

Present: Aric, Ron, Randy, Charlie, Jim, Noah, me

I started by bringing up the Economic Problem: if we are going to simulate a monetary economy we have to have some basis for the currency. In the "real" world, people work at jobs and produce goods and services, in turn for which they are paid money with which they purchase the goods and services of others. The question is, how do folks in the MicroCosm world get their funds? Having their avatars work at avatar jobs is not only pointless, but probably not fun. Furthermore, it pushes peoples' behavior in a particular direction (economic behavior) that may be satisfying to some but certainly will not be satisfying to all. Economic behavior should certainly be an option, but it should be just an option, not a requirement.

Several strategies were raised:

One proposal was simply do away with money. This handily answers the income problem, but cancels a number of other options in so doing. In particular, the only form of trade is barter, which makes it difficult to have such fun things as stores (especially automated ones run by the system). Of course, stores are not necessary, but they would add a little variety and provide a handy mechanism for introducing new things into the world. The consensus was that doing away with money entirely was not the way to go.

Another suggestion is that when you log in it's your avatar's day off. He (or she) works at a regular job when you are not logged on and earns a salary. This provides a justification for just giving the player some working capital, but seems a little contrived. Also, there is an unfortunate meta-level disincentive to log in (since not being logged in earns money for your avatar).

A slight variation on this idea which I find much more pleasing is outlined by the following scenario: The MicroCosm is a special place. They don't let in just any of the hoi-polloi. Rather, like certain night clubs and foreign countries, you have to have a minimum amount of wealth before they will even let you through the door. Fortunately for you, you have this trust fund left to you by your rich, eccentric Aunt Zelda which is sufficient to get you past the doorman. This trust fund is in an interest-bearing bank account, and you can spend or save the interest money as you wish. However, you are never allowed to touch the principal, so you are guaranteed a certain minimum income that is not extravagant but which is enough to cover your subsistence-level expenses. The trick is: everybody has a rich Aunt Zelda. Also, for purposes of computing the interest on your bank account, only the time you are logged in counts as "real". I.e., you accrue interest while you are logged in, but the clock stops the minute you sign off.

Another suggestion (which I think works best as an adjunct to the above system) is that we *do* have jobs. However, the jobs are optional, and they are fun sub-games unto themselves. For example, you could be a guard at the city gates. Your job is to let the citizens past and repel the bandits. The host system generates the bandits, and we make Shoot-At-The-Bandits a sub-game. To augment this we could have a time-clock object and a time-card object. When you go to work you "punch-in" and when you decide you are bored and want to leave you can "punch-out". You can then take your time-card to the city hall and get paid for your time. This mechanism has a couple of nice properties. First of all, the time-card can be an independent object and so becomes a valuable in its own right. Someone could rob you and take it away from you and go try to collect your pay. You, on the other hand, could then lie in wait at city hall and try to catch the thief. Also, there is no

requirement that the time-card/time-clock belong to the State (i.e., to the system). They could belong to other players or to communities of avatars.

Yet another source of income (and variety in the world) would be to allow avatars to actually produce goods. We could have factory-machines that make stuff. Such machines could work in a number of different possible ways. One would be to have a variety of dedicated, special purpose machines. For example there could be a gun making machine and a telephone making machine and a shoe making machine. The machine is a box with a hopper on the top. You put three medium sized rocks and a Fnork-berry bush into the hopper, turn the crank, and out pops a new pair of shoes. Another variation would be for the device to act rather like a Xerox machine: you put some object into the hopper labeled MASTER and some raw materials into the hopper labeled INGREDIENTS, turn the cranks, and now you have two of whatever object you gave it (it is unclear what would happen if you tried to duplicate an avatar!). A third variation would be for the machine to be a sort of alchemical puzzle: it has a bunch of different knobs, dials and switches, and depending on the setting of the controls, the particular assortment of raw ingredients, the time of day and the phase of the moon, it produces *something*. Of course, if you do it wrong it produces something worthless, like brown sludge. Or maybe it will produce something BAD (or just explode). And certain items of manufacture require certain rare or expensive raw materials which you have to go out into the world and find. Also, there are no instructions. Mastery of the factory machine becomes a genuine wizard's art, for the attraction of those players who are into playing wizard.

