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TODAY, TOMORROW, NEVER

by Maria & Oscar Biffi

The horizontal line of the walls around us. A border.

The vertical line of the bars between us. A border.

The straight line of the back I don't bend. A border.

The broken line of the gaze you move away. A border.

Borders to count, to cross, to escape.

Today, tomorrow, never.

Roles

3 to 6. No gender restrictions.

Time

2 hours.

Replayability

High.

The roles are defined by random card combinations. The scenario is made up of ritualised phases, but the outcome is always open.

Leitmotiv

Prison, punishment, guilt, passage of time, complicity, bonds, friendship, lust for freedom.

Today, tomorrow, never is a live-action roleplaying scenario consisting of phases and rituals, just like the prison life it seeks to recreate.

Standing between the characters are more than obvious, physical barriers: these subtle, impalpable borders will prove no easier to cross. The only thing we have is plenty of time to try.

Translated by Chiara Locatelli



Orchestrations

Set-up

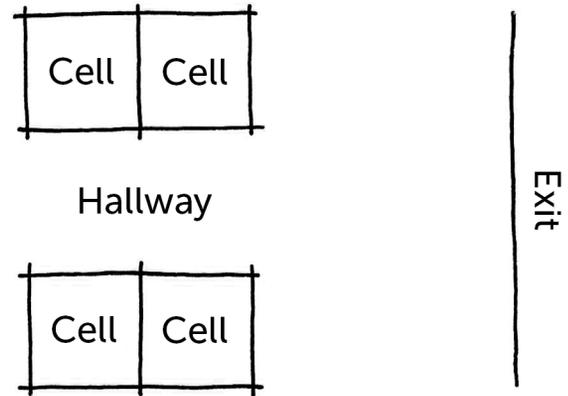
Before we begin play, we need to build both the prison and its inmates.

First, let's print and fold the *Mugshot signs*, *Personal effects*, *Solitary confinement* and *Reports* cards: They all have a public front and a private back (framed by barbed wire) which must only be read by the cards' owners. The *Personal effects* are all associated to an item, which should be physically represented: a toothbrush, a pack of cigarettes and a book or newspaper. Likewise, the *Solitary confinement* should come with earplugs and a blindfold. Other necessary implements are a roll of masking tape, a six-sided die, a pen, a skein of yarn, a pair of scissors and a timer.

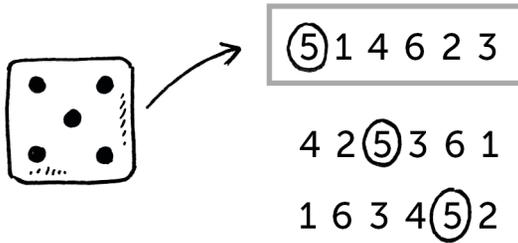
Now that we have what we need, let's start with the preparations.

▀ *Setting up the perimeter, distributing Personal effects and Solitary confinement:* Let's get the masking tape, as well as the *Personal effects* and *Solitary confinement* cards. We need the tape to mark the game area on the floor and divide it into four *Cells*, a *Hallway* and an *Exit*. We begin by outlining the first two *Cells*, which are squares with sides approximately two paces long, then measure three paces starting from a corner—the width of the unmarked, empty *Hallway*—and outline two more *Cells*, symmetrical to the first two. Let's leave one random *Personal effect* in each of the first three cells, and put the earplugs and blindfold for *Solitary confinement* in the fourth.

Lastly, let's go back to one of the corners facing the *Hallway*, not shared by two *Cells*, and count five more paces before marking the *Exit* line. This will be our door to freedom.



▀ *Assigning Mugshot signs:* Let's exit our prison for now by crossing the line. One of us should get the die while the rest divvy up the *Mugshot signs*. The player with the die will roll and announce the result, while the others check the *Mugshot signs* for the serial where the die result comes up first. The person who rolled will receive the associated *Mugshot sign*. After getting it, they must stand in wait at the *Exit* line, holding up the *Mugshot sign* to display their nickname and crime, right below the serial. The procedure must be repeated until our lineup is complete. Wouldn't it have been easier to just hand out random signs? Yes, but that's prison for you: Welcome to the Office for Complication of Otherwise Simple Affairs.



