

ULTIMATE SETTINGS GUIDE



CONSPIRACIES

Conspiracies and conspiracy theories are a weird beast. There have been enough true conspiracies out there that we should be inherently skeptical. And it comes from a natural place. Recent studies have suggested that the major reason human brains are so complex has been in order to outsmart other humans. It is in our nature to make sure others do not outsmart us, and we are perpetually locked in this struggle.

Conspiracies can be a powerful tool in role-playing games. They can be used as plot elements, background storylines, hidden puppet masters, side adventures, or the basis for an entire setting. *Ultimate Settings Guide: Conspiracies* takes a look at what makes a conspiracy and explores a number of conspiracies in detail. GMs can use this as a reference to create their own conspiracies or insert one of the included conspiracies into an adventure or campaign. Players can use this as a means of driving their character concepts and fleshing out a character's background and motivation.

Ultimate Settings Guide: Conspiracies includes:

- An introduction to conspiracies.
- Over a dozen detailed conspiracies.
- Character options to fight or embrace conspiracies.
- Conspiracy-like Arcane Backgrounds.
- Alien tech gear.
- Non-player characters.
- A sample adventure.
- A conspiracy building toolkit.
- ... and more!

Whether part of the conspiracy or working against it, the right tools are needed!

Ultimate Settings Guide: Conspiracies is a guide for conspiracies primarily set in the Modern Age. Although it does discuss conspiracies dating back to the Middle Ages and how to use conspiracies in other genres, the player content and GM tools are designed for the late 1800s to the present.





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ULTIMATE SETTINGS GUIDE: CONSPIRACIES

BY

Tyler Omichinski

EDITING

Aaron T. Huss

ARTWORK

Ken McIntyre, 19srb81, boscorelli, Everett Historical, Katja Gerasimova,
phipatbig, solarseven, Tribalium, Johannes Wiebel

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ABOUT CONSPIRACIES

“Three may keep a secret, if two of them are dead.” – Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard’s Almanack* (1741).

Conspiracies and conspiracy theories are a weird beast. There have been enough true conspiracies out there that we should be inherently skeptical. And it comes from a natural place. Recent studies have suggested that the major reason human brains are so complex has been in order to outsmart other humans. It is in our nature to make sure others do not outsmart us, and we are perpetually locked in this struggle.

On the other hand, seeing conspiracies around every corner is paranoia and equally unhelpful. There are a large number of conspiracy theories that have no evidence whatsoever; not that this prevents people from believing. Conspiracies can be everything from fixing the price of oil, to overthrowing governments, to your neighbors trying to make you move by having their dogs relieve themselves on your lawn. The importance is often not the size of the conspiracy, but the impact it has upon each of us.

In general, conspiracies are the organizing of a group of people, or beings if you believe in the lizard people who secretly run the planet, that have organized and are undertaking a plan unknown of by others.

Within this book you’ll find:

- Ideas for including conspiracy theories in your game.
- Discussions of little green men, alien visitations, Tunguska, and what the military is doing behind closed doors.
- Examples of how to include alien or other advanced technology in your game.
- Character options for creating conspiracy-oriented characters.
- And much more!



INTRODUCTION TO CONSPIRACIES

There are two large ideas that fall underneath the larger topic of conspiracies: real and theories. These two concepts have always been uneasy bedfellows. Sometimes ideas firmly existing within one camp will, through sudden revelations, shift wholeheartedly into the other. Within modern society, especially, it is impossible for any individual to know everything, and the relatively primitive human brain is left to cope.

This book attempts to address both of these – there are a number of conspiracies that were real and have been included and are discussed. On the other hand, there are a large number of conspiracy theories as well. From a role-playing standpoint, many groups may prefer the more outlandish conspiracy theories to the relatively mundane ones.

If you are to look at conspiracies in general, there is an important consideration to remember. Humans are, in general, terrible at keeping secrets. An individual may be perfectly adept at lying, but as groups grow, the chance of a single individual being willing to rat everyone else out for personal gain or even just for security approaches a surety. This is an important rule to remember – the members of your secret society need motivation to not spill the beans. For the larger conspiracies and secrets out there, this is usually accomplished by limiting the information that everyone outside of the inner circle knows. When that isn't done correctly, the conspiracy is often found out (see Aaron Burr's attempt to become president as an example) and they can seldom survive public attention.

It is worth noting that, though an effort has been made to include conspiracy theories from around the world, those from Western society make more appearances. This is, in part, because of the nature of conspiracy theories and conspiracies. It is only within the share-everything Western society that research is feasible for those without academic access. We have sought to include conspiracies from elsewhere, but true conspiracies are only effective if you don't know about them, and it's often very hard to know about a successfully executed conspiracy. Additionally, there are nearly as many conspiracy theories out there as there are crackpots who have something to sell. There are so many other conspiracies out there that could, and have, filled piles upon piles of books. Included herein is a selection that works especially well for role-playing games.

THE ORIGINAL CONSPIRACIES

“People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.” – Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)

Please note this chapter deals with religious and racial bigotry. The intent is not to glorify this, but to discuss the ongoing bigotry towards the Jewish people and the bizarre fascination of them as a source for conspiracy theories.

Ever since the Romans conquered the previous incarnation of the nation of Israel, creating the puppet state of Judea and sowing the seeds for the Jewish diaspora, the Jews have been subject to speculation of conspiracies. As the diaspora spread out across the Roman and post-Roman world, they were viewed with suspicion. A largely traveling or transient people at the time, many doubted their loyalty to the nation they resided in, and some were frightened of the strange ways of these newcomers. It was not uncommon for a Jewish family to be ousted from their home by suspicious neighbors and for the entire family to be forced to pack up and move to another town, or even another country. Despite being forced to spread out, first by the Romans, and later by others, Jews held strong to many of their traditions and values. By holding strong to this, they kept a relatively cohesive culture across multiple nations and great geographic distances.

For conspiracists, those who believe or promote conspiracy theories, this was great fodder for their paranoid minds. Almost as soon as the Jews were forced to spread across Europe, the conspiracies began to spread. Fueled by their apparent pervasiveness, the conspiracies grew further than others. They were also more memetic than other theories because they could be exported and traded amongst the paranoid between multiple nations. Where, for example, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had a large number of conspiracy theories about the multitude of ethnicities throughout their empire at its height, they could not be easily exported to other nations. Rumors and tales about the Jewish people, by contrast, could spread easily throughout Europe and around the world, as stories could jump from town to village without changing significantly along the way.

It was from this that the superstitious of Europe created the myth of “blood libel”. The people who spread this believed the Jewish people murdered Christians, especially infants, and used the blood for strange rituals. Throughout the 1100s, in towns across modern France and Germany, everything from the plague to cholera to a bad harvest would be blamed on the Jews and their strange ways, when most often it was actually the result of poor sanitation.

It is worth noting that during much of this time, the Jewish people tended to have a better understanding of medicine than others. This too was turned against them though, and it was not uncommon for Jews to be blamed for witchcraft and alchemy. It took very little for a drunken accusation being the cause of a withered

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arm on a child (often actually caused by complications in the delivery in the era) to the accusation that they were just doing “something suspicious” to lead to riots and hundreds, if not thousands, of Jews killed.

Outside of France and Germany, the belief in a conspiracy of heinous, albeit nebulous, Jewish plots continued to abound. In Spain, they would burn Jews alive for not believing in the word of the Bible. Venice gave us the word *ghetto* from *gheta*, Venetian for “slag”, in part because the Jewish quarter was near the iron foundries of the city. Across the Arabic world, Germany, France, and elsewhere, the Jews commonly lived in their own community apart from the rest of the city by the 16th century. Even before Hitler’s Nazism and beliefs in racial purity, Jews often had to wear special clothes or badges, had to have special passes to be able to travel, and made themselves scarce around Christian holidays.

Ironically, the fear of a Jewish conspiracy, the original one, gave rise to behaviors that would indirectly lead to the next one. With the Jewish people often unable to join guilds or partake in other commercial activities of this type, but having a culture that valued and organized education, the Jewish people quickly became moneylenders. This was also supported by the fact a shared faith and culture allowed Jews from different countries and places to easily coordinate and work with each other. They started as merchants, but quickly built their way up. The early Christian Church believed, citing a passaging Luke, that profiting from loans was not allowed under the faith. This ensured that in the early days, there was less competition for the early Jewish moneylenders.

Over time, the fact that Jewish people were common moneylenders gave rise to a number of conspiracies, many of which continue to this day. It is difficult to point to a specific time that it happened, but to certain, racist, conspiracy theorists, the Jewish people are a world-sprawling secret society. They have been accused of nearly every conspiracy theory under the sun including killing Kennedy, fomenting Liberalism to weaken Christianity and the modern State, faking the Holocaust to gain sympathy, being Freemasons, being the Illuminati, a group of bankers run the world, and more.

DREYFUS AFFAIR

Captain Alfred Dreyfus, in 1894, became a symbol for the hatred towards and persecution of the Jewish people. He was an artillery officer of Alsatian and Jewish descent and was sentenced to life imprisonment due to allegations of sharing French military secrets with the Germans.

After two years imprisoned on Devil’s Island in French Guiana, the first pieces of evidence began to come forward that would absolve him of the crime. Military investigators found evidence that pointed to a French Army Major instead of Dreyfus. Much of this evidence was suppressed and the Major was unanimously acquitted after a trial of only two days. Dreyfus would stay on Devil’s Island for another three years.



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During his imprisonment, however, more and more people began to suspect a cover-up and a conspiracy. *J'accuse*, an open letter published in a Parisian newspaper in 1898, chiefly fueled activists and the rising pressure on the French government to reopen the case. Due to pressure from activists and political groups, Dreyfus was returned to Paris in 1899 for a retrial, though this would quickly find him guilty and given a ten-year sentence. He was, however, pardoned for this and set free.

A full seven more years would pass, bringing us to 1906, before Dreyfus was properly exonerated. He would go on to serve in the French army again, served France in WWI, and would pass away in 1935.

The entire affair, however, would become a symbol for the larger socio-political issues going on in France at the time. Those who supported Dreyfus were pro-republican and anticlerical while those against were primarily pro-Catholic and pro-army. This deepened and exacerbated divides that would shape France for a long time afterwards.

