

CYBERPAPACY

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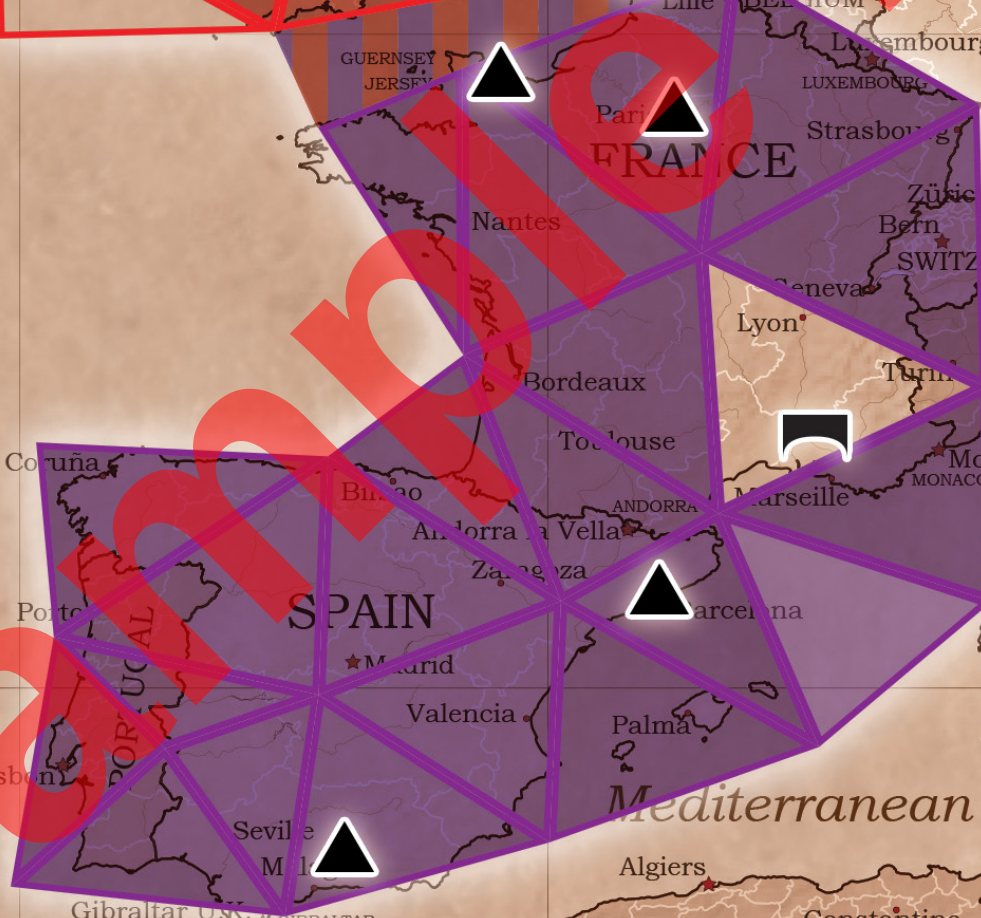
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PLAYER SECTION



WELCOME TO THE CYBERPAPACY

"Something's wrong."

Chloe looked up from the data terminal she was flirting with, trying to extract valuable information regarding Church Police patrols in the Madrid sprawl. She adjusted the shield on her back as she considered. "I feel it too," she replied.

Their thoughts were interrupted by a moan at their feet. Viola, a cyberwitch, grabbed the riot stick leaning against the computer and shocked the jackpriest lying next to her.

"I don't know why this data is locked down so hard, it's nowhere near as easy to get as it was last week," Chloe said, frustrated. She took a step back. She looked like a hoplite—bronze armor covering her torso, legs and arms, with a plumed helmet. However, she looked more regal than that, more like a god...Athena, the Greek goddess of warfare and wisdom, to be exact.

"I think the alert level just rose," Viola warned, looking out the office window to the exterior of the Holy Exchange. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary though, just unaware citizens of the Cyberpapacy walking to and fro, under the watchful gaze of several cygoyles perched on building tops.

Chloe raised her left arm and a holographic control panel manifested above it. She tapped away, shaking her head. "You're right, the level is elevated, but I don't think it's anything we've done."