► *Distributing uniforms, Reports and Cells:* Let's cross the *Exit* line again, this time to enter; if we want to employ some sort of uniform, like a jumpsuit or a wifebeater, now is the time to wear it. Let's also take the die, pen and printed *Reports*, which we'll randomly assign (the front is always the same). We should all sign our *Report* with our real initials—and wave goodbye to our names for a while. After numbering the *Cells* from first to third, *Solitary confinement* not included, we can take turns rolling the die again: 1 or 4 means ending up in the first *Cell*, 2 or 5 in the second, 3 or 6 in the third. There's a limit of two inmates per *Cell*, so if our result indicates a full *Cell*, we get to choose between the free ones.

The goal of these rituals is recreating a prison's atmosphere, so we should take them seriously: although we're not playing our characters yet, let's try and get in the mood by avoiding unrelated chatter.

Once we are all behind bars, we can read the back of the *Mugshot sign* and *Report* we received, as well as the *Personal effect* in our *Cell*. If two inmates share a *Cell*, they should both read the *Personal effect*. If there are fewer than six of us, some of the printed materials will be leftover: just toss them out.

Game mechanics

To simulate the rituals of prison life, game time is split into cyclical phases. The only materials we need beyond those in the *Cells* are the die, the skein and the scissors, which we should keep near the *Exit*.

► *Detention:* The characters are locked in a *Cell* and must respect its borders as if they were real walls. Communication follows strict rules: To get our voice across the *Hallway*, we need to shout; speaking normally is enough to be heard in the adjacent *Cell*; we can even whisper to our cellmate, but no physical contact is allowed. If someone is in *Solitary confinement*, they must read the back of the associated card, then wear the earplugs and blindfold: They can talk or shout to themselves, but they must ignore everyone else. If two inmates share a *Cell*, they must decide who owns the *Personal effect* contained within: They physically have the item and are allowed to use it. If they can't find an agreement, nobody can use it. *This phase lasts 10 minutes, counted by the timer.*

► *Rec time:* The characters exit their *Cells*, free to move around the *Hallway* and in the clearing before the *Exit*. Even the prisoner in *Solitary confinement* can get some air, so someone should take off their blindfold if they don't notice the change of phase. Communication is no longer regulated, but physical contact remains forbidden, like an impassable border. *This phase lasts 10 minutes, counted by the timer.*

► *Yarn:* This phase represents prison labour in a more abstract fashion compared to the previous ones. Within the narrative, the characters work in a spinning mill and reflect on their day to get their minds off a repetitive task. In actuality we will all sit in a circle before the *Exit* line, putting the skein and scissors in the centre of the ring. Any player can take the skein and pass it to another inmate, keeping hold of one end of the thread, but they must recount a gesture, a piece of conversation, or a thought that made them feel close to that character, momentarily crossing the borders between us. Whoever receives the skein can then decide whether to loop the thread around their wrist and pass it to someone else, telling another anecdote in the process, or interrupt the weaving by unravelling it and putting the skein back in the centre. Each time the skein is put down, all players who received it (not those who only gave it) must cut a *Snippet* of thread, hold it in their fist, and put it in their pocket once they return to their *Cell*. Each inmate only gets one chance to choose whether to speak and nobody can tell more than one anecdote. At the end, we'll find ourselves somewhere

between two extremes: All characters interwoven by the same thread, or an untouched skein lying on the ground. *This phase lasts no more than 5 minutes, counted by the timer.*

If the weaving is still underway and the skein is still going around when the timer ends, nobody receives a *Snippet* for the current round of anecdotes.

The cycle will repeat for four times, although the last *Yarn* phase will be replaced by an *Epilogue*. Before we return to our *Cells* after the *Yarn* phase, one of us will always roll the die: the result will establish how many years have passed between each repetition. Thus, the game will cover from three to eighteen years of reclusion. Let's give some weight to this information as we play.

Before we go over the rules, we should make it clear that *Snippets* represent complicity, trust and confidence, or our ability to get someone else to lower their barriers even when the borders built by guilt and blame surround us. As we'll see in the *Epilogue*, whoever ends the game with the most *Snippets* will probably feel like a winner, but competition is a useful tool to sow discord, making trust a meaningful accomplishment.

Personal effects add another element of strategy to the gameplay.

► Owning the newspaper means being in charge of the distribution of the *Inner Echo*, the prison bulletin. Whoever owns it can spend a *Detention* phase, or part of it, in a *Cell* different from their own. It cannot be used by someone in *Solitary confinement*. Once used, this *Personal effect* must be left inside the visited *Cell*.

