to secrecy, knowing he’s risking a lot by telling people this, but he really wants to give peace a chance, especially with the world going so screwy lately.

7am to 11am: Work Detail

Following breakfast, the prison population is set to work. There are five areas for work:

- Yard Work
- The Laundry
- The Library
- Cleaning Detail
- The Shop

The players can either choose a duty for their PCs during character creation or have the GM assign one. PCs with high Physique or Crafts will find themselves more useful in Yard Work or the Shop, for example, but they can take on any jobs they want.

Yard Work

This is considered one of the worst assignments. It’s the riskiest, since it exposes people to the outside world, and often things out there aren’t good. It’s also the most labor-intensive, since it involves everything from raking and mowing lawns by hand to pulling up stumps and rocks.

Yard Work requires tools, which means prisoners have access to the Tool Shed.

This is a small shed, about half the size of a cell, out next to the garden area of the prison. The lock on the door rusted out long ago, and the shed’s contents aren’t strictly regulated or monitored. Inside, piled against the back wall are some rusty rakes, hoes, some picks, and several shovels. A large bag of fertilizer, holding about fifty pounds, sits in the corner. Screwed into the wall is a small shelf with several packets of various seeds and a toolbox.

The toolbox is unlocked and contains three screwdrivers, a hammer, a chisel, and a working refillable lighter.

Should any animals attack, or should too many prisoners succumb to radiation, yard work is ended by a guard blowing three shrill blasts of his whistle, and everyone is sent to their cells or the Infirmary.

The Laundry

The Warden preaches that clean clothes maketh the man, so there's plenty of Laundry duty. It's often a lot of dumping huge bins of clothing into giant drums of suds and chemicals, then sitting around before hauling wet clothes by the shovelful into dryers. It's not as grueling as outdoor work, but exposure to chemicals, steam, and heavy workloads all take their toll.

The Laundry is a cavernous room taking up the basement of an entire building. Dozens of industrial machines stand in various states of disrepair or disuse, since the prison only has enough fuel to run one machine once a week.

Any washing machine or dryer can be cannibalized for the following parts using the Invent skill:

- A metal drum
- Several feet of power cable
- Several springs
- A round pane of glass
- One motor (which can be further broken down)
- Two hinges

The Library

This is considered the cushiest of jobs. Distributing reading supplies, cataloging materials, organizing communal activities, Library duty is nearly always dominated by Thorns. It's not physically taxing—the heaviest thing to lift is a phone book—and it affords access to the entire prison, thanks to the few carts of books that need to be pushed around.

The Library does not have much to salvage other than the usual office supplies, tables, chairs, and books.

The Thorns regularly sneak out of work details to meet at the Library. If any PCs are members, they're encouraged to attend. Their leader, Numbers, promises "retribution" against the Red Angels because Wagner, his "main man," stumbled across something while on Cleaning Detail. Numbers won't give any details, though.

Wagner is there as well. He looks saddened at the prospect of violence, but puts on a brave face whenever Numbers looks his way. The rest of the Thorns are hungry to pay the Red Angels back for all the times they've been "disrespected."

The meeting breaks up once guards filter into the Library. As people disperse, Wagner takes aside any PCs there. He tells them to avoid Numbers at all costs and to meet him down by the Guard Tower before the meeting at noon with the Warden. To help convince people, he'll say that he found a weapon in the Storage Area under the Tower when he was sent to paint it, and that he made the mistake of mentioning it to Numbers. If someone presses him for specifics about the weapon, he gets cagey. If anyone is still undecided, he'll reveal his secret—his love for Twisty—and that he'll explain more when people meet him at the Tower before the meeting.



Cleaning Detail

Not just mopping floors and cleaning bathrooms, this job also involves painting walls, wiping windows, making beds, and otherwise straightening any mess the Warden designates as “a problem.” The Warden and some of the toughest guards in the prison oversee this job, making it more of a punishment than a work assignment.

The Warden isn’t a bad guy; he’s quite paternal and kind, more like an elementary school principal or retired neighborhood pastor than like an authoritarian responsible for hundreds of inmates. But he is particular and fastidious, and he wants the prison to be in the best shape possible, even if the world around it is falling apart.