An incoming message alarm, from another GodNet Holy Exchange, chirped on Chloe's heads-up display. She acknowledged it, and a small screen opened, revealing Father Damien, a cyberpriest, but also a Storm Knight.

"Damien!" Chloe said, surprised. "And Astre!" she added as she saw the punk rocker looking concerned behind Damien's shoulder. "I thought you were in Rio?"

"We are," the priest said glumly. "I'm sending you coordinates. You'd...better come see."

Chloe looked at the address, and asked, "Hey, you know that address is invalid, right?"

"It's not. Not anymore," Damien replied.

Chloe looked up at Viola, confused. Then she saw understanding spread across Viola's face. "We have to get outside. *Now*." Viola ran for the exit.

"What's the rush? What's going on?" Chloe asked as Viola reached the door. "Give me a chance to change, they're going to notice!"

Viola paused, "No time," and she raced out into the boulevard. The sun shone down on her, embracing her in a holy fashion. Suddenly a cygoyle's head turned, locked onto Viola as she paused in front of a flower planter. With a screech, it spread its wings and glided towards her.

Fear pulsed through Chloe's veins as Viola performed complex movements with her hands and muttered words of incantation. The flower planter began to glow. The cygoyle reached out with its claws, but just as it was about to collide with the cyberwitch, it was shocked to find a spear embedded in its chest. The cybernetic creature crashed into a tree next to Viola, who did her best not to be distracted. Two more cygoyles noticed the ruckus and turned to leap off their perches.

"Hurry," Chloe warned.

"Now!" Viola yelled as the planter burst with light. Chloe reached out and touched the stone container and everything disappeared.

Before she knew it, she was in another Holy Exchange. Right out in the open. Exposed. A few seconds later, Viola materialized next to her. Chloe pulled out her GodMeeter, ready to defend herself, and then suddenly realized...they were completely alone.

The boulevard was empty. The buildings were generic stone, some with holograms, some without. Not a single person was visible. Viola motioned to Chloe to follow her as she walked to a wayside shrine. "Going holo," Viola said, tapping at her cyberdeck.

Chloe, still confused, followed suit. She felt her awareness stretch almost as if she entered the shrine itself and then appeared next to Viola. The two deckers manifested in the Flesh, appearing as hard holograms. It was raining, and raindrops bounced off of Chloe's holographic form.

It was dark. Off in the distance lightning flashed, strangely red and blue. She looked around and

realized she was in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Brazilians walked around, many in a daze, some sitting on the ground, others looking up to the sky with their hands outstretched in prayer.

She looked up to the top of Mount Corcovado, where a beam of white light somehow shone from the heavens, through an unworldly gap in the clouds. Blinking lights of helicopters flew near the beam of light, which landed at the summit of the mountain.

Chloe saw Damien and Astre watching a bank of TV screens at what she assumed was an electronics store. Damien was praying. Astre was running his hand through his spiked hair, muttering vulgarities in French. The TVs were showing footage from one of the orbiting helicopters. The narrator spoke in Portuguese, but Chloe could tell the man was scared. The TVs showed a closeup of the mountain, at the...now-empty plinth where the statue of Christ the Redeemer once stood.

Chloe turned to Viola, whose head hung down, distraught over what she was seeing. "How is this possible?" Chloe asked.

Then it finally clicked. She was holo. In Rio de Janeiro. Something that was impossible because the largest city in Brazil was firmly in Core Earth. Chloe looked up to the top of the mountain off in the distance, and a feeling of horror seeped into her virtual bones.

The full impact of what had happened hit her. She saw holograms lighting up over the buildings of the city. She noticed the high tech nature of all the electronics around her. She looked up at the summit of Mount Corcovado, at the base of the now-landed maelstrom bridge.

She saw a light flicker atop the mountain. Chloe looked at the bank of TV screens and saw the plinth was no longer empty. Displayed above it was a four-story tall hologram of Cyberpope Malraux.

He spoke, his voice carrying miraculously across the city. "God has heard your prayers, my children. We have come," he said gently. He paused and stretched his arms out. "I have come. To save you."

Chloe's eyes met Viola's. The cyberwitch said, with a sadness in her voice, "This changes everything."

ONE YEAR LATER...