▀ Owning the toothbrush means having made a *Shiv* out of its handle. After the *Yarn* phase, its owner can *Cut* an inmate by sneaking up to them as they return to their *Cell* and touching the item (or their hand) to the victim's back. This *Cut* is not just the only instance of physical contact in the game and a highly dramatic moment within the narrative: It also forces the victim to discard the *Snippets* they just obtained (those still in their fist, not in their pockets). Whoever inflicted the *Cut* will spend the next *Detention* in *Solitary confinement*, while the wounded party receives the toothbrush. Violence breeds violence.

▀ Owning the pack of cigarettes means being the master of *Smoke*, the common currency, source of all corruption. *Smoke* can be traded for another *Personal effect* during *Rec time* (no other trades are possible and the *Smoke* cannot be refused), or it can be used at the beginning of *Detention* to permanently switch *Cells* with someone else, who will receive the item (every switch can be later reversed).

As for the combination of *Mugshot sign* and *Report*, it gives us a starting profile and a series of questions which will aid us in giving some depth to our character and eschewing stereotypes. Only through confrontation will we be able to discover our inmate's true condition, their inner truth, their way of accepting or defying their punishment.

They say you don't talk about your crimes in prison, they say that everyone is innocent. They also say that prison and illness are the cradle of true friendship. We need to dig deeper than that, if we want to put our characters in play and get ourselves a *Snippet* of trust.

Epilogue

After the fourth *Rec time*, the following *Yarn* phase is replaced by an *Epilogue*. We are still going to sit in a circle, but instead of threading yarn, each of us will simply take the *Snippets* they stored in their pockets and hold them in their fist. Let's raise our arm in front of us, open our hands simultaneously and count the *Snippets* we gained.

We can break a tie with a quick vote, each player laying a hand on the shoulder of their preferred contestant: all should be done in silence. The tied contestants must vote; no abstaining and no voting for ourselves; the quickest player can change their vote after everyone else if and only if there's a second tie to break. The winner can rejoice and the others congratulate them: They will walk away a free man.

Maybe the others aided their breakout, maybe it's a matter of good conduct, or maybe karma exists and their case has been re-examined. Maybe they've just done their sentence and the others' trust kept them from insanity. We can weave

the tale we want, but the departing inmate must always bid the others farewell one by one, finally being able to touch them, before crossing the *Exit* line.

If we prepared them beyond the *Exit* beforehand, we can use a stereo or smartphone to play *Sull'aria* from the Marriage of Figaro, and read out this quote adapted from Stephen King's *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*.

I find I am excited, so excited I can hardly hold the paper in my trembling hand.

I think it is the excitement that only a free man can feel, a free man starting a long journey whose conclusion is uncertain.

I hope I can make it across the border.

I hope to see you again and shake your hands.

I hope the world outside is as colourful as it has been in my dreams.

I hope.

Today, tomorrow, always.

The former inmate can read the quote and let the soundtrack play, then cross the *Exit*, while the others go back to their *Cells*, silent but still in character. Let's savour the music for a while, then any one of us can put an end to it—and to the game.

The last thing left to do is to tear the borders of our prison away from the ground. The memories we wove inside them will be our only memento.

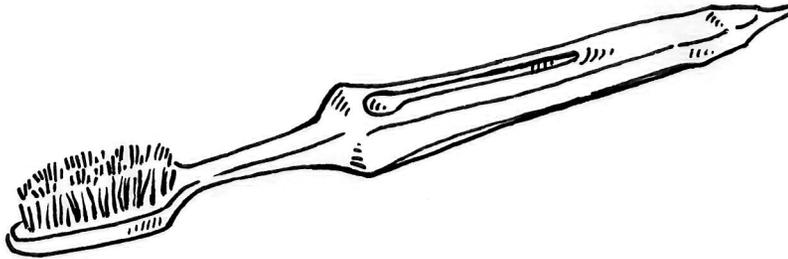
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TOOTHBRUSH