The affair is considered a conspiracy because Dreyfus was selected as the most likely culprit only partially based on evidence, and also based on blatant anti-Semitism and anti-republican views. Various, spurious, interpretations of Dreyfus and his faith were entered into evidence as supporting the view that he must be the traitor. His curiosity was held against him, and almost immediately there was a conflation between facts and beliefs.



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As far as processes go, the treatment of Dreyfus throughout this was appalling by modern standards. After deciding he was guilty, based on evidence that was questionable even for the time period, the interrogation included placing a loaded revolver in front of him, and suggesting the only noble course of action was suicide. Dreyfus refused, maintaining his innocence and saying it would be proved. He was placed in solitary confinement after this, illegal by the laws of the day, and his wife was harassed and warned that a single word to anyone would result in a war that would tear Europe apart. As far as ways to prevent a case from being defended, this was a good one. The affair was eventually revealed in an anti-Semitic paper and, in true angry mob fashion, the case began to be tried in public as well as within the legal system. Fortunately, this allowed his brother to travel to Paris and begin to prepare the defense that would eventually exonerate him.

By the time of the trial, anti-Semitic papers across France began to develop wild theories about Dreyfus. He frequented gambling halls, he had a perfect memory and was thus the perfect spy, his guilt was all but assured because there was so little evidence. This last example was actually a major part of the case against him – he must be guilty because there was so little evidence linking him to the crime. Several papers claimed a form of prescience for warning the general populace that this is what would happen when including Jewish people in the military. The court was closed, that is no member of the public or the press could attend. This fueled rampant speculation about what was happening behind closed doors. Despite it being closed, certain key figures illegally attended the proceedings, though little fuss was raised over this. Despite records showing that Dreyfus's Jewishness colored the opinions of many of the individuals bringing charges against him, it was not formally raised as evidence in the court.

Towards the end of the trial, records show that Major Hubert-Joseph Henry made a theatrical showing that included vague accusations that a "respectable person" had accused Dreyfus, and he swore an oath on the crucifix hanging on the wall that the traitor was Dreyfus. The accused was enraged by these theatrics and veiled insinuations that his religion was the reason he must be the traitor and demanded to meet the accuser. This was rejected by the court. At this point in the trial, the court was unresolved as to whether Dreyfus was guilty or not. The General Staff, however, was able to, and took advantage of the opportunity, to transmit a dossier of secret documents to the judges. Amongst these were accusations of an erotic homosexual relationship, letters that purported to prove this, and reports from the military that supported the conclusion they had already reached. The contents of this document were not made public until 2013, preventing Dreyfus from mounting any sort of defense against them.

While he was in prison, Dreyfus's brother was able to unravel the conspiracy against his brother, working bit by bit to drag documents and information into the light. This process triggered a surge of violent but vague anti-Semitism that risked a great number of people. The second trial was much more public than the first and disseminated throughout newspaper articles, changes in the political

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landscape, and shifting attitudes in public. Anti-Semitic opinions were dragged out into the light of day, and eventually the conspiracy was dismantled. The Criminal Division was brought around to the view that the military trial had been inherently flawed and biased, and the situation was ultimately resolved.

Doing so required speeches in the Senate about the “moral conspiracy” taking place in France, the jousting of various writers across newspapers and treatises, and more. The entire affair became a symbol for the ongoing difficulty of creating a secular and republic nation out of France. The situation became an international phenomenon with protests taking place in England and elsewhere to a grand total of twenty foreign capitals. Germany and Italy, by contrast, were relieved with the situation. There were spies between France and Germany at the time, and many observers were already noting a gargantuan war was nearly imminent. There was a fear that the Dreyfus affair would be the spark that lit the powder keg that would, instead, be lit by the death of Archduke Franz Ferdinand years later.

FROM IRGUN TO MOSSAD

Perhaps it is with a hint of irony that the creation of the state of Israel does have a few hints of conspiracy behind it. In the days before WWII, Zionists, believing there should be a state of Israel in the Middle East, created *Irgun*, a paramilitary organization to further their ends.

The group engaged in bombings, at least one massacre, and tried to develop and further propaganda efforts. Over the course of their history, they were declared a terrorist organization by Britain, the 1946 Zionist Congress, and the Jewish Agency (a non-governmental organization focused on fulfilling the League of Nations’ Palestinian Mandate). They also became the right-wing *Herut* (Freedom) party, which in turn led to the modern *Likud* party.

Irgun was created with the express purpose of creating a Jewish state by nearly whatever means possible. Many who joined this organization served with the British in WWI, presuming the British would be more favorable to the Jews when compared to the Ottoman Empire that had owned the region prior to the war. They operated within the region of Palestine, attempting to recruit to the cause of Zionism and create a Jewish state.

One of the most impressive successful operations was the mass immigration of Jewish people into what was then called Palestine. Over the period of April 1937 until February 1940, 18,000 Jews immigrated to Palestine due to Irgun working with other organizations. Most of these immigrants were not caught by British forces, which had not approved the level of immigrations taking place.

Irgun had its own intelligence apparatus, at least one Swiss bank account, and a number of cells across Europe after the end of WWII. The end of WWII also resulted in the Palestinian partition, at which point Irgun stopped its insurgency and became the de facto military of the new Jewish state. By the time the British withdrew and the 1947-1948 Civil War in Mandatory Palestine began, Irgun

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operated publicly – recruiting, training, raising funds, establishing military bases, and all but openly purchasing weapons from European powers. They also created a medical unit and supply services as they prepared to engage in what would be a brutal conflict.

The Civil War in Mandatory Palestine was brutal and bloody. Irgun was fighting against both the Arab Legion, for fear that failing to establish a sufficient beach-head would result in the Jewish people being thrown from the region in short order, and British forces still in the region. Palestine was being “managed” by the British, while the UN Partition Plan was being developed and negotiated. Irgun’s tactics were largely successful as large numbers of Arabs were forced to flee from the region, resulting in a mass exodus. Despite the final decision of the UN at the time for the partition, Irgun and the others fighting for an independent Israel were able to declare an independent state of Israel.

This fledgling state, we must remember, was being created against the recent backdrop of WWII, wherein a number of Western countries refused Jewish refugees even after having a basic understanding about what was going on in Nazi Germany. Members of Irgun were used to being betrayed, double-crossed, and being the subject of much political horse-trading. As the civil war was resolved, the vast majority of Irgun was folded into the nascent military system of the state as it became Israel. Members of Irgun’s intelligence apparatus appear to have become some of the early members of Mossad, and the transition to statehood was made easier for their existence.

From these origins, Mossad went on to become an effective intelligence and special operations organization. One of their best known operations was in the aftermath of the Munich Olympics where Mossad operatives, organized into what were essentially hit teams, eliminated those involved with the Munich massacre of Israeli athletes. This amounted to what was a conspiracy the likes of which are often only seen in movies.

The effectiveness of the Israeli intelligence apparatus has given rise to a nearly untold number of further conspiracy theories. From the Israeli standpoint, Mossad and the IDF need to be particularly powerful as they are, based on historical positions, surrounded by potential enemies. The international legal community has been critical of some of the actions Mossad has undertaken due to their lack of recognition of the sovereignty of other states and their flexible approach to international law.

There have been a number of assassinations Mossad has taken credit for, and for the most part it looks as though they are correct. The use of bombs, small arms, and smuggling has all been regular aspects of their operations over time. Though many of the conspiracies that accuse Mossad and Israel of goals of world domination and other laughable objectives, they have certainly been responsible for the successful execution of a number of conspiracies over their history.

VIVE LA REVOLUTION! AND THE TEMPLARS OF FRANCE

In many ways, this was the true birth of modern conspiracy theories. Before Napoleon even showed up on the scene, conspiracy theory-based books were already being published:

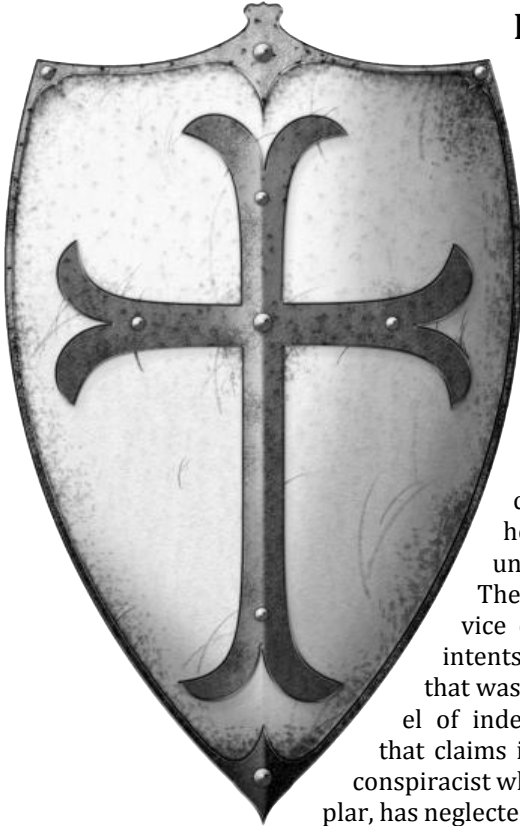
- *The Veil Withdrawn*, LeFranc (1791): a short volume “revealing” how the Freemasons were behind the French Revolution.
- *The Tomb of Jacques Molay*, Cadet de Gassicourt (1792): Jacques de Molay was the legendary last grand master of the Knights Templar, and Gassicourt claimed the Templars founded the Freemasons, and this legacy was responsible for the revolution.
- *Proofs of a Conspiracy*, *John Robison* (?): Allegedly written by an English Freemason, this book praised English Freemasonry for not causing the bloody revolutions their brothers to the south caused.

Strongly based on anti-church rhetoric, tired of secrets, possibly due to the perceived knowledge being squirreled away by the Church, the entire situation continued to develop and tensions continued to rise. The French, it seems, are particularly fond of conspiracies and apt to speculate on them.

This established a lot of the trends adopted again and again in conspiracy theories over time. Included in this was the conflating of various other conspiracy theories, including mixing up the details of multiple origins for organizations and using that as evidence of their existence and origins.