At the end of the first year of the Possibility Wars, the Cyberpapacy stands on two continents. It enjoys nearly complete control of western Europe, including France, Spain, and Portugal, as well as parts of Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium, Italy, and Germany. The Cyberpapacy also covers almost all of the major population centers of Brazil as it sprawls along the coast from the mouth of the Amazon to the border with Uruguay.

DEMON DAY

Agents of the Cyberpope were in France for several months before the invasion, preparing the populace to accept the arrival of Malraux. Then on the same day, mere weeks before the maelstrom bridges dropped, blind priests began preaching on street corners, warning that the end of the world was coming. Word of their hellfire and brimstone sermons first appeared online, spread by locals who found a similarity to their own faiths in what they heard. Gradually, videos of the blind preachers spread, and the week before the invasion, mainstream media began to run stories on them. These "Prophets of Doom" were never identified, but as the bridges crashed down, millions of people across Western Europe remembered the warnings and realized that it had all been true.

Demons unleashed by members of the *Sicarius Maleficarum* killed many important political, military, and police leaders, throwing France, Spain, and parts of Italy into chaos. Then a white beam of light shone down from the sky over Avignon, and cybernetically enhanced priests and warriors appeared and assaulted the fell creatures terrorizing the city. Additional teams of cyberpriests and Hospitalers appeared across France and many people took video of the brave warriors sacrificing their lives to save innocents.

The GodNet quickly installed itself into all electronic devices within the stela boundaries, and Church Police quickly restored order to the attacked cities. The presence of an authority—any authority—brought comfort to the people.

That evening, holograms of Cyberpope Malraux appeared across the nation, telling the masses he was here to save them, to bring them to salvation,

and to fight the demonic invaders that had appeared suddenly across the globe.

Almost a week after the invasion, the last demons in France were eliminated, and Malraux gave what he declared would be his final benediction. But the remaining leaders of France begged him to stay, and, pausing for a moment, he smiled and relented. Even though Malraux had never heard of Sun Tzu, he understood perfectly one of his teachings: "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

ASSIMILATION

Demonic hordes continued to appear in areas the Cyberpapacy presence had not yet been felt, and Church forces were deployed to engage them. Soon Spain and northwestern Italy celebrated the arrival of the Church.

And then the Cyberpope began to solidify his control over the territory he held. With an open hand he offered the blessings of cyberware, free for anyone, with priority to those who needed it most. Fearing the clenched fist, the leaders of the occupied regions declared martial law. The Church Police oversaw the creation of checkpoints, began patrolling the streets, and accused heretics, witches, and other "immoral" people were arrested. The GodNet continued to spread across the land and brought joy to the masses.

Despite the efforts of the nascent resistance, the Delphi Council, and noddies from Magna Veritas itself, the populace accepted the teachings of the Church and were thankful for the protection it provided.

Although the populations of the nations of Western Europe take pride in their country and heritage, much of the regional differences have been smoothed out by the Cyberpapacy. No longer do people see themselves as Spanish, French, or Portuguese but as the flock of the Cyberpope. While architectural and cultural differences persist, they are subdued as the people become more assimilated into Church society.

By the fourth month of the war, leaders of France, Spain, Portugal, and western Switzerland granted the Church complete authority over their territory as they joined the "Holy Cyber Conclave".

Although this is the erstwhile nation's official name, everyone outside of Church control calls it the Cyberpapacy.

EXPANSION

The Church continued to try to push into Italy, but the Vatican rallied the faithful and rebuffed Malraux's conversion attempts. However, Malraux likes to have multiple options and sent missionaries to South America to preach and warn about the coming chaos and convince the masses that only he could save them.

It worked. Mostly.

Agents of the Delphi Council responded to these incursions and forced the missionaries to be more subtle. Working in the "enemy territory" of Core Earth granted all of the advantages to the Storm Knights and few to the missionaries. However, despite the Delphi Council's best efforts, the influence of the Church grew—in Brazil and Argentina in particular.

Then rumors began of monsters in the Amazonian rain forest, and people began to disappear. Seeing his opportunity, Malraux dropped a maelstrom bridge into Rio, right onto the summit of Corvocado mountain, where the statue of Christ the Redeemer overlooked the metropolis.

