



CAT WIZARD

You never know who's playing

A role playing game by
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Introduction

You press “go”. Three other avatars start blinking dully on the screen. Looking up, you see three other faces peering over their bus seats. Looking around, trying to identify the other wizards. Your eyes connect. Finally one of you, a woman in her late twenties with a snake pattern tattooed on her neck, gets up from her seat. Approaches you, waves at the others. She leans in, smelling of cigarettes. “Are you ready to do this fucking thing”?

Cat Wizard is a roleplaying game about a renegade app and its maverick users. The app is banned from app stores in its current incarnation, but is still downloaded and put to use by those who want to affect change in themselves and the world. Based on the location, skills and interests of each user profile, Cat Wizard brings together teams of Wizards to perform quests. Some of these may seem banal on the surface, some more sinister. During the course of the quest, the actions of users bring about unpredictable change in themselves and the world.

Background

In August 2011 an interaction designer from Kansas (USA), a programmer from Fevik (Norway) and a post-situationist art collective in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) met through the now defunct Ariadne webforum. They found they shared a common interest in flashmobs, role playing games and the way memes (in the sense of virulent ideas, not ironic motivational posters) spread in social media. They decided to make a social app.

Cat Wizard was a moderate economical success, but brought about unpredicted change. After downloading the app to your smart device and activating the location function, Cat Wizard would put you in touch with other players and feed you tasks. At first the tasks might seem trivial. Locate some geocache. Take a picture of local street art and upload to Instagram, tagging with the location.

But as the game progressed, odd synchronicities would start to occur. Meaningful coincidences. Conversations that just seemed too... *right*. That lady you just met, the one with the screaming red badge, who winked at you saying something cryptic about “The Minotaur”: is she a player, too?

With the built-in systems for coverage in social media the “movement” spread like wildfire. The win-conditions and prize, letting the winners feed their own tasks into the app for new players, resulted in weird pyramid schemes, coordinated acts of situationist vandalism, whole multinationals infected as sleeper agents were brought online inside the corporate structures, to inject whatever madness their peers in the Cat Wizard network preordained. Relationships were formed, business ventures started, manifestos written. It was like some digital New Age had dawned.

Within only eight months of launch, Cat Wizard got pulled off all app stores, due to pressure from governments, intelligence agencies and whole industries. However, as this happened,

the original trio of developers released the code into the public domain, where anonymous engineers soon re-tooled and released a new app. The new app had extended functionality, and it had access to all the data and users of the old app.

Since then the app has regularly been pulled from stores, only to resurface immediately in a new guise. It has been hidden within meditation apps, children's doll dress-up games, alarm clock apps, minecraft guides and other innocuous sources. The community of "Wizard's apprentices" soon learns where the newest version is to be found. You were just notified by your phone that the latest iOS is ready for download? Beware, sister. You never know what you're going to get, these days.


The features of the Cat Wizard app

In its current incarnation the app has the following functionality:

- As a new user is registered that user gets an auto-generated identity, that is automatically registered with all noticeable social media. The user is also given an e-mail account associated with the app, and a unique hashtag.
- The e-mail address used to register is then forgotten by the system, IPs redirected through Darknet servers by default. Idiot proof systems of encryption are the baseline of the second and third generation Cat Wizard, ensuring that you'd have to be NSA or worse to track the identity of the apps users (the game is quite popular amongst NSA employees anyhow).
- All money transactions are done with bitcoin.
- The app has an in-app message board, used for communication and discussion.
- Each new task has a unique hashtag ID that is used by the characters when referring to the task on social media and on message boards. It is also used in the process where peer users decide whether a task was successfully performed.
- As the user completes a task she gets editing access to design a new task for the app. For many this is a main motivation for participating.
- Each completed task = 1 cat wizard level. The community recognizes its veterans. Some of them have gained notoriety in the media, some have been to or are in jail. There are also known martyrs.