The Templars have continued on to become one of the most well-known groups subject to conspiracy theories. There are a number of reasons for this, notably including their strength in military terms at their height, combined with strong control as a lender of money. These particular strengths, in addition to the very public and colorful methodology with which their organization was dismantled, captured public imagination. This was especially due to the ludicrous number of buildings in and around Europe funded by the Templars. They existed as a powerful and secretive organization that seemed to dissolve overnight.

After this drastic change in the geopolitical landscape, many simply didn't know what to do. It's difficult to come up with an analogy for the strange hybrid of military might and the providing of capital the Templar provided. It would be almost like a medium power, but integral, nation-state suddenly disappearing from the world stage. Perhaps Switzerland, itself a target of many conspiracy theories, would serve as a good stand-in for the financial services it provides.



LEGACY OF THE TEMPLAR

The Templar had a legacy that went beyond their impact on history as a whole; a legacy that shaped how conspiracy theories would develop and be realized over the rest of history. The Freemasons, especially in their heyday, played fast and loose with both history and Templar imagery. Many of the individual organizations that fall under the larger umbrella of Masonic organizations use Templar imagery, and many claim their origins lie within the mists of Templar history.

Many groups and organizations have claimed throughout history to be the heirs to the Templar Order, though it is unclear what this would actually mean. The Templar were a monastic order in service of the Church and have been, for all intents and purposes, an arm of the Church that was capable of operating with a higher level of independence. Nearly every organization that claims its origins from the Templar, or every conspiracist who has alleged a connection to the Templar, has neglected this particular relationship. The Freemasons, for example, have been largely a religiously unaffiliated organization, yet the connection continues to be drawn.

Though these conspiracies remain, most hinge on the financial might the Templars controlled and the belief that non-state actors must have had a similar level of power in the society of their era compared to modernity. The theory goes that since they had money in the past, it would have been easy for them to hide it away from the French.

THE GOLDEN LAND OF CONSPIRACIES: AMERICA

“Conspiracies no sooner should be formed, then executed.” – Joseph Addison, *Cato, A Tragedy* (1713).

For whatever reason, the United States of America seems to be the most susceptible nation on earth when it comes to conspiracies, whether they are actual conspiracies perpetrated on one group or another or the stuff of fancy. Nowhere seems to have the same obsession, and sheer virality, of conspiracy theories like the United States. There are a lot of theories as to why, but certainly one of the most likely is the combination of the heterogeneity of the populace (combined with ongoing skepticism of other races in a holdover from previous centuries). The second major contributor is likely the fact that without nobility in place partaking in what was a very upfront methodology of conspiring against the average person, a number of people have been left to organize new, and more secretive conspiracies. As a result, the American people have had conspiracy after conspiracy attempted against them. By modern times, it may be no wonder they're inherently skeptical and becoming paranoid towards what the government is doing.

THE BUSINESS PLOT

In the heady days of 1933, America was in the midst of the Great Depression, and Franklin D. Roosevelt was the president of the United States. He was touting the New Deal and what would become a drastic change to the American system of government. In the midst of this, retired Marine Corps Major General Smedly Butler claimed business leaders were creating a fascist veterans' organization with the goal of overthrowing the American government through a coup d'état. In 1934, he testified before the United States House of Representative Special Committee on Un-American Activities. No one was charged, and at the time no one was prosecuted.

Butler claimed they had attempted to acquire him as the leader of a military coup to take over the American government. He claimed that despite his support for Roosevelt and his staunch criticism of the capitalist system, they wanted him on board due to the public position and goodwill he held. The conspiracy, as he described it, would have him assume the new position of “Secretary of General Affairs”, with Roosevelt remaining on in a figurehead position.

After the hearings, Butler would go on to argue that many of the people investigated were the “small fish” and the committee had let the major conspirators go



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free. His testimony was allegedly edited and redacted before being released to the public, resulting in these idiosyncrasies. Others came forward and spoke about an international conspiracy between powerful Jewish financiers and fascists dedicated towards destroying the American way of life. This, according to claims, wanted a return to the gold standard, a departure from the New Deal that FDR was beginning, and increased support for the veterans of the war.

The news reported this all to be a gigantic hoax. General Douglas McArthur, who Butler alleged would be his replacement if he did not support the conspiracy, referred to the story as a hilarious concoction.

Since then, we have had additional time to examine some of the claims about this allegedly far-reaching conspiracy. There has been some evidence that at least some of the conversations that took place may have been somewhat like Butler claimed. There is some evidence that a number of war financiers and other businessmen were engaged in influence peddling to change the direction of the country. Some have suggested that such a conspiracy and coup was planned, but was not nearly to the level Butler said it was. At best, it may have been little more than a conversation between a few of these parties as “something they should totally think about doing,” only to be abandoned once all the parties involved sobered up.

AN AMERICAN EMPEROR: AARON BURR'S PLAN TO RULE THE WEST

Imagine yourself, for a moment, as Thomas Jefferson: founding father and third president of the United States. In the summer of 1806, a mere year into your second term in the presidency, you receive a long rambling letter from a man in Nashville by the name of Andrew Jackson. Remember you don't know he's going to be president himself one day. This is just one of the latest of over a year's worth of letters warning you about the activities of Aaron Burr, your former vice president. He has, according to the letters, declared himself emperor of a new empire that he has carved out of the Western territories. One can only imagine the immediate reaction.

It is important to note that Burr and Jefferson never got along. Before being saddled as running mates, they had been in the first ever tie in terms of votes for President. At the time, the law stated that whomsoever was second in terms of votes would become vice president to the person who received the most. There was also a cultural expectation being developed that, wherever possible, an individual would serve first as vice president, and later as president. It makes sense in theory – sort of an apprenticeship for the big job. As a result, Burr was given the vice presidency in a gentleman's arrangement. Burr made a grab for the presidency and, when that didn't work out, he simply refused the vice presidency and the Constitution was amended to address the problem.





Burr's political career, already on the rocks, took a further hit when he decided to duel Alexander Hamilton in 1804. The two men were long time political rivals, but when Burr won, public opinion came down against him. In the Eastern United States, his aspirations were finished. All but fleeing west, he traveled to Pittsburgh where he built himself a boat and traveled down the Ohio and Mississippi to New Orleans under the name Aaron King.

We aren't positive what Burr was thinking at this time, but there are some things we know. There are records that Burr spoke with King George of England through diplomatic channels and informed him he would turn on the United States in exchange for money and the warships to steal the West from the American government. The King either wasn't interested or didn't trust Burr. He also had a plan to attempt something similar with the Spanish, setting himself up as

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emperor of a nation between the remaining Spanish holdings and the quickly growing America, or to otherwise let him steal some land from the Spanish and set himself up as a king or emperor. This man was obsessed with becoming a ruler.

Once he arrived in Jackson's home of Nashville, a good and easy jumping on and off point from the Mississippi, he spoke openly about his plans to create an empire of his own in the West, making it sound like the army was already prepared and waiting for him. Despite those in the East being highly disappointed with and hostile to Burr, those in the West were far more welcoming. Despite Jackson quickly turning on him and writing those letters to Jefferson, many others did side with him. General James Wilkinson, the commanding General of the Army at the time, sided with him, as did Harman Blennerhassett, who became financier for the conspiracy soon thereafter. With funding and the help of military might and intelligence, he was able to secure meetings with the *criollos*, a group ready to seize swaths of Mexico. He was also able to arrange a discussion with the Spanish minister of the time, saying the United States had to be broken up before it became too strong of a power on the border of New Spain.

It was during this period that Jackson wrote the letters to Jefferson. He was able to lay out nearly all of Burr's plans in great detail, though Burr hadn't shared the details with him. This appears to be consummate guesswork and deduction on Jackson's part. He mentioned in the letter a "certain general" involved in the plot.

To make the entire situation more complicated and convoluted, Wilkinson had been a spy for the Spanish government for a number of years, almost as long as he and Burr had been planning their break-up of the American frontier. He had pledged his loyalty to Burr and his empire, the United States government, and the Spanish Crown. He had been sending coded letters to both Burr and the Spanish.

With their help and their money, Burr began to recruit volunteers for military adventure. Operating off of Blennerhassett Island, things were going well for this treasonous operation until the Governor of Ohio began to be suspicious. The Governor ordered the state militia to raid the island and seize the supplies. Some of the men escaped, and Blennerhassett and Burr took this smaller force and headed down river. Wilkinson had sworn to supply troops and support this endeavor previously, but at this point decided the conspiracy would fail and turned on his co-conspirators.

To ensure he was not considered a co-conspirator, Wilkinson edited and altered the cyphered letters to cast more blame on Burr and left on himself. This alerted Jefferson to the conspiracy and he informed Congress. A bounty was put on Burr's head and his arrest was ordered soon after. They managed to capture him in relatively short order and Burr was put on trial in Richmond, Virginia.

The trial has an enduring piece of fuel for conspiracy theories beyond the initial conspiracy created by Burr. Given the complicated nature of many of the factors included, it brought to the fore the questions of state privilege and protected information. From this, they started the long tradition of courts being able to protect government and state secrets where appropriate.



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The court case after that is the stuff of legend. The Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall presided and had one of the subtlest legal minds of the age. Both sides had incredible lawyers and the case went on for days with many issues being debated and argued. Due to the complex and novel nature of the case, prominent lawyers were brought in to serve as a jury and they would regularly interrupt to ask questions of their own. With so many onlookers coming in to check out the case, the trial had to be moved to the House of Delegates in the Capital building. Despite being first cousin to Jefferson, Marshall maintained proper decorum and his belief in honor and the justice system resulted in Burr being found not guilty of the charges of treason. Burr entered into a voluntary exile in Europe and exited the stage of history. His dreams of empire had been shattered and America remained unbroken.

There are numerous conspiracies, both real and imagined, that come from this ruling. Not only was there another set of individuals who would call themselves emperors in America over time, this also set the standard of what information the government could hide from their people. Since this legal case, the government has fought increasingly hard to hide more and more information from the populace under the justification of national security. There have been instances since then, including Watergate and others, that members of the government have used this justification to hide other sins.

POLITICAL MACHINES AND MACHINATIONS

The history of president Chester Arthur has some of its origins in the New York Political machine. In the 1800s, there was both Tammany Hall and Conkling's Customs House acting as major political machines, affecting and determining the outcomes of the elections that took place within New York. Arthur had his early career take place in the Customs House and was part of the political machine for some time.