Several people came up with the idea that we should have a "Hall of Fame" that posts vital statistics on other players in a variety of different areas. This would give people some feedback on "how they are doing" with respect to everyone else. Providing a bunch of different statistics could allow people to find different areas to pursue, if they are interested in getting into the Hall of Fame. For example, we could post lists of the ten avatars who

- are the wealthiest
- have been killed the most times
- have the longest average lifespans
- are the largest land-owners
- have killed the most dragons (Charlie *really* wants there to be dragons!)
- have discovered the most new territory
- etc.

The more things (within reason), the better. The records would be adjusted continuously and automatically by the system (we could also have a "Hall of Shame" listing the avatars coming out at the bottom in these statistics). The effect would be to give players identifiable targets to strive for (e.g., "I want to collect the world's biggest ball of string") in the same way that the Guinness Book of World's Records does in the real world. Some of these records would have the effect of casting an unwelcome spotlight on certain individuals, as, for example, in the Old West you didn't want to become known as the best gunfighter.

The issue of protection from violence and mayhem was raised. The consensus was that there should be some way for non-violently inclined players to avoid the violently inclined ones. Noah made the suggestion (based, I think, on the work he and Ron are doing on a space game layered on top of the MicroCosm universe) that there be a State, run by the system. Certain parts of the world are State controlled. These areas are automatically operating Weapons Free Zones -- check your guns at the door. Nobody can get in while armed. Of course, there is a price to living in the State: you have to pay taxes: some

fraction of your bank account is collected every-so-often. Running between the State controlled zones are State operated transport lines. These are safe but expensive. You can take private transport at much lower cost but consequently greater risk. You can avoid paying taxes by homesteading an area outside the State controlled zones, but then you have to protect yourself. Of course, you could band together with other players for mutual protection and form a new town of your own. We would provide various security measures that would provide various levels of protection. For example, you could put up a fence around your town with a special gate that has a weapons detector in it. For a few more tokens you can buy a protection-field generator. Of course, for each of these measures there is a more expensive counter-measure, and for each counter-measure there is an even more expensive counter-counter-measure. The only absolute security is with the State, but some will feel the price for absolute security is just too high: you have to go outside to get VERY wealthy, for example.

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Another thing that could happen would be for a bunch of people in an area to get together and decide to annex themselves into the State.

I brought up the issue of what happens when you die. I described the scenario where you are (sometimes) interviewed by God, where you get to plead your case and have judgement passed upon your actions. This went over pretty well. Charlie suggested that you should be able to leave a will with instructions about what should happen if you are killed. One possibility would be to let you write your own obituary, which gets published in the newspaper if you die. You could leave messages like "I am about to visit So-and-so who might try to kill me" as a form of insurance. Of course you could also leave such messages as a form of deception -- kill yourself and let others "avenge" you by beating up on the hapless victim at whom you have pointed the finger.

You register your will at the Hall of Records. The Hall of Records also keeps property deeds, so that you can homestead unowned property and claim it as your own, as well as letting you transfer title when you sell something. Perhaps we should maintain some sort of requirement that, as with real homesteading, that you somehow improve or use your property, or it reverts to being unowned again.

Charlie ceaselessly brought up the subject of being able to be some other sort of being than an avatar. In particular, he wants to be a dragon. There did seem to be some support for the idea that there should at least be some sort of Horrible Monster to wreak havoc. Also, having other kinds of critters gives you the option of being able to transform players from one type to another (transformation being another one of Charlie's obsessions). For example, misuse of certain magical items could turn you into a toad for a

while.

We discussed the notion of avatar "health". The current avatar definition specifies a 'health' property, but the only thing that now matters is whether or not it is zero. health=0 means you're dead, health>0 means you're alive. Clearly, we would like to have a broader interpretation of this, so that intermediate values could represent wounded or diseased states. We could then have cures for these which would make you all better again.