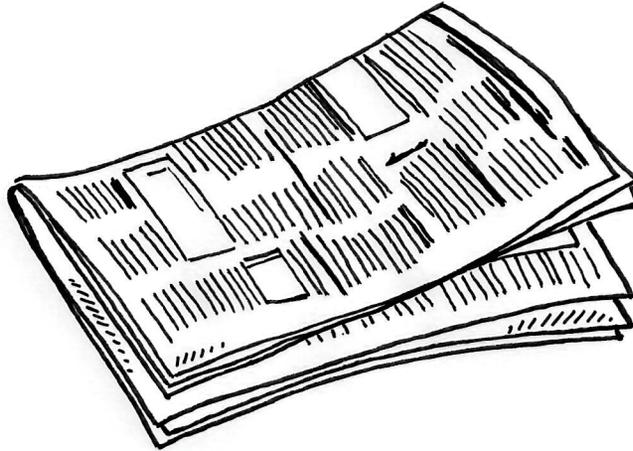
Shiv

The pressure of time shapes people as well as things. Coal becomes diamond underground, today's rotten fruit becomes tomorrow's hooch behind bars. All you need is patience. And you had plenty of it, sharpening this piece of plastic day after day. Maybe you whispered a name to yourself as you worked at it, or maybe you just wanted some sort of defence. But now it's ready to cut.

Yarn: During the return to the *Cells*, the owner of the toothbrush can touch it to the back of another inmate to make them lose the *Snippets* they've just obtained. The scene must be acted out, then the toothbrush goes to the victim and the aggressor goes into *Solitary confinement* for the next *Detention*.

Epilogue: The departing character must bid farewell to all the others, one by one. The owner of the toothbrush can take this chance to *Cut* them, killing them. The scene must be acted out, then the aggressor will play the music (no quote) and retire in *Solitary confinement*, where they'll spend the rest of their sentence.

THE INNER ECHO



Prison Bulletin

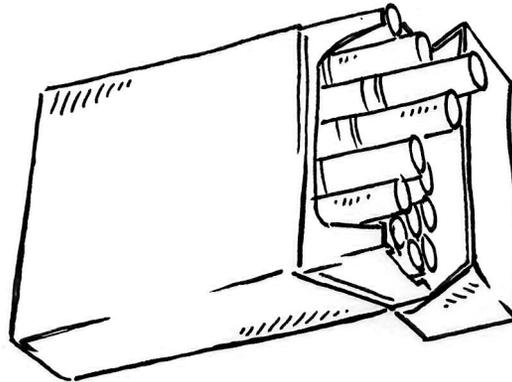
Maybe you can make good use of your time here. Others do hundreds of pushups each day, you've decided to train your mind. You're an aficionado of the penitentiary library, three books are your weekly minimum. You've even begun writing for the Inner Echo: Just brief articles, but they let you go around with a cart to distribute it together with the books. A great excuse for a private chat with the right people.

Detention: Whoever owns the Prison Bulletin can spend part or all of this phase inside another *Cell*. They therefore have the chance to talk in private, even whispering. This *Personal effect* cannot be used by someone in *Solitary confinement*. Once used, it must be left inside the visited *Cell*.

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PACK OF CIGARETTES



Smoke

Things are not much different in here than they are out there: Whoever has what everyone wants can make the rules. Smoke is even more honest than money, it makes you crave it both with your head and with your flesh. Nobody can go without and you were good—or lucky—enough to acquire a sizeable stash. It cost you effort and favours, but you're ready to get your due. Everyone's dangling from your lips.

Detention: Whoever owns the *Smoke* can give it to another inmate to permanently switch *Cells* with them. This exchange can be repeated and reversed, but this *Personal effect* cannot be used twice during the same phase. You need to wait for the next.

Rec time: Whoever owns the *Smoke* can swap it for any other *Personal effect*, included those left inside a *Cell*. This is the only possible trade and nobody can refuse the offer.

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

A terrifyingly empty room, a hole in the heart of the prison. You earned yourself the toughest punishment: Being alone with yourself. Don't be fooled, this won't end soon. In this place a day lasts a month, a week a year, a month a whole life. Who said that Hell is other people? Who? Surely not someone who's here. You're the only one around.

Detention: Wear the earplugs and blindfold (or cover your ears and shut your eyes). Ignore the others. You can talk or scream if you want. Try to catch the end of the phase or wait for someone to free you.

