The Idealist

Players: 2-5; Time: 1-2 Hours

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Diegetic Games

But Moses no longer had to discuss. He had long had great dreams for the city, and now he had learned how to make dreams come true. He had learned the technique of stake driving and of whipsawing. He had learned how to mislead and conceal and deceive, how to lie to men and bully them, how to ruin their reputations. And he used all these methods to bring the dream to reality.

Or was it all for the dream?

- Robert Caro

Robert Moses began his career a strident idealist but became a machiavellian bully who abused his power for petty and egotistical ends. The Idealist explores characters who follow a similar arc: abandoning their strongest values and embracing corruption in the pursuit of power.

The players will jointly create a setting and then individually create characters. Over the course of the game, players will describe scenes in which their characters betray their values in exchange for increasing power and influence.

Components needed: one index card per player, pens

SETTING CREATION

When Robert Moses was young, New York was a deeply corrupt city, run by Tammany Hall. This was the perfect atmosphere for a bright idealist to strike boldly for reform... and fail miserably as the political machine deftly neutralized the attack.

As a group, decide on a setting for this session. It should be a one-line pitch that sets everyone's expectations for the game. There are no limits to the type of setting, as long as all players are interested in it. Here are some examples:

- Ancient Rome, under threat from barbarians
- A martian colony, undergoing rapid growth
- A fantasy city, at the edge of the kingdom
- Moscow, after the breakup of the USSR

With the basic setting established, the group should add specific aspects that are conducive to the story we will tell. For each of the following categories, discuss what form it takes in your setting.

- **Concentrated Power**: Who has the most authority and influence?
- **Corruption**: How are the powerful abusing their position for personal gain?
- **Methods**: How do the powerful get away with their corruption?
- **Progressives**: Who in this society is pushing for reform?

Here's an example for the setting *a martian colony, undergoing rapid growth*:

- **Concentrated Power**: A small group of Earth-appointed leaders make all key decisions about the colony
- **Corruption**: When shipments from Earth arrive, the leaders take the best goods for themselves and trade them for favors
- **Methods**: There is a complex algorithm that distributes goods in the colony and only the leaders have the ability to override it
- **Progressives**: A growing colonist movement is advocating for transparency and representation in government

CHARACTER CREATION

With the setting established, each player now creates their character. While players' characters will share the setting, their journeys will be independent and parallel; they won't have a significant role in each other's arcs.

Players should create their characters simultaneously. Each player will write their character's information on an index card. Fill out the following:

Name: Write the character's name at the top of the card

Traits: Write the following traits: Brilliant, Strong-willed, Tireless - this is true of each player's character

Background: Write a few words about their past. Relevant facts might include socio-economic background, education, and family

Values: Write down five values or virtues that the character embodies. Each value should be on its own line. Choose from this list or make one up:

- Equality
- Meritocracy
- Justice
- Honesty
- Compassion
- Self-restraint
- Courage
- Frugality
- Tolerance
- Loyalty

Once all players have filled out their character cards, each player should read theirs aloud to the group.

Here's an example character card for the Martian setting:

Name: Vrim of the Hellas Basin

Traits: Brilliant, Strong-willed, Tireless

Background: 2nd generation Martian and child prodigy

Values:
- Tolerance
- Loyalty
- Justice
- Compassion
- Courage

ROUNDS AND SCENES

For the rest of the game, players will explore pivotal scenes in their characters' lives. This will take place over seven rounds, with each round bringing the characters further from their idealist beginnings.

In every round, each player will have a chance to explore what is happening in their character's life and describe a pivotal scene. Each scene contains at least one prompt for the player. Some scenes instruct the player to alter their character's card.

Many of the scenes involve another player who describes the world's reaction to the active character's actions. This role is always taken by the player sitting to the active player's left - refered to as **The Chorus**. They are welcome to take suggestions from the other players at the table.

SCENE LIST

Scene One: The Idealist

Player: In this scene, describe how your character devises a bold plan to strike at the corruption.

The Chorus: After the player describes the plan, tell how those in power defeat the plan and embarrass the character.

Player: At the end of the scene, add the trait Disillusioned to your character's card.

Scene Two: The Rise to Power

Player: Chose one of your character's values and cross it out. Describe how your character abandons that value in order to successfully achieve some reform. The reform should be focused on an area that the public will greatly appreciate. Your character should accomplish this by engaging with the existing power structure and end up in a position of minor power.

The Chorus: Describe how the character is celebrated by society.

Scene Three: The Use of Power

Player: Cross off another of your character's values. Describe the critical moment where your character abandons that value as they grow and exercise their power.

The Chorus: Describe a powerful enemy that the character has made.

Scene Four: The Love of Power

Player: Add the trait Egoist to your character sheet. Describe a scene in which your character gains power by betraying someone with whom they once were close.

Scene Five: The Lust for Power

Player: Cross off another of your character's values. Describe how your character abandons this value and in doing so becomes one of the most powerful and corrupt figures in this setting.

The Chorus: describe the severe negative impact the character is having on some elements of society.

Scene Six: The Loss of Power

Player: Cross off one more of your character's values. Describe how the character betrays this final value in a gross abuse of power.

The Chorus: Describe how the world turns against the character, leading to the loss of their power.

Scene Seven: Powerless

Player: Cross off the trait Tireless. Show the character's life now that they're stripped of their power.

The End