The machines operated through offering jobs and kickbacks to those who would support various individuals and causes. Rather than being based on merit or public election, they were based on patronage and knowing the right people. They engaged in conspiracy after conspiracy to ensure the people they wanted got into the right positions.

President Arthur, however, did everything he could to put a stop to that. He certainly dismantled whole swaths of the system by making government bureaucracy positions based more on merit than they had been in the past.

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Nearly every major city that existed in the 1800s, including Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Kansas City, New York City, St Louis, and Philadelphia, have been accused of or it has been proven that there are political machines operating within their borders making major decisions about how the political positions are filled. Some of these machines are alleged to still exist to this day, particularly in major urban centers like Chicago and New York. If this is true, it represents a major hindrance towards the United States operating as the democratic Republic it is supposed to be, as it ensures the great and powerful are running things behind the scenes, away from things like elections to muddy who gets elected.

LET'S INVADE CANADA!

In 1858, the *Fenian Brotherhood*, an Irish organization styled after ancient Celtic warriors tasked with protecting the island, were trying to develop a conspiracy of their own – to invade Canada and hold it for ransom. Their logic held that, similar to the United States' revolutionary war, it would be difficult for the British to project power so far afield, and Britain would be forced to capitulate. There is evidence that the Union government, recall the United States was in the midst of the civil war, knew about this plan and didn't do anything about it. This worked out well for the Fenians as they crossed at Buffalo, New York into Canada with 800 troops.

(This was one of the few incidences of a conspiracy actually existing. This was a secretive plan, funded through selling bonds only to Irish immigrants, to invade another country.)

After this crossing, the Union apparently changed their mind about the viability of the plan and promptly cut off supply lines from the Fenian's American holdings and prevented reinforcements from crossing as well. The group managed to briefly capture Fort Erie and made a few raids in the area, but this conspiracy lacked ample foresight and planning. The U.S. Army stepped in and offered train tickets to soldiers who would return home; and it appears they all took them up on the offer.

Nine years later, in 1867, the Fenian Brotherhood decided to give the invasion of Canada another try. After a parade of 6,000 armed troops marched through the streets of Philadelphia, 15,000 Fenians crossed from New York and Vermont into Canada only three years later. It didn't take, and they were quickly chased back across the border to America. Another attempt was made in 1871, but they were also quickly routed.

These repeated attempts, and the apparent ability to field a relatively proper, if small, army, gave rise to fears of subsequent invasion attempts all the way until the Anglo-Irish treaty in 1924.



ILLUMINATING THE NEW WORLD ORDER

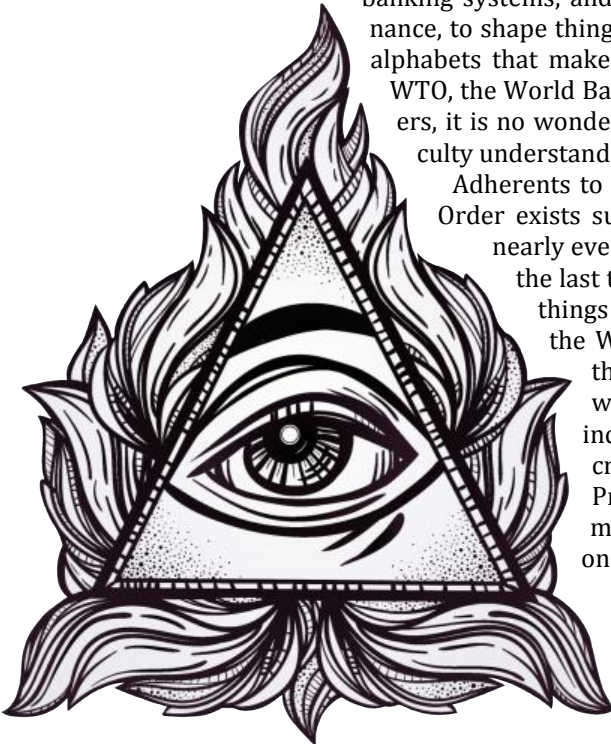
“You simply cannot invent any conspiracy theory so ridiculous and obviously satirical that some people somewhere don't already believe it.” – Robert Anton Wilson, *Everything is Under Control: Conspiracies, Cults, and Cover-ups* (1998).

One of the most common allegations amongst modern conspiracists is the creation of a single world government, whether through the United Nations or something else entirely. There have been allegations that this would be, or has already been, done through the use of international banks, secret cabals of powerful figures, or something else entirely.

The central idea of these conspiracies is that there is already some secret organization running things behind the scenes. There have been accusations that members of this group have included the Council on Foreign Relations, owners of private banks, the Bildeburger group, and the Federal Reserve system. The general thrust of the theory suggests these shadowy figures are able to utilize central banking systems, and the world of international finance, to shape things their way. With the mangled alphabets that make up the acronyms of the IMF, WTO, the World Bank, and a great number of others, it is no wonder the average person has difficulty understanding what is going on.

Adherents to the belief that the New World Order exists suggest they have been behind nearly every major international event of the last two hundred years. Pointing to things like war profiteering through the World Wars and the Cold War, the fact a great number of wealthy people have drastically increased their wealth in times of crisis, and a small reference by President George H.W. Bush mentioning a new world order in one of his speeches.

It is believed the modern version of the New World Order, or whatever version you believe exists, operates out of the Denver International Air-



ILLUMINATING THE NEW WORLD

port. Apparently, this is where most of their fleet of black helicopters, by some argued to be silent, operate out of. Much of the support for this belief comes from the murals within the airport that contain environmental devastation and various masonic symbols.

The alleged end goal of the New World Order is the unification of the world beneath a single authoritarian world government. This end state is particularly concerning for the adherents of right-wing American political beliefs, which have been the most represented in sources for the adherents of this theory.

THE EARLY DAYS

Prior to the 1990s, only the most extreme members of American counterculture believed in the threat of a New World Order. The end of the Cold War and the apparent growing strength of various international organizations brought the seeds of conspiracy, which had apparently been sown decades before, to maturity. In the early twentieth century numerous politicians, including Woodrow Wilson and Winston Churchill, used the phrase “new world order” as an attempt to discuss and give codification to the changing balance of power and the changes to international affairs. This largely happened after the end of WWII to discuss these changes, and attempt to make some sort of determination about the changes to the world.

A great number of Progressives welcomed the changes to the world and the international political stage. The argument was made that these international bodies did suffer from a certain lack of democratic decision-making, noting for example the Security Council in the UN. This shortcoming was a common criticism.

During the days of the Red Scare of 1947-1957, many members of the American Right started to be whipping into a fearful furor about the power of Jews, intelligistas, the Freemasons, the Illuminati, and others being involved in running things behind the scenes. These included the Rothschilds, Bildeburgers, and a large number of other international power brokers implicated by some of them. Much of these early days was being fed by and was tied to the process of the Red Scare, discussed elsewhere, resulting in a great deal of cross-pollination.

The Illuminati, so named for their origin of attempting to enlighten Europe, is a particularly resilient conspiracy theory tied to the New World Order since its inception and even predates it (actually having its origins in the late 1700s in Bavaria, Germany). The group was founded with the purpose of creating a devoutly secular, pro-gender equality, liberalist, and republic society. By cherry-picking members from a number of Masonic Lodges, the seeds were sown for the two organizations to be inherently intertwined in the imaginations of conspiracy theorists. In reality, they chose from Masonic Lodges merely to find educated and well-connected members of society, rather than anything more sinister than that. The difference in view of secularism versus the belief in a higher power of the Masons should be a key clue.



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Within a decade of their founding, the organization was infiltrated, broken up, and suppressed by agents and representatives of the Bavarian Elector. Within a few decades after that, reactionaries began to speculate that the Illuminati had somehow survived. They believed such a secret society could never be fully destroyed, and feared there was a growing secret, shadow government being formed with the intent of taking over the world. They were accused of promoting and attempting to further the most radical of the Enlightenment era views. Since then, more and more people have bought into the belief that there is an Illuminati secret society operating behind the scenes. They have been blamed for everything from the Battle of Waterloo, to the Kennedy Assassination, to movies from Hollywood being developed to ruin the minds of Americans.

TO POST COMMUNISM

In the early days, the theory was tied extensively to the fear that there would be a singular world Communist government. Over time, this started to shift and change. Fears were originally that the Communists would secretly take over. After the early days of American intervention in other states and the realization that Communist states were not capable of running the world from behind the scenes, the conspiracy theory started to evolve and change. Throughout the 1960s until the 1980s, there was relatively little going on amongst believers in the attempted creation of a single world government. There were a large number of people who continued to believe in this threat, but they were unable to effectively package and distribute their theory.

It was the changes in the world of the 1990s – the increase of American adventurism, as critics have called it, the fall of Communism, and the so-called end of history that heralded the revival in fears of a single world government. This group, it was argued, engaged in drastic control over any number of aspects of daily lives – including various efforts to stifle communication through censorship, limit education through re-working the education system, and the existence of a massive fleet of black helicopters and other munitions ready for when the New World Order emerges from the shadows and properly takes over.

It was the revival of the UN as a meaningful international body, once the USSR became Russia and was less prone to veto measures on principle, when the theory began to grow. Major figures like Pat Robertson have written books on his belief in the New World Order and how to combat it. Despite the support of some major media figures, late night radio and viral internet propaganda have been the major contributors to the belief.

Amongst conspiracists, believers in the New World Order are unique in two ways: they are amongst the most prepared for a violent situation, with some living their entire lives around the belief that a war is coming wherein the New World Order will attempt to seize power, and they are one of the most willing conspiracy theorist groups to learn and borrow from other conspiracists. This includes belief in the Illuminati (either allied with or fighting against the NWO, or

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the NWO's earlier version), UFOs (either aliens allied with the NWO, or experimental spacecraft, or genetically altered humans who are going to enslave us all), occultism (perhaps its actually advanced science we don't understand, or it could be their education programs have limited our understand of magic and other things once commonplace), and even various racially based theories (such as accusations that a suspiciously large number of the members of the NWO appear to be Jewish).