He seldom yells and often regrets many of the punishments he has to dole out. Today he’s eager to explain to anyone within earshot about how the upcoming “conversation” with the gangs could really birth a new spirit of compromise.

It’s easy to scavenge supplies in Cleaning Detail—paints, chemicals, and cleaning supplies don’t draw much notice from the guards, all of whom know well that the Warden likes a clean environment.

The Shop

Here, the prisoners work to fashion wood and metal into useful things, truly a skilled labor. Now that the outside is in shambles, workers in the Shop produce materials for use in the prison rather than outside it. A large stockpile of unsold but finished furniture sits waiting at a loading dock for trucks that will never arrive. Without orders to fill, more people are sent to the Shop in an effort to keep the generators functioning, the bed frames repaired, and the heavier items of prison use in working order.

The Shop is a goldmine. Sharp blades, chisels, screwdrivers, welding supplies, an array of metals—they’re all potential weapons just waiting to be exploited. The Warden can only spare so many guards, so there are only two posted: one at the door and one patrolling.

11am: The Yard

Work ends at 11, when people are ushered outside for recreation in the Yard, where they're overseen by five guards in the Guard Tower.

The Yard is a great place for the PCs, who have likely been separated, to reconvene and strategize before moving forward to meet Wagner, Crutch, or both before meeting with the Warden.

The Guard Tower

It stands in the middle of the Yard, a giant monolith of order. Its five guards work around the clock in 6-hour shifts, changing over shifts at 11am. Any guard working the Tower is *A Crack Shot* with Great (+4) Shoot, and they all tend to fire before sounding any alarm—inmates know a shot from the Tower means trouble, so freezing on the spot is often a good strategy. Entry into the Tower is through a door at its base, followed by a climb up a metal spiral staircase into a single round room. Halfway up the staircase, a landing houses a small bathroom.

The Storage Area

Located beneath the Tower, it's accessible through a small pair of metal storm cellar doors. A guard is often posted here during daylight hours. The Storage Area itself is an L-shaped space, the basement of a building demolished in order to expand the Yard.

At 11am, Wagner meets the Thorns and allies by the storm cellar doors, with no guard in sight. He leads them inside and shows them three things:

First, a rifle fitted with a small rocket-powered grenade, collecting dust.

The **M31 HEAT rifle grenade** is a precursor to the RPG. It is used mostly by the military of the era to pierce concrete and take out groups of people. It has a maximum range of 200 yards, and it's absolutely deadly at distances less than 50 yards.

Prisons and National Guard units could requisition one of these weapons, which they often converted to shoot tear gas for crowd control.

M31 HEAT Rifle Grenade

Weapon:3, considered lethal in close quarters

The rifle has never been used, but Wagner is pretty sure it will work. He was just moving things around when its crate broke open, and he regrets ever finding it down here.

Second, Wagner shows an elaborate series of wires and gears—made in part from a repurposed eggbeater, the guts of an alarm clock, and part of a pair of scissors—rigged to an electrical box. He’s confident that, at 12:01, this device will black the prison out for 5 minutes, plenty of time to get away.

Which leads to his third revelation: the tunnel he’s dug under the prison.

He’s been digging it for the last three and a half years, hiding dirt in empty crates while on Yard Detail. The passageway is large enough for two people to work their way through, all the way from the middle of the Yard to about a half-mile outside the walls, where he says he found a wheat field and a road. Once the blackout device kicks off, Wagner plans to meet Twisty here, and the two will escape. He’s rigged the first twenty feet of excavated tunnel to collapse—there’s a loose support beam, he explains—so no one can follow them.

If the PCs are eager to join them, Wagner will eventually concede, but he’ll need serious persuading. The tunnel is designed for just him and Twisty to get out—it’s not a free ride.

At 11:30, a pair of guards will enter the Storage Area, sending anyone out to the Yard, keeping a close eye on them as they depart. Wagner, before he leaves, sets the alarm for 12:01 and covers the tunnel entrance. Without a reasonable excuse for the inmates’ presence in the area, the guards may act more aggressively and suspiciously, with possible responses ranging from issuing a simple warning to forcibly separating people or returning them to their cells.