Almost immediately, the rumors subsided. Nobody knew exactly what occurred in the jungle depths of the Amazon, but the fact remained that the Cyberpapacy now covered most of the populace of Brazil.

RESISTANCE

Despite the darkness, sparks of hope remain. The rebellion in Brazil began almost immediately. Malraux had launched his invasion before the populace was entirely ready to accept the Cyberpapacy. They didn't have the rampaging hordes of demons to fear like the initial invasion of Europe. The Delphi Council was surprised how fast Malraux acted, but they took the opportunity to intensify the support of local resistance groups in Brazil.

In Western Europe, the Resistance is small but growing. The iron fist of the Church, as well as the

MINORITY REBELS

Although members of the LGBTQ+, disabled, Jewish, and Muslim communities are minorities in Western Europe and South America, they are disproportionately more represented in the membership of the Resistance. The very existence of these minorities is anathema to the teachings of the Church, and the members of these communities knew they would be targeted as the Cyberpapacy took over the governments.

Many people of these minorities were captured and placed into "Redemption Camps" and others escaped through the reality storms with assistance of foreign governments and the Delphi Council. But many more stayed, determined to regain their freedom of bodily autonomy, religion, and identity.

Law of Suspicion, makes it difficult for Resistance members and cells to trust each other, but through the efforts of the Delphi Council's Storm Knights, they are becoming more organized.

THE BASICS OF THE CYBERPAPACY

The Cyberpapacy is a theocratic socialist dystopia. The Church runs and owns everything within its sphere of influence, propped up by the very nature of the cosm itself. The Cyberpapacy is a moderately magical and spiritual cosm, but its most visible feature is its high Tech Axiom. Evidence of high technology is everywhere, including inside the bodies of the denizens of the realm.

Theoretically the Cyberpapacy should be a moderately advanced society, but it is held back by its World Laws. The Law of the One True Way dictates that the Cyberpope's teachings, as told in the Malraux Bible, are true. Additionally, scientific and technological advancement is advanced only through divine inspiration, provided by the Cyberpope himself. Furthermore, although there

are some features in the cosm common to those with a Social Axiom of 18, the Cyberpapacy acts more as if it has a Social Axiom significantly lower, caused by the Law of Stagnation. Even if that wasn't enough, the Law of Suspicion helps drive people to report those who would try to free them and interferes with people attempting to rise up in rebellion against the Church.

LIFE IN THE CYBERPAPACY

THE PROMISED LAND

The citizens of the Cyberpapacy have free health care, gainful employment, and the Church provides everyone with a place to live. Crime is low (except for those "cursed witches"). As Malraux is fond of preaching, instead of taking the flock to the Promised Land, he instead is bringing the Promised Land to the masses.

However, this security comes at the price of freedom. The Church tells you how to live, how to think, how to believe. The Church's propaganda and reality itself conspire to keep the masses suspicious of their neighbors, and heretics and demons abound.

Holograms, hard and otherwise, are everywhere, altering the appearance of the otherwise ordinary buildings. Rather than ordinary stone, wood, or concrete, each structure appears to have circuitry infused within it, and with neon colored holograms overlaying and creating a new veneer to every structure.

More than giving the scenery a high-tech appearance, the holograms cover the flaws the Church does not wish people to see. The dark alley ways, the trash, and other impurities are covered up. The vast majority of people don't even realize the decrepitness of the cities they live in. Even though the stone may be crumbling, and trash may not be getting cleaned up, passers-by don't even realize it.

Even people can be telepresent via hard holograms, though this technology is very new, and many locations only have the non-upgraded versions of hologram emitters. However, with the new mobile

emitters, it's entirely possible for someone to be logged into the GodNet in Madrid, yet be fighting on the streets of Rio.

THE MOUNTAIN

Even when not jacked in, the masses experience the true miraculous magnificence of the GodNet. The Cyberpapacy's holograms even alter the appearance of the environment itself to show the GodNet in the Flesh.

Back on the ground, yellow beams emit from the local church and cathedral steeples off into the distance towards an immense holographic, circuit-covered mountain which towers over the land. These are the datapaths that lead from the local Holy Exchange—a central router connecting all of the various individual connections in wayside and garden shrines, homes, and churches—to the first level of the Mountain.