AND NOW

After 2001, things changed drastically in America and around the world. While FEMA, the NSA, and other government institutions were given unprecedented reach and power, Kissinger and other important figures in international politics began to call for extensive reforms to the global financial system, including calling for a "Second Bretton Woods." These two factors mixed together and became a cauldron of fear to a great number of conspiracists. Governments were growing in their power, and the FEMA death camps rumored of in the 1990s suddenly seemed more likely to happen.

As the financial crisis hit in 2008, this was the final proof conspiracists needed. Those hit most drastically by the crisis were not the ones speculating and engaging in risky behavior, but instead were those who just wanted to buy a house. They had been exploited and the international financial system seemed more poised to support its own rather than change "business as usual." This has even pushed many who would not otherwise support a conspiracy theorist worldview into a realm where they'll actually consider it. Even Glenn Beck and major newscasters have begun to bring New World Order conspiracy theories into the mainstream by providing them with a major platform to voice their viewpoints.

The growing dissatisfaction with the current state of political affairs in America and other Western cultures has resulted in a weird alliance between radicals on the far right and the far left of the system, both agreeing that the system is becoming too powerful, but disagreeing on to what ends.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW

One of the major viewpoints of conspiracists who believe in a New World Order conspiracy has been the Christian viewpoint, largely couched in apocalyptic eschatology. Arguing the end times are near, they view the New World Order's creation and gaining power as a sign of the end times.

The belief is predicated on the view that the utopian vision presented by members of the UN and others is a false utopia that will be revealed to be a dystopia built upon the trinity of Satan, the false prophet and the antichrist. These viewpoints largely cast someone from within the perceived New World Order to be the antichrist, whether the person will be the President of the EU, the Secretary General of the UN, or the Caliph of a new Islamic State. The false

CONSPIRACIES

prophet, by contrast, will be the last pope installed through an anti-Christian conspiracy, a guru of the New Age movement, or some other false Christian that will lead the faithful away from the “true teachings.”

The biggest critics of this viewpoint are other Christians who argue this is turning God’s message of love into one of fear. Others point out various problems with the conflating of various international figures with those from prophecies that are either part of the Bible or are from other sources not officially associated with the teachings of God.

WHAT IF THEY’RE MASONS?

Another mainstream view about the New World Order is their apparent resemblance to many theories that used to exist about the Freemasons. As made popular in movies like *National Treasure* and books by Dan Brown, there are a large number of things that can be easily conflated with various Masonic beliefs and rites. Some conspiracists have latched onto these beliefs and argued that throughout the formation of the United States, masonic rites and practices have been baked into the bedrock of American society, including architecture of government buildings and depicted on the dollar.

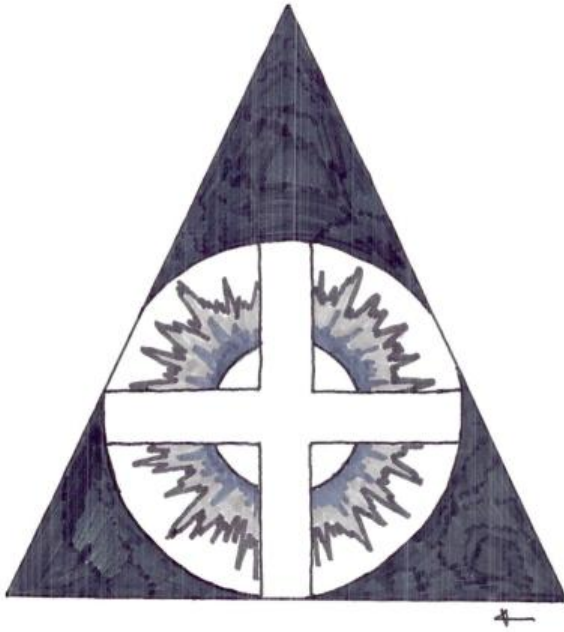
These individuals have drawn a line throughout American history of the Freemasons directing monetary policy and other aspects of society. The Eye of Providence and the unfinished pyramid were symbols within Masonic lodges for much of their history, and the evidence that their inclusion on American currency as a coincidence is easily swept aside by someone who believes in the conspiracy theories.

This belief is latched on to as contributing to the large theory of a New World Order. Perhaps the Masons have transformed into the New World Order, or perhaps it is the case that a group of Masons broke away to create the New World Order. This theory is one of the ones with the most evidence against it as the Freemasons have not, as discussed in their own section, ever had a single body of political or social belief to unify them.

BILDEBURGERS

In 1954, a conference was held in the Bilderberg Hotel in the Netherlands. The purpose was to work to counter a growing trend of anti-American views in Western Europe. The attendees included the Prince of the Netherlands, former Belgian Prime Minister, the head of Unilever, and a total of fifty delegates from 11 countries in Western Europe. Attendees were from different political backgrounds and ultimately the conference resulted in the establishment of an annual conference and the creation of a permanent steering committee. Historically, the attendees tended to skew towards bankers, politicians, executives from large businesses, and heads of state.





The group is very pro-internationalism, and attendees have, when questioned about their goals to create a single world government, agreed that it is exaggerated, but not wholly unfair. The group wants to create an ongoing world peace through increased interconnectedness. With this view in mind, they have regularly been accused of being a part of the larger New World Order. Some have argued that the end goal of this organization is to create a single international world government with the purpose of then creating a single communist state across the world.

The organization is extremely opaque regarding its activities, and there is essentially zero accountability of the group. As a result, the Bildeburger conference has been repeatedly accused of a number of conspiracy theories. Groups on both the left and the right have accused the Bildeburger group of planning world domination. Even Fidel Castro has levied accusations that the Bildeburger group is a capitalist organization aimed at a single capitalist market made of the entire world.

THEN THEY MUST BE THE ILLUMINATI

As you'll see comparing this section to the one on the Illuminati, there are a lot of similarities between the two conspiracy theories. Many have argued that one is subservient to the other, or they are the same conspiracy by different names. Despite a great deal of evidence that the Illuminati no longer exists, a great number of individuals have argued that the New World Order is either their latest iteration, or a new project by them.

COMMUNISM LOST AND FOUND

“Just because you’re paranoid, doesn’t mean they aren’t out to get you.” – A bumper sticker.

The hunt for Communism, especially in Cold War America, makes for a fascinating story. While on one hand there is the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) led by Joseph McCarthy accusing people across the country and ostensibly trying to root out Communist sympathizers and spies on American soil, there are also a number of instances where KGB spies existed on American soil, operating successfully, that McCarthy and HUAC didn’t have a clue about.

It is a testament to how bizarre this situation was that an actual government committee was created to root out a communist conspiracy they feared was growing within the nation, with an abysmal rate of success. Instead of finding real spies, the committee focused much of its efforts on political gamesmanship and censorship, often targeting “West Coast Elitists” (from Hollywood) and others that weren’t American enough for their sensibilities.

From the 1920’s through the end of the Cold War, and arguably still today, there is a pronounced fear of Communism. In the 1920s, America was the land of joiners. Nearly every man and woman, and many children, were part of fraternal organizations in the form of the *Freemasons*, the *Elks*, the *Knights of Columbus*, and many more. Most of these were formed because this was the era prior to social security and they provided, along with friendship and a sense of belonging, an insurance package that has become the purview of the state. Many of these groups would be labeled as organizations of potential concern during the Red Scare days. It is particularly interesting that those of these orders and other fraternal groups oriented around particular jobs would actually evolve to become the earliest unions, suggesting that in some instances this fear of organization may have been justified in an era where unionism was seen as a precursor to socialism.

The heyday of the fear of a Communist Conspiracy theory was between 1940 and the end of the 1960s. This was a strange hydra of a conspiracy theory in that it would grow and envelop numerous other theories and fears either blaming them on the communists, suggesting there were other forces at work, or maybe the communists were just working for one of these other organizations.

Communism was, for example, tied to the fluoride in the drinking water scares that took place in the 1960s. People became terrified of the effects that fluoride would have on themselves and their children, apparently failing to do any sort of actual research into the chemistry behind it. Doctors claimed it was a Communist plot to sap the intelligence and strength of the next American generation. This viewpoint could not be altered easily, and to this day some of the more eccentric amongst conspiracists still argue there are dangers from fluorinated drinking water.

The difficulty in deconstructing many of the Communist conspiracy theories is not the parts we now know are certainly wrong, but rather the difficulty we have in determining what they actually did do.

In instances where the KGB had a successful mission that NATO did not find out about until after the fact, we are left without any information. Unlike the CIA and other American institutions, who we have begun to learn more of over time due to the capacity of the media and the release of various government documents, the KGB is not subject to these requirements. Even former heads of the CIA have lamented their inability to undertake the same level of espionage, with a relatively nonexistent degree of leaks, that the KGB seemed entirely capable of doing.

One of the enduring and fascinating theories is that with the fall of the USSR the KGB did not actually dissolve. Instead, there are allegations the organization went underground and, along with Putin, runs Russia as a shadow government.



SHADOWY ORGANIZATIONS

“Yes, there is a conspiracy, in fact there are a great number of conspiracies that are all tripping each other up. And all of those conspiracies are run by paranoid fantasists and ham-fisted clowns. If you are on a list targeted by the CIA, you really have nothing to worry about. If however, you have a name similar to somebody on a list targeted by the CIA, then you are dead.” – Alan Moore, in “The Mindscape of Alan Moore” (2003).

The operations of the CIA are a bizarre blend of conspiracies that have actually happened, and ones that have been dreamt up in the most confused of minds. Mind control, attempts to develop psychic powers, selling drugs to Abbie Hoffman, and much more are all parts of the bizarre activities the CIA is suspected of undertaking.

It is the unusual reality that the CIA has been reported to be far less effective than Hollywood portrays them as. Several books have been written about the CIA’s failures over the years, and there have been many. Elsewhere in this very piece we discuss the sheer reality of the KGB apparently outclassing the CIA and their efforts through swaths of their history. This is no fault of the many dedicated and talented individuals who work at the CIA, and is rather the result of systemic problems baked into the institution from its inception. This topic is better discussed elsewhere.

