

# Fall of the Republic: an Agoran sub-game

Michael Norrish

## 1 Introduction

*Fall of the Republic* (*FotR* henceforth) is a proposed sub-game for Agora. It's designed to meet three goals:

1. Provide Agorans with a legislative arena that is *grounded*. This means that when they make rules, these rules can govern behaviour within a world that has an independent physics. Players will not be able to make rules to require pigs to fly. They will be forced to behave slightly more like real-world legislators who can invent legal fictions, but can't construct entire universes.
2. Be a legislative game that *resets*. This has the advantage that Players can deliberately set out to wreck the system to their own nefarious ends and not feel guilty about it. Furthermore, the game design can even encourage this, as will become clear.
3. Be fun to play, and appeal to Agorans everywhere.

## 2 Setting & Background

*FotR* is a strategy nomic game unabashedly based on a simple reading of the situation that pertained in the Roman Republic in the first century BC. Players represent Senators (or maybe, noble families) of the Republic, and their aim is to dominate the game. In order to avoid confusion with Agoran Players, *FotR* Players will henceforth be referred to as Senators

only. Initially, power resides with the Senate as a communal law-making body. Senators aim to eventually subvert this and rise to pre-eminence (see Section 5 below for how the game ends), but they will have to work within the state's institutions as the game begins.

Further, the Senate is explicitly a law-making body, and *FotR* is a nomic. Senators have some other levers to play with but the aim is to have law-making be the most significant activity for most of the game. (If and when the game reaches a climax, other, probably military, simulation aspects of the game will be important too.) One way of ensuring this is by having game-affecting levers that only the Senate can adjust. To contrast with the rules governing the physics of the world in which they play, Senate-level rules will be known as the *Law*.

### 3 The Referee

In addition to the Senators, another, non-playing individual is required to act as game Referee. The Referee's role is to implement the Physics rules (Section 4 below), and to act as impartial adjudicator when situations arise that the Physics rules don't cover as well as they should. The Referee is analogous to the Wizard position filled by Geoff Wong in Nomic World. The important difference is that the Senators can't change the Physics rules. Because the Referee doesn't play as a Senator, the Referee should also be able to run the game in an unbiased way. Note that the Senate may create a judicial system of their own that includes Judges, CFJs and the like within the Law. This is entirely up to them.

If it becomes clear that a Physics rule is fundamentally broken, the Senators and the Referee may agree to adjust that rule while the game is still playing. The Referee may also make Platonic fixes to the game state if rules are broken, and a fix is judged possible and desirable. The Senate will have to figure out how to deal with violations of the Law itself.

Between games, Players can discuss how Physics rules should be adjusted for subsequent iterations. They may also choose to begin a game with a particular Senate Law already in operation.

### 3.1 All is not mechanisable

In the discussion that follows, I use the phrase *executive power* to refer to a Senator-initiated ability to change the game state outside of the Law. These executive powers are precisely what standard Nomics do not have, except within the limited sense that they may control their players' behaviour. Nomics to date are poor models of legislatures because they never have any ability to affect the world beyond the legislature.

It is very important to realise that the Referee can not be a computer. This is because the Referee has to decide how to react to attempted uses of the Senate's executive powers. This in turn entails simulating the behaviour of the state apparatus below the Senate. This apparatus consists of human public servants who have to decide whether or not the desired action is even legal. This is easy for as long as every executive power can only be exercised with the unanimous approval of the Senate, but this situation would also be dull. Problems arise whenever Senators can be in a position where they believe that executive powers have been executed improperly.

Imagine that the Senate has established the Office of Comptroller, who has been given the power to set tax rates for certain provinces, within certain limits. If the Comptroller Senator decides that the rate for a province should be  $x$ , then the Referee should almost always allow this action to go ahead. If the Senate's judicial process later determines this to be illegal, the Senate can presumably instruct the civil service (i.e., the Referee) to set the tax rate back to what it should have been. Any further redress for the situation should be something for the Senate (and the Law) to figure out. So far so good.

*[Nor do we need to suppose the establishment of independent executive offices. If tax policies are set by majority votes, but again, subject to various constraints, then a situation analogous to the above one is possible. A tax policy may be passed that is later determined to be against the Law. The Referee will likely implement it, and then unimplement it in response to some sort of judicial Order.]*

But what happens if the same Comptroller tells the Referee that their position also entitles them to raise an army of 1000 auxiliaries in Rome for customs and excise purposes? Now, the Referee has to look at the ruleset and see if this looks half-way reasonable. If there's no suggestion that the Comptroller should have this sort of power, then the Referee should simulate the underling who says "But Sen. Comptroller, only the City Consul

has that power.” Given the hope that the Senate *will* legislate for all sorts of complexity, the Referee has to have a passing acquaintance with Senate Law, and a sense of which executive orders are or are not reasonable.

It seems that a human Referee is necessary unless one of two extremes holds:

- All executive powers are held by individuals only. In this case the game devolves to a standard board-game.
- Communal executive powers are only exercisable by unanimous agreement, or by holding to an unchanging Law that is easily implemented algorithmically. Board games that allow voting to play a part in their rules fall into this situation, maybe to elect players to various pre-defined positions. It’s only nomics that allow for these rules to be changed.

Finally, a Referee could also be dispensed with if Senators were happy that they could adjudicate game situations such as the above themselves, putting partisan considerations to one side and coming to an agreement at some sort of “meta” or impartial level.

## 4 Physics

This section describes the rules that implement the game world’s physics. Some of this is purely mechanical and should be implemented in a computer system as a matter of high priority. For example, no-one wants to have to perform book-keeping by hand if it can be done by computer. Because the Referee can be confident that these rules will be stable, investing the time into generating a computer-driven system should be worthwhile.

### 4.1 Geography

*FotR* is played on a game board, or map, consisting of a connected graph of *provinces*. Each province has the following attributes:

**Population:** a natural number in the range 0–30. This is linearly proportional to the number of people living in the province. Though it’s not really important, a factor of 50000 is probably historically reasonable.

This would allow Rome (with an initial population rating of 30, say) a “real” population of 1.5 million people.

**Loyalty:** a natural number in the range 0–20. This represents the degree to which a province is loyal to the Republic. Provinces that are loyal will generate more tax revenue. Provinces that experience loyalty drops may rebel.

**Political Allegiance:** a province may be entirely Outside the Republic, Attached, or within the Kernel of the Republic. Kernel Provinces are those whose population is granted Roman citizenship. These provinces may recruit Legions. (Others may only generate auxiliaries.) Attached Provinces recognise the authority of the Senate, but aren’t granted the privilege of citizenship. Those provinces initially Outside the Republic will have loyalties of zero.

**Infrastructure Level:** a natural number in the range 0–10. This number represents the degree of state capital investment in a province (public works such as roads, stadiums and the like).

*[More geographical sophistication could be introduced by adding terrain types to the list of province attributes.]*

## 4.2 Senators

Senators have two important attributes:

**Wealth:** some number of gold coins (*denarii* maybe).

**Homeland:** an set of provinces with which they are (exclusively) associated, and over which they have some independent powers.

## 5 End of the Game

The game ends when a Senator becomes Dictator for life, or by mutual agreement if the Senators decide that the edifice they have constructed is immune to *coup*. Becoming Dictator could be recognised as the situation where a Senator has the power to promulgate Laws as they see fit, can not be removed from this position, and controls 80% or more of the Roman world’s military forces.