11:45: Pre-Meeting

Crutch has already assembled a group of four toughs, Twisty included, to “stratigerize” how they’re going to handle the Thorns. Each tough produces some form of melee weapon: a screwdriver, a sharpened shiv, a broken chair leg, something sharp and wicked. Crutch nods to Twisty, who hands him a cloth bundle.

With much fanfare, Crutch opens it to reveal a guard’s pistol and six bullets.

He doesn’t wave it around, though he does load it while saying he’s got two bullets for Numbers, two for Wagner, and two for anyone who “gets in the way.” Then he and his gang delegates, PCs included, head to meet the Warden. If any PCs wish to pass word to Twisty about Wagner’s plan, they can do so now; Twisty will enthusiastically but quietly thank them, and then ask for help in making sure he can duck out when the timer goes off.

Numbers and his group assemble outside the Library, and Numbers has a surprise of his own: an unused smoke grenade he saved from the last riot. He has no idea about the timer or Wagner’s plan, and he gleefully tells everyone around that he’s going to use the grenade to distract everyone and then “take out” Crutch. The others echo their support. Wagner casually nods to any PCs aware of his plot.

Each group will continue to make appropriate plans and then head to the Warden’s Office for the meeting.

12pm: The Warden’s Office

The office is much nicer than you’d expected. It’s practically homey. There are a few soft couches to sit on, and some nice looking chairs next to a desk. There’s even a large rocking chair over by the packed bookshelf. At the room’s center, a large metal table is set up with chairs around it.

Once both sides and the PCs arrive, the Warden welcomes everyone and gestures for the guard to wait outside the office. He doesn’t expect trouble and sees little reason to turn this “conversation” into anything intimidating. He offers everyone a glass of water and makes a few opening remarks about how he’s encouraged by everyone showing up, how he really thinks they can work out a solution.

And then 12:01 happens.

The blackout is total. No one can see anything, but they can hear things: The shattering of several drinking glasses. The pop and hiss of Numbers’ smoke grenade. The two cracks of Crutch’s gun. The door opening. Another crack of Crutch’s gun. The sounds of intense scuffling.



When the Lights Come Back On

Chaos descends on the entire prison pretty quickly. If the blackout didn't send the guards to the alarm, the gunshots did. Prisoners run amok all over the complex, guards fire at them, and gang tensions bubble over.

In the Warden's Office, both gangs fight each other, though there's no sign of Twisty or Wagner initially.

GMs, make the three gunshots matter. One bullet killed the guard at the door, leaving his body in the doorway, blood spilling onto the tile. The other two bullets went elsewhere.

If Numbers Got Shot

Numbers might have shanked Crutch right as he got shot, leaving both of them to possibly bleed out while their gangs fight on.

If the Warden Got Shot

This will force the guards to quell any prisoner fighting through absolute force. They'll come down hard, eager to beat people into submission as retribution for killing the Warden.

If Twisty or Wagner Got Shot

A bullet might have clipped either or both men as they made their way to the tunnel. If either sustains an injury, he'll leave a blood trail for the PCs or surviving gang members to follow.

In any event, the fighting in the Warden's Office will continue. If Numbers and Crutch are still alive, they'll bolt out the door and into the prison. PCs with gang allegiance will be called on by their leaders to "handle the fight." Eventually, more guards will filter in and attempt to restore control.

Final Confrontation: At the Mouth of the Tunnel

The fighting in the Yard is perfect cover for Twisty and Wagner to reach the tunnel entrance. The PCs can catch up to them pretty quickly, especially if either is injured, but so can Crutch and Numbers, should either be alive.

Numbers will have made a beeline for the Storage Area, finding the HEAT grenade launcher waiting there. When the PCs arrive, he's backed himself into a corner, the rifle raised to shoot. It's at this moment that Twisty and Wagner stand at the mouth of their escape, and Crutch charges into the room, his gun still holding three bullets.

Diplomatic PCs can try and negotiate some kind of arrangement. With three bullets versus a grenade, though, the chance for everyone getting seriously injured is high. Any guards who arrive will also draw their guns, though they won't immediately fire on anyone, thanks to the grenade.