MIND CONTROL FOR FUN AND PROFIT

MKULTRA was one such example of a CIA conspiracy that stretches the bounds of credulity. The project was to use LSD and other drugs to interrogate enemy agents and attempt to brainwash them. The dream of some members of the CIA was teams of Manchurian Candidates and brainwashed teams of sleeper agents able to fight the enemies of freedom. The project cost countless dollars, work-hours, and even lives.

To the CIA’s credit, they were far from the only operation engaging in this type of practice. The KGB almost certainly engaged in similar activities, just they and their successors are subject to less civilian oversight than American agencies. One of the major problems within the CIA’s operation, and likely elsewhere but we aren’t going to belabor that with every topic, was the lack of informed consent. Various individuals were dosed with LSD and other drugs and then interrogated to learn what the effects of the drugs were, and to attempt to brainwash individuals. The MKULTRA program has left a long list of tragedies that aren’t necessarily linked to it, especially legally, but there have been accusations that a

variety of different suicides, years of drug use, and similar are the result of these experiments.

As far as conspiracies go, even the parts of MKULTRA that have been admitted to by the CIA are pretty extensive and terrifying. At their height, operations took place at more than 80 locations across 44 separate campuses. Professors, academics, researchers, and many more were both knowingly and unknowingly complicit with the CIA's operations.

The ambit of the program was broad – it was essentially a license to use government money to investigate pseudoscience; this included drugs, hypnosis, electronics including bio-electric devices including electrotherapy, psychic driving, remote viewing, and much more. The results from these experiments range from the disappointing to the surreal. A series of experiments involving medically induced comas and various noises being played the patient in question resulted in amnesia, incontinence, forgetting how to talk, and other bizarre symptoms. Others have suggested these efforts were not so much about mind control as they were about determining better ways to extract information through efforts like torture. There was another simultaneous operation going on abroad called MKDELTA, and there were further operations including Project Artichoke, Project Chatter, and others. All were, essentially, the same theme as MKULTRA – attempting to engage in mind control of enemy agents and other recruits.



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After Watergate, the director of the CIA ordered all MKULTRA documents destroyed. Most CIA documents regarding these projects were destroyed under this order, resulting in the complete picture never being fully known. Only a few scraps of information have survived. Government budget reviews from the 1980s revealed there were at least thousands of individuals experimented on. The remaining documents were declassified in 2001, though the destruction of the documents post-Watergate heavily limits any attempts to determine the details of what really happened.

Many of the individuals who have come forward since the end of the MKULTRA programs are incredibly hard to verify or disprove given the aforementioned lack of evidence. A fairly extensive money trail shows us there were dozens upon dozens of nested sub-organizations and semi-associated companies across North America. To the most conspiracy minded, these all suggest the CIA's efforts were successful and there are any number of sleeper agents around North America and the world ready to activate at a moment's notice. Others have suggested the successes of this program have merely translated into the modern methodologies of torture we now use against detainees. Still others suggest the exploration into drug use opened up hitherto unknown doors in human mental capacity and gave rise to a new generation of psychic warriors and operatives.

A WATCHED GOAT NEVER EXPLODES

Popularized in *Men Who Stare at Goats*, there was an actual project by the American government to create psychics and superhuman soldiers in the late 1970s. Known as Project Stargate, the purpose was to investigate paranormal claims for ways to create better and more skilled soldiers and intelligence officers. This operation attempted to investigate psychokinesis, telepathy, remote viewing, and other psychic phenomena.

Those who argue remote viewing and other projects were a success have been largely unable to demonstrate a scientific standard of their findings. Many of the successes are not replicable, and there are a number of other issues involved. Believers in the psychic and otherwise enabled argue this is just further proof – the abilities are not perfect and things are often murkier than they appear. Parapsychology, the study of these phenomena, has always struggled with this issue. Replicability is incredibly difficult for many of these instances, which proponents will disagree with, stating that though it is a science, it is not the most exact one.

There have been series of experiments going back to the 1800s that suggest psychic abilities exist. However, each round of experiments essentially disproves the previous round or scientific rigor points out that, well, the earlier experiments were faulty due to bias, experimenters giving accidental or purposeful cues, or any number of other reasons. This happens in many arenas of science – we continue to develop experiments and either disprove or prove previous ones. The entire field of parapsychology, however, has been subject to bizarre obses-

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sion from innumerable believers that think for this one topic, the scientific method as otherwise understood just doesn't apply.

Believers are able to write and publish semi-peer reviewed papers, in that they are reviewed by other believers. They have concluded that remote viewing and other psychic phenomena are demonstrable enough to be justified as statistically significant. Most reputable scientists, by contrast, tend to look at these studies and find there to be experimental errors and conclusions drawn that are not adequately supported by the experimental data. One study that attempts to examine the bulk of parapsychological research suggests nearly every experiment that correctly concludes the findings are statistically significant is not justified in suggesting parapsychology is the explanation. Instead, various problems, including the individual being studied being an exceptionally skilled charlatan, are not properly investigated.

The initial Project Stargate studies concluded there were no psychic abilities, and all the official documents support this. At this point, the government appears to have given up on the study of parapsychology from a serious standpoint. That being said, subsequent research would probably still be underneath various layers of government secrecy. Several of the researchers from within the project, in the matter commonly held by many parapsychologists, were believers and maintain to this day they found real and verifiable psychic phenomena. Scientific overview, however, disagreed with these findings. The project was officially ceased in 1995.

The other side, including US Major General Albert Stubblebine II, who was involved in Project Stargate and was the key sponsor of it, believed not only were these tests successful, they were a necessity for the future success of the American military. Stubblebine believed future soldiers would need to be able to bend spoons with their minds, walk through walls, and much more. Since his retirement from the military, he has spoken out questioning the 9/11 attacks against the Pentagon and admitted he attempted to walk through walls himself, but has not yet been successful. This is the ongoing way the question of parapsychology goes – proponents point to stage magicians, charlatans, and con artists as success stories, and the other side systematically dissembles their claims. Despite this, the debate goes on and on.

Conspiracists argue that many of these projects were actually successful and there are psychic warriors undertaking missions on behalf of either the American government or the World Government. These overlap with various Men in Black government theories and more. Others have suggested there are secret psychic wars going on between either different nations or the world government and so-called home grown psychics – your various late-night television and less reputable individuals. Apparently there are entire wars and battles going on in the psychic plane to control the world, or something else entirely. It's a very nebulous and strange state of affairs, and the apparent impact of one side winning is often bizarre or nonsensical.

BLACK OPS

There is an ongoing and prevalent belief about the capacity of the alphabet soup that is American intelligence agencies to do far more than they are actually likely to do. A sentiment echoed in a number of movies is that the CIA is so effective you only hear about their failures, despite numerous books written by people from inside the organization telling a very different story. Many would argue these stories are red herrings and counter-intelligence operations to prevent individuals from realizing the capacities of these various organizations. Many television shows, including *X-Files*, *24*, etc., have shown the government intelligence and law enforcement apparatus to be mysterious, complicated, and nigh-infallible when it isn't attacking itself.

In the real world, revelations like the Iran-Contra scandal have demonstrated that the CIA was capable of engaging in various missions around the world with what was essentially *carte blanche*. For each revelation, conspiracists assume there must be dozens, if not hundreds, of other operations that have taken place to upset the balance of the world in the favor of the CIA and whoever their true masters are. Lest we be concerned this is only the purview of American conspiracists, something similar has happened in Canada with the various revelations of the involvement of CSIS with spilling foreign intelligence in their involvement with Guantanamo Bay, and Mi5 and Mi6 being accused of various assassinations of key figures around the globe.

The history of fears about black ops goes back to the WWII heyday of military spying and intelligence. As legends and stories trickled back from some of the successes of each side, public imagination filled in the rest about what different governments could do. Writers like Ian Fleming wedded this public fascination with the intelligence services with both his own imagination and firsthand accounts, resulting in the superspy James Bond. These legends and stories began to take on a life of their own. Despite the failures of the CIA in their early days, especially against the KGB and its related organizations, clever marketing ensured they were seen as infallible within the United States.



LITTLE GREEN MEN

“I think the surest sign that there is intelligent life out there in the universe is that none of it has tried to contact us.” – Bill Watterson in *Calvin and Hobbes*.

Some of the most prominent modern conspiracies are the stuff of primetime television. Whether it's Roswell, New Mexico, the Tunguska Event, Area 51, or cigar (or saucer) shaped UFOs, aliens have always been an option. Polls currently show that somewhere in the area of 70-90% of Americans believe Earth has already been visited by alien life, and most believe the American government knows and is hiding it.

THE SCHULGEN MEMO

This memo is one of the most often trotted out as ‘proof’ of the American Air Force’s knowledge of aliens. Sometimes (mis)spelled “Shulgen”, the memo purports to be proof that the Air Force was afraid of interplanetary UFOs. In light of a number of 1947 UFO sightings, intelligence services were concerned these may be advanced Soviet air forces. The Soviets had already demonstrated a more talented intelligence service, having stolen the secrets to the atomic bomb just four years after the end of WWII. The Americans had captured intelligence on what was called the Horton design and were concerned the UFO sightings were Soviet tests.

This memo did exist, and detailed the concern about intercontinental bombers. The U.S. had already discovered the Germans were close prior to the end of the war, so their concerns were not unfounded. British Researcher Timothy Good circulated a forgery of this memo in 1987 in a book he wrote. The memo was quickly demonstrated to be a forgery, though only one sentence was altered. The alteration, however, pointed to the object of concern as coming from an “interplanetary source” instead of a “Soviet” one. Small difference.

ALL'S WELL THAT ROSWELL

One of the most famous UFO incidences, and the cornerstone of many conspiracy theories, is the ‘discovery’ of a UFO crash site in Roswell, New Mexico in 1947. The drama played out over a three-day period and then essentially vanished from history until the 1970s when it was resurrected by UFO researchers.

Roswell is difficult to discover what actually happened there. A quick Internet search reveals hundreds of accounts and debunkings of each account, ad nauseum. What we do know to a relative certainty, though most conspiracists would allege we don't even know these things to be true, is that a violent thunderstorm



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swept through the area on July 4th, 1947. The next morning, Mac Brazel, a sheep rancher, found unusual debris on the property he worked on while investigating after the storm. He took some pieces to the authorities in Roswell, wondering if they were wreckage from a flying saucer, as the media had recently been covering UFOs extensively. It may have contributed to his motivation that the media was offering a \$3,000 reward for physical evidence of a flying saucer (approximately \$32,000 in modern numbers). A local radio station interviewed Brazel and a reporter contacted the 509th Bomb Group of the 8th Air Force at the nearby Roswell Army Air Field for comment.