The Mountain is visible from anywhere in the Cyberpapacy—no matter where a viewer is, it appears to loom at an incredible height, twice as tall as any mountain on Earth. At the top of the Mountain stands an enormous cathedral, topped by a massive circuit covered black cross, which emits a beam of white light up into the sky to a giant glowing white sphere—the First Sphere of Heaven.

The Mountain and the Sphere of Heaven are virtual representations of the GodNet, projected into the Flesh to constantly remind the masses why they toil and obey the Church. For only those who are sufficiently pious may climb the Mountain, and ascend into Heaven.

The GodNet is not just a massive technological network. Its very essence is highly affected by spiritual energy and faith, and many believe those logged into the GodNet aren't just connected to it, but are in it—just as much as someone would be in Paris should they travel there. While their body may be sitting or lying motionless, the person's soul is truly present in the GodNet.

Magic is also a powerful force within the GodNet, and this fact is the only thing that truly stops the Church from completely ruling the GodNet.

Even though the GodNet is, at least to a degree, an extension of Ebenuscrux, it does not have full

control over the network, and this is the crack hackers use to exist and act independently, even though it is incredibly dangerous to do so. For if you die in the GodNet, your soul does not go back to your body...what happens is much, much worse.

GODNET PHYSICS

For almost all intents and purposes, the GodNet is a real place, with physics that act much like our world. People can walk. Things fall at the same rate as Earth gravity. Objects look, sound, feel, smell, and taste the same as they do in the Flesh. The similarity to "real life" physics notwithstanding, some individuals are able to bend the rules. Most beings cannot fly, but some with high Piety Scores are granted the ability to fly with angel wings as a Blessing, and most members of the church hierarchy can fly at their normal speed. Deckers with the right programs, sufficiently faithful cyberpriests, and cyberwitches can break the rules, including flying, teleporting, and even manipulating the surrounding environment.

Although both cyberdecks and TempTodes allow full access to the GodNet, using a neural jack makes everything seem more vivid and real. At least, that is, if you're using sanctioned jacks. Unless a person uses hacked TempTodes or jacks, he can never be sure what he is viewing is truly as things are, as the Church is quite capable of creating illusions and tweaking perceptions. Sanctioned devices are practically "rose-colored glasses" when it comes to accessing the GodNet.

COMMUNING

A flocker communing with the GodNet materializes in the local Holy Exchange, the church within a sector that serves as the conduit to the Flesh. Arriving in the GodNet is accompanied by the singing of a heavenly choir, and the supplicant experiences the Ecstasy—a religious experience they simply do not undergo in the Flesh. This experience is a direct stimulation of the pleasure center of the brain and is physically addictive. Those who experience it for the first time are driven to do anything they can to continue to have the privilege to return to the full experience of the GodNet.

To end a communion in the GodNet and return to the flesh, a flocker goes to the local church



The Mountain is always visible to those in the Promised Land

construct, kneels before the altar, and then prays to return to his body.

The GodNet is, at least superficially, excessively pleasant. Organ music or choir singing constantly rings throughout the local sector. There is no decay, garbage, or squalor seen in the GodNet, for "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Most of all, the sun is always shining in the GodNet.

For the general population, the GodNet is a place to enjoy life—shop, communicate, and especially, worship. The Law of Suspicion taints relationships in The Flesh. However, when people are logged into the GodNet, their Piety Scores are visible to everyone as icons above their head. This simple addition of identification and data (even if it's false) allows people to relax a bit, socialize, and unwind.

This transparency is particularly potent on the Mountain. The displayed Piety Scores allow everyone to know these are true God fearing

people, and part of their tribe. People here laugh and smile as they enjoy even simple luxuries such as flavorful food and drink, basking in the light of heaven on open terraces.

THE LAND OF NOD

Despite the steel grip the Church has on the GodNet, there are areas where it has no influence at all. The Land of Nod is the region of the GodNet outside the Promised Land, home of glitchstorms, glitchwraiths, and the souls of the excommunicated. However, it also provides opportunity for those who explore it, as there are regions to hide away from the Church yet to be found, along with other potential discoveries, inside the VR reality.

THE SPRAWLS

When the Cyberpapacy's axioms washed over the land, the transformations were not as drastic as