Character creation

Your profile

PERSONAL HASHTAG	
WIZARD LEVEL	
SKILLS AND INTERESTS	
DISLIKES	
FOLLOWING	

EXAMPLE

PERSONAL HASHTAG

11_orange_buffalo

WIZARD LEVEL

14

UPLOAD
IMAGE

SKILLS AND INTERESTS *Sherlock series, geography, craft beers, punk, tour de france, horror, dancing, fencing, journalism, biking, riding, music history, geography*

DISLIKES

people patronizing me, body hair, perfume, japan geeks, fish and meat, white sneakers

FOLLOWING *4_lime_peacock, 5_brown_zebra, 16_brown_ocelot, 2_pink_field_mouse, 5_lilac_tetra, 6_lime_unicorn*

Personal hashtag

This is the name you are given by the Cat Wizard app. Some prefer to be known only by this name when in a group, others use shorter nicks, or even their real name. On the community boards only the hashtag is used. The personal hashtag is also used when documenting the task in social media. As a player you are free to make up whatever you want as your hashtag.

Wizard level

When a user completes a task she has been given, and the community has approved its completion, then the user receives 1 wizard level. A higher wizard level naturally gives high status in the community, as it signals experience, but it gives no particular privileges besides that. As a player you are free to be whatever level you like. Low level probably means a character has little experience, but you never really know. Some users choose, or are forced, to make new profiles often.

Skills, interests and dislikes

This section is used to signal to other Cat Wizard members what you can contribute with to a group, what you care for in your real life and what you have problems coping with.

Skills and interests could be anything from bands you like, crafts you master, political opinions, your totem animal, zodiacal sign or results from personality tests. Dislikes could be anything from food you hate, allergies, religious views you dislike, manners that make you cringe or the most boring sports to watch.

Following

This is a list of friends your character has in the Cat Wizard community. Your friends could be characters from earlier sessions you have played in Cat Wizard. (If your old and new characters know each other, maybe they share views, goals or information).

Most commonly, however, the “following” list is used to summon friends to help your character during play.

Motivation

Your character is part of the Cat Wizard community. Characters have different motivations for participating. It's necessary for the game to work that your character is willing to actually take on the sometimes absurd, sometimes dangerous missions she's tasked with. Choose one or more from the list below or make up your own.

- For some it is art.
- For some it is the thrill.
- For others it's just a game.
- For some it is the social bit.
- Some even do it out of habit.
- Some want to practice their skills.
- Some want to get to the top wizard level (if there even is one)
- Some want to design new tasks driven by some creative urge.
- Some want to design new tasks with commercial goals in mind.
- Some are trying to get the community to work for their idealistic cause.
- Some use the opportunity to gain wealth, gather information and gain influence through criminal means.
- Some are spies from governing bodies, political, military or religious organisations.

- Some are journalists or sociologists, game theorists or other academics.
- Some are raving insane. Or just moderately loco.
- Some wants revenge on society.
- Some just like destroying things.
- Some are desperate for meaningful change in their lives.

No matter the motivation: Every one of the characters strives for status and recognition within the Cat Wizard community and its subgroups.

The tasks

After you have created your character your game master will run a scene where the characters are gathered. The app will then provide them with a task to perform as a team:

- The task always has a time limit.
- The task is never pleasant.
- The task must always be documented.

See Appendix A for a list of suggested tasks to run.

Game structure

The game master (GM) sets scenes, describes scenery, plays all secondary characters and provides the main characters with resistance. The players primarily control their own characters, describing what they do and say. There are two notable exceptions to this: Friending and Comments (described below).

The game master is the final arbiter as to whether player actions succeed, using common sense and what she knows about the character's skills. The game master is advised to go along with and adding to most player suggestions, in ways that propels the story forward. Always thinking: "Yes, and", "Yes, but". Or even "No, but" for that matter. The clue being not blocking, accepting input, and adding to what the players say.

Likes and game economy

Each player is given 7 "Like" tokens at the start of the game. These can be used for:

- Rewarding fellow players when they do something cool.
- Friending: introducing secondary characters to the scene (picked from your followers or made up as the situation warrants). Cost = 1 likes.
- Comment: adding detail to a scene beyond your character's actions. Cost = 1 likes.