Neither Crutch nor Numbers will surrender without a fight, and they'll fight to the death. Twisty and Wagner just want to leave. If they're pursued, even by friendly PCs, they'll knock out the support post and cave the tunnel's mouth behind them. Any serious wounds they've suffered might make freedom very bitter—they won't live long outside of the prison without medical care.

Whichever way the PCs act, hostile guards will continue to appear, draw their weapons, and escalate the tension.

The Aftermath

Whatever the outcome, no matter the survivors or victims, life at Collins Park Correctional Facility will be irrevocably changed.

If the Warden is dead, the prison riot spirals into terrible violence with high casualties until the guards can appoint a new Warden from their own ranks.

If one gang eliminates the other, they rule the population with an iron hand, eventually overpowering even the most hostile of guards and pressing them into a labor force under the gang's control.

If Twisty and Wagner escape and blow the tunnel, it just needs a new opening. Once that's done, anyone can use it to reach the outside world.

Behind the Walls can easily be the starting point of an adventure after life in prison. Whatever the world holds beyond those walls is up to the players and GM to discover.

RELEVANT STATS AND NPCS

The Warden

The Warden is a stocky, tired older man. He's been Warden nearly 40 years, and probably will be until the day he dies. When you were incarcerated, he had just a little dab of grey hair at his temples; now, there's barely any ink-black hair left.

The Warden

High Concept: *Warden of the Territory*

Trouble: *Warden to a Prison Without a Society*

Other Aspects: *"I always want more.";*

By Any Means Necessary; I Have a Secret

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Deceive, Empathy

Fair (+2): Investigate, Fight, Shoot

Stress

Crutch, Leader of the Red Angels

Crutch is a thick-necked wall of muscle, and a mural of prison tattoos and scars. His nose bears signs of one too many breaks, and he's developing a good case of cauliflower ear. He's the grown-up version of a schoolyard bully.

Crutch

High Concept: *Leader of the Red Angels*

Trouble: *Aggressively Violent*

Other Aspects: *No Head for Talking; A Tireless Bully;*

Eager to Fight

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Physique

Good (+3): Fight, Shoot

Fair (+2): Athletics, Will, Notice

Stress

Twisty

Twisty can double as a college quarterback: He's got good looks, muscle, and charm to spare. He only fell in with the gang because he's tough in a fight and he certainly never expected to find love in a men's prison.

Twisty

High Concept: *Member of the Red Angels*

Trouble: *Burdened By My Secret Relationship*

Other Aspects: *Die-Hard Romantic; Natural Tough Guy; I Keep Wagner Safe*

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Physique

Good (+3): Fight, Rapport

Fair (+2): Empathy, Will, Notice

Stress

Red Angels

Rank and file members of the Red Angels have Great (+4) Fight and 2 stress boxes.



Numbers, Leader of the Thorns

Anywhere else, Numbers would be a toady or an obnoxiously cliché business manager. He's not a fighter, preferring to sweet-talk and deceive his opponents so that someone else can do the dirty work. He's a greasy, weasel-faced man with pinched features beneath beady eyes.

Numbers

High Concept: *Leader of the Thorns*

Trouble: *Prison Gang Napoleon Complex*

Other Aspects: *"I will make them take me seriously.";*

Nobody Calls Me Short!; Power Goes to My Head

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Deceive, Athletics

Fair (+2): Will, Fight, Shoot

Stress

Wagner

You would not expect to see Wagner survive long in prison. He's a tiny nebbish of a man, strained with constant anxiety and hair that resists any taming. He's soft-spoken, well educated, and shy to the point of mumbling.

Wagner

High Concept: *Member of the Thorns*

Trouble: *Secretly In Love with an Enemy*

Other Aspects: *Torn Between Love and Allegiance;*

Very Handy; "I don't want any trouble."

Skills of Note

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Invent, Empathy

Fair (+2): Investigate, Fight, Knowledge (Botany)

Stress

Thorns

The foot soldiers of the Thorns have Great (+4) Rapport, Fair (+2) Fight, and 2 stress boxes.