The military base sent Officer Jesse Marcel to town and the ranch to investigate. Marcel gathered up some pieces, took them home and showed his family, then took them to the base. Upon showing them to Colonel William Blanchard, the site was ordered to be cordoned off so the remaining pieces could be recovered. The Colonel also issued a press release about the incident.

Newspapers and network radio stations jumped onboard and began reporting the U.S. Air Force had captured a flying disc, but the next day a correction was issued saying the debris came from a weather balloon. When the pieces were revealed at a press conference, they appeared to verify the debris was, in fact, a large rubber balloon and pieces covered in silver foil – debris fitting a weather balloon from the era. Brazel was dismayed and said he had previously found the debris of weather balloons and this was different, though he never claimed what he found was metal, merely that it had a strange composition.

On July 9th, the Air Force base issued another press release, identifying the wreckage as a high altitude balloon with a radar target made of wood and aluminum. For the next thirty years, no one would question this take on events.

By 1978, however, UFO researchers gained new information. The now retired Officer Jesse Marcel contacted a UFO researcher and alleged the wreckage he collected was a flying disc and not a balloon. The foil was unlike anything he'd ever seen and there were strips of purple tape that contained some sort of hieroglyphics. He claimed there were photographs of him and the real wreckage, though when questioned he couldn't recall when the events had happened.

Frank Kaufman also came forward, claiming to be a radar specialist sent to Roswell. He claims to have witnessed the retrieval of at least one alien occupant from the crash. Since these claims, however, we have learned there was no radar at the place Kaufman claimed to have worked prior to being in Roswell, that he was nothing more than a civilian clerk, and that upon his death a number of fabrications and forgeries were discovered.

Since 1978, we've also heard from Glenn Dennis, a funeral director from Roswell who claimed he was contacted by the military base for proper treatment of bodies recovered from the desert and he later stumbled into an autopsy on an alien corpse. He further claims a nurse, the name he gave varied, gave him information and sketches about the aliens, though no record of her existence has ever been found.



Since then, many more people claiming to be Roswell witnesses have come forward with claims about the 1947 incident. Nearly every single one has been easily discredited as a lie or a fabrication. To this day, aliens are 20% of Roswell's income, except now as a form of tourism. There have been a number of in-depth examinations of this conspiracy theory, and almost none of them hold any water.

MAJESTIC-12

In the 1980s, a series of documents began to circulate amongst conspiracy theorists that purported to describe a secret government panel, known as Majestic-12 (or MJ-12), for the purpose of studying the Roswell spacecraft. No names were used as the members were all high-ups in various military, intelligence, and scientific communities. People have claimed a veritable who's who of scientific figures and intelligence spooks have been a part of this organization at one time or another. One of the actually suspicious incidences surrounding MJ-12 is that the documents refer to a briefing for President Eisenhower in 1952. This briefing did actually happen, but to this day the documents relating to the briefing remain classified.

These documents have split the UFO community, as many believe them to be forgeries. There are a number of inconsistencies and problems with the documents, which seem to signal they are, in fact, forgeries. Other factors indicate there is some factual basis to at least some of the claims the documents make. At the very least, they appear to be very well researched forgeries.

There are a number of FBI and other documents that suggest, at least initially, the government took many of these reports about flying saucers quite seriously. These documents include a number of surprisingly consistent descriptions of "a saucer within a saucer in the manner of cymbals" and a number of other details. There have even been reported incidences of saucers being picked up by various police forces. Project Sign was the first major project that compiled these documents and attempted to explain sightings with natural phenomena wherever possible. When there was not an apparent explanation, they would note this was the case. In 1949, Project Sign was replaced with Project Grudge that was strongly against UFOs and would discredit anything they couldn't explain, even when it was genuinely unexplained.

In 1952, Project Grudge was replaced with Project Blue Book. The program coined the actual use of the phrase UFO; previously they were referred to as flying discs or other names. Many now note that Project Blue Book was likely a deliberate disinformation training program for junior intelligence officers. Some have even suggested the entire UFO belief may have been seeded by Air Force Intelligence to keep people away from what was actually taking place at Area 51. Of course, if this actually happened, and someone who was mentally unwell or particularly sensitive to suggestion were to have something untoward happen to them, the Air Force would be open to liability and lawsuits, further supporting their incentive not to come forward that this was happening.

After 1953, Project Blue Book was heavily gutted leaving a smaller group to work on it. There were a few incidences of apparently obvious disconnects between what Project Blue Book would report and what the public was seeing. In one incident, four UFOs were reported by multiple radar installations and seen by police officers in Oklahoma. Project Blue Book claimed this was merely an unusual sighting of Jupiter.

By 1966, Project Blue Book had almost no credulity and another committee was held to examine its operations. The committee concluded there were never any extraterrestrial origins for any UFOs and they could all be explained. A memo that allegedly leaked, now called the Trick Memo, suggested this was a forgone conclusion and there was pressure on the scientists to make the report only appear objective. Either way, the committee's findings put an end to Project Blue Book, further gutting it until it was finally put to rest in 1970. When the Blue Book was finally cut, many of the open cases were never resolved.

Despite all of this, Astronomer J. Allen Hynek, who was a consultant with all three Air Force studies, started as a skeptic and became increasingly more willing to accept there were true UFOs.

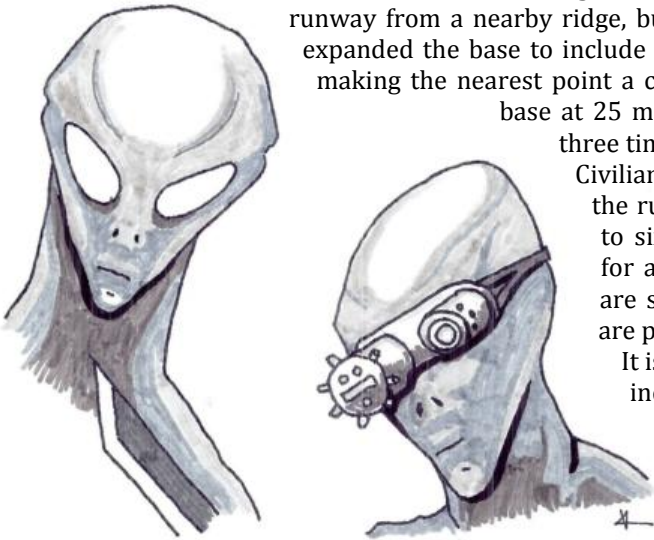
AREA 51

Not widely known until the 1990s, and classified until 1997, Area 51 is surrounded by myths and allegations of conspiracy. Originally, the name came from its designation on early internal maps, and the name just stuck. It is highly restricted – it is a no fly zone, trespassers can be fined or shot, etc. There are surveillance cameras, guards, and buried motion detectors, and that's just what we know about. For a long time, you could see the Area 51 runway from a nearby ridge, but the government recently expanded the base to include most of the land around it, making the nearest point a civilian can legally sight the

base at 25 miles away. The base is now three times the size of Rhode Island.

Civilians have been able to identify the runway has been lengthened to six miles, a very long length for a runway, suggesting things are still landing there, and they are probably going very fast.

It is also important to note it is incredibly difficult to get verifiable information on Area 51. Many people have claimed to have worked there and offer the 'inside scoop', but most are



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contradictory or unverifiable. To make matters more complicated, the base is still being used, so much remains under various secrecy acts and black budgets making this a great piece of conspiracy fodder.

Most of the buildings on the base are without windows, employees are still required to sign an oath not to reveal what's going on there, and it seems to be sticking. Unassociated civilians cannot even get close to the base, as discussed above, and it is still heavily under wraps. Some have suggested the attention Area 51 has garnered has not been appreciated by the military, and many of their public statements seem to echo this, and the most sensitive (read as potentially creepy, covert aircraft) has been moved elsewhere, perhaps to Utah's Dugway Proving Ground.

The military has a history of executing proper conspiracies in regards to sensitive and covert projects. For those who are too young, remember that prior to the 1988 public announcement of the B2 Spirit Stealth Bomber, almost no one knew this advanced project was in development. There have also been some who have suggested the American Air Force was actually not too frustrated with the belief that Area 51 had aliens and advanced aircraft because it was at one point being used to test captured Soviet technology. All the talk about aliens and super advanced technology may have been a clever red herring on the part of Air Force Intelligence. Whether there is a conspiracy about aliens, advanced technology, or something else, there's definitely something going on at Area 51.

Prior to 1955, Area 51 was used for bomber training. After 1955, it was used to develop and test Lockheed's U2 Spy Plane. Still later, the base was used for some black projects, including, it is believed, the B2 Spirit Stealth Bomber and the testing of Soviet jets the Americans had confiscated. Some people claiming to be former workers have come forward, but many of them have been thoroughly discredited by researchers as not having the postings they have claimed, not having graduated from where they have claimed, and similar. These "whistle-blowers" claim this is a coordinated effort on the part of the government to discredit them.

EUROPEAN ALIENS

Similar to the American government, Britain has waffled back and forth about whether UFOs could be extraterrestrial in origin. The British organization focused on examining UFOs was called the Flying Saucer Working Party (FSWP) and did work similar to Project Sign.

In 1952, a major NATO joint military exercise had 8,000 troops from nine different nations resulting in multiple sightings of four UFOs. Multiple pilots and the crew of the USS *Franklin D. Roosevelt* all reported seeing the UFOs. In response to this, and due to Churchill's policy that there were no extraterrestrials, the British policy became to never discuss UFOs with the press.

Conspiracies and urban legends about UFOs and aliens are rampant. The truth is, outside of America and Russia, the supposed little green (or grey) men are

relatively benign and boring compared to the complex and overarching theories that Americans develop for their explanations of crop circles and the like. A major contributing factor to this may be that several individuals in Britain gained national exposure on the BBC over a decade before writing this explaining that, and how, they made a number of crop circles across the British Isles.