Friending example:

Trying to get hold of the plans of the basement of the local hospital, the player in control of character #admiral_71_sycamore uses 1 like to call a friend who works at the town hall. She has access to blueprints of all public buildings in town.

Comment example:

Needing to build a specific look, the girl playing #lemon_31_spiderweb pays 1 like and comments: "Down the street is a second hand clothing store. They probably have all kinds of garments I could put together for my costume."

The GM hands out Like-tokens to players when the characters create interesting complications for themselves.

How to get likes:

- Do cool things (players award likes).
- Make a complication for your character or the group (GM awards likes).

At the end of the second act the GM will collect all unused likes from the players, so use your likes while you have them.

Acts of play - running the task

This list provides you – the GM – with a rough outline of the story. But roleplaying isn't a scripted film! Discovering how the scenes are actually resolved and how you get from A to B *together with your players* is the fun part of the game. The player's tools and tricks (likes, comments etc) will function as both curveballs and inspiration.

Act 1: Establish the heroes in their normal setting.

Part 1: Exposition

We get to know and care about the characters. You could use cut-scenes from their daily lives, or maybe they're already in the same situation when the action begins (café, party, work). Players are allowed to use likes to take this particular scene from the GM.

Part 2: Inciting incident

The call to adventure! In a Cat Wizard story, this will often be when the app brings the characters together to change their lives forever. Choose from our suggested list of tasks (Appendix A) or make up your own.

Part 3: Bring the pressure

Show them how it won't be easy to perform the app's task. Throw shit at them, give them enemies, chase them around, take away their stuff! Remember: the players have tools too (if they have sufficient "like" tokens, they can edit the story by making comments, or introduce useful secondary characters to aid the main characters). See our suggested shit list (Appendix B).

There's a fine line between creating interesting trouble for the *characters* and denying the *players* the freedom to act. Make sure you do the former, not the latter. Reward and follow up on player initiative.

Act transition, act 2:

A brief scene where the characters take the full, final step into the new world, leaving the old one behind. There's no going back after this!:

Act 2: Rising action

Part 1: Things are looking up!

Events seem to be going the characters' way!

Part 2: The heroes' world is turned upside-down!

It's time to really bring up all the shit you can muster and throw it at the characters. Take away their jobs, kill their friends and family, stick them in a death trap. Bring them as far away from the goal as possible. If your stuck for inspiration, pick something from the shit list (Appendix B).

At this stage every player's like pool is re-set (emptied). They can still get new ones from the GM by creating trouble for the characters. When they start receiving likes from the GM (by creating difficulties for their characters), they can use them as before: Rewarding fellow players for doing cool stuff, Friending and Commenting.

Act 3: Climax

Give the heroes' what they deserve, but not without enough heartache and not in the way the players expect.

The end, a new beginning

When the characters resolve a task, the app lets them generate a new task for someone else to solve. The story you just played is often part of a larger set of interlinked events that bring about bigger change. Your next session will often references previous stories, re-incorporating scenery, secondary characters and themes.

For your next session, the players can freely choose to continue playing the same character, or make up a new one.

