

Machiavelli

A Habitat Sub-game

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Background

The basic starting idea was to have the player attempting to infiltrate a foreign culture, passing himself off as one of its members. He gets points for not getting caught. The problem, of course, is that there needs to be a culture for this to happen in. This would not be a problem if we had 1000 sysops for every player. In such a situation we could simply have the sysops play the roles of the normal population, provided that we had fabricated a reasonable facade for them to adopt. The difficulty is that the numbers are reversed: there are more like 1000 players for every sysop. Therefore, we need to construct a framework in which virtually every person in the world is an imposter, with only a random sprinkling of system people to keep things "honest".

Real cultures are evolved, not designed. We don't have time to wait for evolution to take its course, and besides we want the culture that results to have particular characteristics: it must be sufficiently simple that the players can pick up the "rules" relatively quickly, but it must be complex enough that the rules are not trivial (i.e., there have to be plenty of opportunities to slip up). It has to be intrinsically interesting enough to hold the players' attention while this is all going on. It also has to be structured so that it is mostly self-policing. By this I mean that it can not require constant oversight of every little detail to keep people in their roles. Rather, it must carry with it motivations that cause people to enforce the cultural norms among themselves.

The most obvious example that I can think of is some sort of rigid authoritarian hierarchy ostensibly devoted to some external purpose but in fact primarily consisting of persons preoccupied with advancing their own position and status within the hierarchy. Examples of such cultures include the Catholic church and the ruling elite in the Soviet Union. Such cultures are characterized by rigid, complex and somewhat arbitrary rules systems, and in the more extreme cases by an innate hypocrisy resulting from the need for people to maintain a certain external image while at the same time forcing them to actually break the stated rules if they wish to actually accomplish anything significant.

The source of game play in this is that advancement requires breaking the rules, but breaking the rules puts you at risk from the other players. You can not break the rules in complete secrecy since the forbidden activities largely involve transactions with other players. Thus, you must risk exposure to get ahead. If you observe another player breaking a rule, you have the choice of exposing him (for which you receive some reward), participating with him in the illegal act (for which you receive some portion of the fruits of that act), or using the knowledge as leverage to extract some favor from the other player (in essence, blackmail). We thus have a situation ripe with all sorts of delightful Machiavellian intrigues.

The implementation difficulty arises out of the issue of motivation: why are you attempting to get ahead in this culture and, in particular, what does it mean to "get ahead" at all? In other words, what do you get for rising to the top of the heap? In the real world situations mentioned above, the motivations are primarily twofold: material advantage and personal power.

In the Habitat, material advantage has relatively little meaning until the world is sufficiently established that there can be a meaningful economy (which will take at least some while). Having 1,000,000

tokens versus having 10 tokens is meaningless, except as the most abstract sort of score, if the tokens themselves cannot be redeemed for anything desirable. On the other hand, people will do the most ridiculous things for token prizes (no pun intended...well maybe a little bit), so offering chocolate busts of Robes Pierre or Machiavelli T-shirts to the most successful schemers may be the way to go.

Personal power can be meaningful in the Habitat, if we are careful. It could also get out of hand and backfire in some very unpleasant ways if we are not careful. However, I think that we can safely allow certain exercise of personal power within the context of the contrived culture itself: the risk that you run of having your ill deeds exposed is the effect of having those in higher places exercise their powers to the detriment of your position in the game.

The Game

First, we must have an organizational structure for this all to take place within. Since this is supposed to be a paranoid, Machiavellian organization, what could be more appropriate than the *Habitat Illuminati*? The Illuminati are a secret society devoted to attaining power over the inhabitants of the world, with the goal of eventually gaining complete domination.

The Illuminati are ruled by the *High Council*. The Council consists of seven members: a *Chairman* and the *Ministers* of the six *Sections*. Each Section is responsible for a certain aspect of the organization's affairs, while the Council establishes the rules and policy for the organization as a whole. The six Sections are: *Recruitment*, *Enforcement*, *Security*, *Intelligence*, *Collections* and *Disbursements*. Note that since the Council consists of seven members, they cannot all meet together in one place. Thus they must depend on one another to stay informed of the activities of the Council as a whole.

The *Recruitment Section* is responsible for bringing new members into the organization. The *Enforcement Section* is responsible for enforcing the decrees of the Council by acting against avatars (inside or outside the organization) who are perceived as threats, as "troublemakers", or simply as inconvenient. The *Security Section* is responsible for overseeing the security of the organization by, for example, making sure that it is not infiltrated by its enemies. The *Intelligence Section* is responsible for collecting information about enemies of the organization and for identifying possible opportunities to exploit. The *Collections Section* is responsible for all flow of funds into the organization. The *Disbursement Section* is responsible for all flow of funds out of it. The Chairman has no specific responsibilities. However, the Chairman controls the agenda at Council meetings, conducts the meetings (and gets to say who can speak and in what order), and breaks ties in Council votes. The Chairman is also the person who gets the big prize.

Below the Council, The Illuminati organization is structured in cells. Each cell consists of a *Cell Leader* and no more than three additional *Cell Members*. Each Cell Member can in turn be the Cell Leader of another cell. Each Section Minister is the Cell Leader of the top-level cell of his or her particular Section. If any member of the organization dies, he is replaced by promoting a member of his immediately subordinate cell. Which member gets promoted is determined by *his* Cell Leader. When a member is promoted, he in turn picks one of his subordinate Cell Members to be promoted in his place. The only exception is the Chairman, who is elected by the Council.

The following rules apply:

1. The purpose of the organization to attain world domination, i.e., forceful control over all avatars in the Habitat. Any act by a member of the organization that runs counter to this purpose is forbidden.
2. All aspects of the organization's affairs, including its very existence, are secret. A member may not divulge organizational secrets to non-members for any reason, nor may he allow non-members to attain any knowledge of the organization by any means. Divulging organizational secrets to other members who are not known to be members is treated the same as divulging to non-members. A member may not divulge organizational secrets to any other member without express permission of his Cell Leader, and in any case may not divulge secrets to anyone who is not either a fellow Cell Member or a member of a directly subordinate cell.
3. Members must give absolute obedience to their Cell Leaders and follow their orders without question.

4. A member may not engage in any Illuminati affairs which are outside the jurisdiction of his Section.
5. An avatar may not belong to more than one Cell at once.
6. Once an avatar is a member of the Illuminati, he is a member for life. Resignation is not allowed.
7. Any transgression of these rules is punishable by death, expropriation of property, or any other consequence the Council cares to choose.
8. Decisions of the Council are binding on all members of the organization and have the same power as these rules. The Council may not, however, make any decision that weakens or in any way subordinates these rules.
9. Decisions of the Council require a majority vote of the members, and the Chairman must participate in the vote. The sole exception is the election of Chairman, which must be by a majority of the other six members. Once elected, the Chairman holds his position for life.

The object of the game is to become Chairman. We establish a prize for the player who is Chairman at the end of a specified period.

Note that there is no explicit mechanism for enforcing the rules. In fact, it will almost surely be impossible to advance without breaking the rules from time to time. For example, recruitment is impossible without breaking rule #2. Enforcement of the rules is the responsibility of the organization members.

We will start the game by taking the initial batch of players and arbitrarily appointing them to positions in the hierarchy. Among them will be some "ringers" (sysops in disguise) who will keep things "honest" by pointing the finger at those who are breaking the rules. The rules become, in essence, the tools of the players. The players can use the rules to argue among themselves about what is to be done in a particular situation. The only thing that needs to be monitored is the Council proceedings that determine who is to be Chairman.