SHANK

163 425

HOMICIDE

You have killed. Maybe you didn't want to or maybe it was in cold blood, maybe your victim didn't deserve it or maybe you savoured every second. Maybe there was more than one. It doesn't matter here, after the process. No, the worse your reputation, the more respect you'll get. The dog that bit once is always ready to bite again. But you're no dog, you just want to forget. They won't let you. You will never let them.

Do you sometimes lose control and does it scare you?

Is there somebody out there you would never have hurt?

Have you learned to do something good with your hands in here?

DRUMMER

316 542

GRAND THEFT

You have stolen. There was always something you wanted and couldn't have. And someone else that could. Someone who had no right to own it, nor the imagination to enjoy it. So you took it away. They caught you and you're still sore about it, but they won't find your prize. You just need to hold on and you'll get your hands on it.

What will you do once you get your prize back?

What helps you not think about it every damn second?

Is there someone here who thinks they're better than you?

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MONKEY MOUTH

251 634

REPEATED FRAUD

You have lied. Nobody can outsmart you and it didn't take much to put your talents to good use. The hard part is always stopping before things get out of hand. How could you have known that that idiot would kill himself? It's just money! But you know how it goes: swindling someone means humiliating them. And a man without dignity is just naked.

What humiliation would you find unbearable?

Is there something you've never lied about out there?

Is there even someone who listens to you in here?

FIEND

542 163

DRUG TRAFFICKING

You have pushed. The way you see it, everyone should learn to fend for themselves. They wanted something you could give them, and it's no use blaming you because they weren't able to control themselves. You had the stuff under your nose every damn day and the cravings never got to your head. They may have locked you up, but nobody can lecture you.

What did you think about to get through the withdrawals?

Was there something you were good at before you started dealing?

Did someone in here keep you from selling yourself for a dose?

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J-CAT

425 316

ARSON

You have destroyed. You wanted to send a message, because something was seriously wrong and you needed to make it clear in fiery letters. No matter if they take you for a fanatic or an opportunist, at least for once they couldn't just turn away. You may be locked up, but fire has a nasty habit of spreading.

Do you ever think about the victims of your gesture?

What made you angry about life out there?

What gives you peace about life in here?

KITE

634 251

KIDNAPPING

You have imprisoned. You did it for revenge and now you're getting an eye for an eye by the State. A vicious circle destined to never break. You heard a lot in court about the deprivation of personal liberty, but when you look back it always feels like you had no choice. You haven't felt free for a single day of your life.

Can you believe the victim's family has forgiven you?
 What was the only place where you felt safe out there?
 Do you still hope to get out of here before it's too late?

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547

COMPLAINT/ARREST AFFIDAVIT

CHARGES: FELONY MISDEMEANOR VIOLATION OTHER

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: FUGITIVE WARRANT: ON ARREST OUT OF STATE

OFFENSE NO. 1011 AGENCY CODE: 1011 MUNICIPAL P.D. DIST. ID NO. 702995

POLICE CASE NO. 87196 COUNTY CASE NO. MD-55806

ARRESTED BY: [Signature] ARRESTED AT: MIAMI

DATE OF ARREST: 1982-05-10 TIME: 11:00 AM

PLAINTIFF'S NAME: [Signature] ADDRESS: MIAMI, FL 33126

LEGAL ALIQUOTER: [Signature] JUDGE: [Signature]

WAS NOT IN FULLY ID. BY Det. VERDIN

HOLD FOR OTHER AGENCY: [Signature]

I warrant that I believe I am entitled to appear before the court as required by law and I believe that I am entitled to be released on bail. I agree that such necessary law enforcement officers should be sent to the above address. I agree that it is my responsibility to notify the Clerk of the Court whenever there is a change in my address.

I warrant that I believe I am entitled to appear before the court as required by law and I believe that I am entitled to be released on bail. I agree that such necessary law enforcement officers should be sent to the above address. I agree that it is my responsibility to notify the Clerk of the Court whenever there is a change in my address.

RECEIVED FOR: [Signature] DATE: 1982-05-10

INSTITUTIONALISED

You've got used to it. Nobody stands these walls in the beginning. Then you begin to respect them, and in time you come to love them. You have a place here, a routine, a world with a beginning and an end. Everyone dreams of getting out, but they're all afraid even if they try to hide it, because then they will be just ex-convicts: Old, unfit and unwanted.

What is your favourite time of the day?

Was there somebody out there who stopped visiting you?

Do you think you have rehabilitated yourself after all this time?

What does that mean to you?