Appendix A: Examples of tasks

- Convince your local Starbucks to start selling Green Tea Frappuchino, a variety normally only available in Japan. Then put GHB into the tea they use. Make a thread about it on Reddit, with photos. Time limit: 11 days.
- Hack the web pages of your local council and leave a hidden link to an adult site. Film yourself in furrries costumes in front of the local police station while you click the link. Put it all on Youtube. Time limit: 4 days.
- Break into a cabin. Paint the interior pink. If the cabin doesn't have electricity: Install solar panels or wind turbines and make them run a constant show of blinking lights and Fleetwood Mac's song "Tusk" on repeat. Report about a bomb find in the cabin. Hide until the police approaches, take their photos in front of the cabin, then you should probably flee. Time limit: 3 days.
- Collect all public waste bins in the closest small town. Leave them all in an abandoned house and put the house on fire. Document the charred remains of the waste bins on the photo community 500px. Time limit: 6 days.
- Steal a police car. Use it to track the outline of a penis in the Nike+ Running app - on a policemen's account. Share it on Tumblr. Time limit: 12 days.
- Find a penis track on the Nike+ app. Go in the direction it points, to the first town you hit. Move a public statue from that town back to the former. Time limit: 9 days.
- Go to the closest zoo. Paint a carnivore, a herbivore and an omnivore in different colors. Take their pictures and share on Pinterest. Time limit: 48 hours.
- Get a massage parlor that doesn't exist registered on FourSquare and get more than 5 people to come visit it. Get photos of them naked, spread on tumblr. Time limit: 16 days.
- Become psychotic by means of drugs, trance states and/or sleep deprivation. Go to work in this state. Have a friend record the proceedings. Publish on YouTube. Loose job and/or become hospitalized. Make a blog. Time limit: 1 month.
- Put plastic pigeons on the heads on at least 3 statues in town. Put remote controlled light sources inside. Blink with the lights at midnight, spelling the coordinates of at least three other towns in other countries with morse code. Afterwards: Shoot the pigeons to pieces with guns. Time limit: 11 days.

- Look for blinking pigeons. Go to one of the towns signalled with morse code. Steal a fire truck, fill it with concrete and leave it in front of a hospital emergency entrance. Time limit: 5 days.
- Get jobs in a Kindergarden. Subtly indoctrinate the children in a revolutionary ideology of your choice. Time limit: 1 year.
- Perform an orgastic ritual to Pan at Sunday mass. Make sure local media outlets are present. Time limit: 1 Sunday mass.
- Sign up as participants in Paradise Hotel. Refuse sex and alcohol, discuss politics and fling feces. Time limit: 100 days.
- Help a female refugee into your country on the condition that you get to fix her a false identity: Luisa Kuiper. Get her a job. Tweet about your experiences in a series on Twitter afterwards, but withhold her false identity. Time limit: 1 month.
- Rent a randomly chosen room on AirBnB. Replace all the furniture in it with replicas made from paper. Leave the furniture you removed at a randomly selected politician's property. Document on Facebook. Time limit: 1 day.

Appendix B: Shit list

- Personal enemies, old or new, show up to hinder the players.
- Distraction - something pulls a character`s attention elsewhere.
- Loss: Loss of a resource, like a tool, vehicle, money, promised help etc.
- Getting lost: The players have problems getting to where they need to go.
- Malady: Players get sick, poisoned, drugged, contagious or are threatened by those.
- Accident: Car crash, falling into a manhole, fire, gas leak etc.
- Crime: Getting robbed, razzia or other mild criminal incident.
- Exposed: Police, secret police or other organizations know about the task.
- Competition: Somebody else is doing your task - cat wizards or other organisations.
- Misinformation: The players get the wrong info or misreads what they get.
- Madness: Characters or outsiders are going crazy.
- Offense: Something or someone triggers the character`s dislikes.
- Unwanted attention: Nosy strangers or media get in the way.
- At a cost: the characters get what they want, but there`s a price to pay.
- Capture: the characters are somehow pinned downed or restrained. They must escape the predicament to continue solving the task.
- Unforeseen consequence: What the character attempted succeeds, but something does not go quite as planned.
- Your own greatest enemy: One of the character`s skills or interests are turned against them.
- Cutscene: cut the scene hard, establish the characters somewhere else.

Appendix C: Further inspiration

- Luke Rhinehart: The Dice Man (book)
- Guy Debord: Society of the Spectacle (book)
- Blake Snyder: Save the cat (book)
- Lars von Trier: The Idiots (movie)
- Peter Greenway: Drowning by Numbers (movie)
- Adbusters (movement)
- The Invisibles (comic)
- Abu Rasol: Macht & Rebel (book)
- Panopticon (larp)
- Avant-garde (aesthetical concept)
- Absurdism (philosophical concept)
- Gamification (process in gaming and behavioral economics)
- David Skaufjord: "[Skriv det forpulte manuset ditt.](#)" (article - in Norwegian)