BEYOND THE WALLS

Behind the Walls began modestly as a one-shot adventure, but has since grown into a starting point for a larger world. To continue the game, here are some ideas.

Maybe the world is especially dystopic, awash in abandonment and decay, with no one around for miles in any direction. Maybe the world is crackling with potent radiation and irradiated B-movie insects, exposing workers to radiation (1 stress per hour of exposure, 2 stress if they wander farther from the prison) and super-sized dangers. Maybe the world is okay, but the Commies parachuted in and look to take over the prison as a military base.

Make the world as dangerous and interesting as possible, not to keep the PCs from escaping, but to keep the menace real—yes, things are bad inside, but they're probably worse outside. GMs, you can discuss what happened in and since 1951 with the players, or you can just parcel it out during play. You could even have each player contribute one element of the outside world—something true and factual about what happened—as a way to connect the prison to the outside world.

However you play, wherever you decide to take the story, there are no wrong choices, so long as everyone has a good time when they sit at the table.

Develop the World

The world sits on the cusp of the 1960s. Tensions like the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) can still occur, substituting Nixon for Kennedy. Likewise, Watergate (1972) can still happen simply by adjusting for time. But the world isn't only America, so consider bringing in news from other parts of the globe, such as Maoist China and the Khmer Rouge in Vietnam, grounding the world in semi-realistic details while still maintaining a healthy intimacy about the lives of the PCs.

One benefit of playing an alternate history is that you can quickly spin events in far-flung directions, leading to dramatically different outcomes. For example, there's no mention of Kennedy in *Behind the Walls*, so does that mean there's no Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby or lengthy conspiracy? Maybe someone else gets killed, or maybe Kennedy doesn't die at all. And what about the space race? Do we ever get to the moon now? There's little reason to restrict your ideas when building a campaign from the ground up, so be open-minded about mixing elements together in unexpected ways.

Move the Prison

The prison isn't located somewhere definite. It's based on several prisons all across the United States as well as fictional ones. Without a set geography, the prison's surroundings are wholly variable and modular. Maybe it sits in the shadow of huge mountains or as the lone structure for dozens of miles over wild fields. Think about how the geography might inform the immediate non-prison life: How far from a prison would there be comfortable living? Where does the prison get its supplies? Then think about the post-radioactive world created by dropping tons of nuclear weapons: Would you head toward that building in the distance? Would roving gangs of outlaws do the same? Changing where the prison is located gives you more freedom to say what kinds of situations and interactions will happen once the PCs leave the front gate.

Create Some Neighbors

The people of *Behind the Walls* aren't the only survivors. Other people survived—whole towns, even. Once the PCs leave Collins Park, they must adapt to a place where they're no longer subject to routine, yet still bear the stigma of being convicts to everyone else. How will the first encounter go? Will they be seen as a threat? Will the new NPCs welcome them as signs that they're not alone? These meetings and developing relationships are great opportunities for creating fish out of water stories, playing with the expectations and conventions of limited population and horrible circumstances. Let the PCs lead these interactions.

Increase the Radiation

It's not hard to add a strong flavor of pulp to the world of *Behind the Walls*. Maybe all the bombs weren't nuclear, or maybe the radiation dramatically affected the flora and fauna. If you've ever wanted giant ants or mutated carnivorous roses, here's your chance. The Invent and Knowledge skills can be expanded into pulp sciences and arenas like interdimensional crystals and gravitonic positrometers. During play, you can easily branch out into mutants, radioactive geography, and lots of other great nuclear tropes.

Decrease the Radiation

Going pulp-free, maybe your session of *Behind the Walls* is the start of a survival campaign, where resources are low and danger is high. Maybe the radiation concentrated around the big cities, leaving rural areas untouched, and now the PCs are left wandering around the wilderness with minimal supplies and few skills. Dangers here come not only in the form of terrain (dangerous mountains to climb and fall down) but wildlife (Bears! Cougars! But mostly bears!) as well. Also, don't forget the perennial threat of survival stories: being forced to entrust your life in the hand of the people around you, which is a great situation for keeping secrets and revealing them.