TUNGUSKA

Though not necessarily an extraterrestrial event, this is one of the most common things it is tied to by conspiracists. The Tunguska event was an explosion, believed to have been an aerial burst of the object rather than an impact, caused by an asteroid or comet in Siberia in 1908. The force of the explosion was likely, though not confirmed, to be 1,000 times the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, making it a terrifying force to early 1900's people. The explosion is believed to have leveled some 80 million trees and the shockwave is estimated to have reached a 5.0 on the Richter scale. This thing was gigantic.

Imagine being a Russian peasant in the early 1900s. Russia was relatively technologically and culturally backward at the time. You were still ruled by a Tsar, and if you were anywhere close to the event not only were you unlikely to have electricity, but you may have never seen electricity. Many of the firsthand reports were from semi-nomadic herding tribes moving across the steppes. S. Semnov, an eyewitness to the event, said this:

At breakfast time I was sitting by the house at Vanavara Trading Post [65 kilometres/40 miles south of the explosion], facing north. [...] I suddenly saw that directly to the north, over Onkoul's Tunguska Road, the sky split in two and fire appeared high and wide over the forest [as Semenov showed, about 50 degrees up—expedition note]. The split in the sky grew larger, and the entire northern side was covered with fire. At that moment I became so hot that I couldn't bear it, as if my shirt was on fire; from the northern side, where the fire was, came strong heat. I wanted to tear off my shirt and throw it down, but then the sky shut closed, and a strong thump sounded, and I was thrown a few metres. I lost my senses for a moment, but then my wife ran out and led me to the house. After that such noise came, as if rocks were falling or cannons were firing, the earth shook, and when I was on the ground, I pressed my head down, fearing rocks would smash it. When the sky opened up, hot wind raced between the houses, like from cannons, which left traces in the ground like pathways, and it damaged some crops. Later we saw that many windows were shattered, and in the barn a part of the iron lock snapped.

The event was terrifying to the locals at the time. Since then there have been more than 1,000 separate witness accounts of the event, and they have a high level of similarity. Science points this to be almost surely a relatively small meteor strike resulting in the gigantic explosion. Making matters worse, Tunguska was isolated, even for the time, and any records there may have once been

were lost during one of: the First World War, the revolution in Russia in 1917, or the Russian Civil War.

The earliest investigation records that still exist follow a mineralogist named Leonid Kulik. He went out to Tunguska in 1921 as part of a survey of the region. They were investigating rumors about the Tunguska event and had deduced that it was likely a meteorite impact. He arranged for local hunters, the Evenks (a group that continues to exist and is the name for the people from the Northern Asian region of Tungus) to guide him to the location where the event took place. Though they brought him very close to the event, they would not approach it too closely. No amount of cajoling could convince them to come any closer to it, and Kulik explained this as some sort of superstition. Despite the extensive destruction in the location, still apparent years later, there was no evidence of a crater. There were a number of small holes, however, that he erroneously concluded must be from small meteorites.

Kulik continued to investigate throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, including commissioning an aerial photographic survey to find the crater he believed must be there. The negatives of these photographs were destroyed in 1975 under the justification that their existence was a fire hazard. The true reason is unknown. There were further investigations in the 1950s and 1960s, eventually resulting in the finding of microscopic spheres containing high proportions of nickel to iron, similar to other meteorites, resulting in the conclusion, again, that this was of extraterrestrial origin. Further examination of surrounding peat bogs have further supported there was an extraterrestrial event. The conclusion has been that there was an air burst of an asteroid above the earth's surface. Scientific models have further supported this conclusion, though it is certainly not the only explanation. Others have suggested the incident was caused by the release and explosion of a great deal of natural gas.

To conspiracists, this explanation is exactly what they want you to believe. They offer a number of other explanations.

IT WAS TESLA'S ENERGY WEAPON

Internet darling Nikola Tesla claimed within his own life that he had been designing, or at least thinking about, a number of death rays and other weapons of mass destruction. There are a number of anecdotes about his pawning off a "death ray" to pay for a hotel room and other similar stories.

Even so early as this, Russia knew that wars were coming with the other powers of Europe and the world. They were attempting to militarize and become a major world player as they regularly had the numbers but lacked the technology. Tesla had strong beliefs about the possibility of energy propagation, the ability to send energy around the world to distant location. Some believe that just such a weapon could have been used in Tunguska in what was essentially a test run. Seeing its destructive force, apparently Tesla and the others involved decided not to use it, for some reason.

DARK ENERGY, ANTIMATTER, OR A BLACK HOLE

Another theory suggests the area of the Tunguska event came into contact with an errant body that was a small black hole, a moving piece of dark energy, or a chunk of antimatter. Upon contact, the explosion would have been tremendous, or it would have been a similar implosion in the case of a very small black hole. The entire body of this theory relies on a number of conceits that just don't stand up to serious examination.

A black hole, even a very small one, would likely cause far more damage than what happened at Tunguska. Some theoreticians and conspiracists who, while making for strange bedfellows, suggest there could be an incredibly small black hole that could pass through the earth. Assuming this theory is otherwise correct, the problem still exists that there is no exit incident that would match the Tunguska. According to their mathematical models, this is a hard limit that would have to be addressed. The evidence of nickel, along with other suggestions of an atmospheric incident, has no explanation under this theory.

Antimatter or dark energy should have come into contact with any of the air that would have been miles above the explosion point. Antimatter, when it occurs in nature, appears to come into existence only to be shortly destroyed thereafter through contact with normal matter.

ALIENS

The final, and one of the more common conspiracy theories, is that this was the result of a UFO crash; driven by the writing of Alexander Kazancev who published a book describing how the incident could have been the result of a UFO crashing. Kazancev had visited Hiroshima six years before publication of his book and noted the similarities between the explosion in Hiroshima and the incident in Tunguska, notably the blast pattern amongst the trees. The only possible explanation, in his books, was for it to be a nuclear explosion.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence in favor of this explanation was the presence of severe burns along only one side of the trees that surrounded the epicenter of the contact. A proper forest fire would have burned all sides of the trees rather than just the one side. Since humans didn't invent nuclear weapons before the time of the event, the remaining conclusion was the destruction of an alien spaceship, resulting in a nuclear explosion.

This explanation has been developed and called on to justify the trace metals found all around the explosion site. Some of the most suspicious have argued not only was it an alien spacecraft, but the reason we never found anything was because Russian officials found it first and covered it up. While this certainly does provide a neat and effective method for wrapping things up, it is also highly suspect for a number of reasons. Notably, Russian technology, similar to the Tesla death ray theory above, never surpassed anyone else sufficiently to address these changes. Some have argued this was how they were able to create nuclear weapons without the Manhattan Project, but this forgets the demonstrated skill of the KGB and their sibling agencies credited with the theft of nuclear secrets.

CONSPIRACIST CHARACTERS

Conspiracist characters can come in all shapes and sizes with each one being a little bit different depending on the era, century, and current affairs. Most “conspiracist” ideals will fit within any timeframe, but many of the options below are geared towards 20th and 21st century settings.

CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Agent X: Whether they work for the Men in Black, the CIA, or some other shadowy government agency that isn’t part of the alphabet soup, there’s always room for government agents in any conspiracy. Each of them has decades of experience and is more than capable of taking on some of the scariest things that go bump in the night. **Suggested Skills:** Investigation, Intimidation, Knowledge (Espionage), Notice, Shooting, Stealth, Tracking

Cult Leader: There are few people as terrifying as cult leaders. Whether they have a real set of beliefs behind their cult, or are merely in it for money and power, each one has demonstrated a significant willingness to do terrible things to get their way. Adept at manipulation, they’re a force to be reckoned with. **Suggested Skills:** Intimidation, Knowledge (Choose Cult), Persuasion, Taunt

Paranormal Researcher: There are those who have the rare funding to actually pursue research in the paranormal. Maybe they’re a government employee in a forgotten arm of some department. Maybe they’re a self-funded researcher. Whatever the reason, they have the resources and capacity to continue their research indefinitely, forever trying to find their way to the truth. **Suggested Skills:** Investigation, Knowledge (Conspiracies), Knowledge (Paranormal), Notice, Streetwise

Theorist: These keyboard warriors and wannabe professionals are a far cry from the government operatives they go up against. They are often digging deep into the corners of the web and into government documents they get their hands on. Sometimes they stumble into the reality of what is behind it all, deciphering the secrets despite the difficulty in doing so. **Suggested Skills:** Knowledge (Computers), Knowledge (Conspiracies), Investigation, Notice, Repair, Taunt

Theosophist: Dictators and powers that be around the world have their own reasons to send people after the occult and unknown. Often members of secret societies, they travel the world hunting for the unknown and for answers that can’t readily be answered. They’re the Thule Society of the Nazis, or the active members of the Golden Dawn, seizing mysteries before others can. **Suggested**

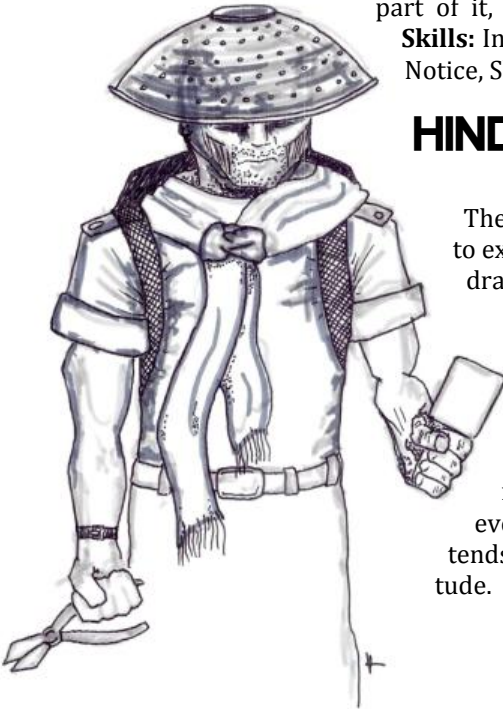
CONSPIRACIES

Skills: Driving, Fighting, Investigation, Knowledge (Occult), Shooting, Stealth, Streetwise

Treasure Hunter: The treasure hunter is a well known figure in the realms of history and fiction alike. Whether they're after some greater good, or in it just for their own profits, they hunt for treasure and the unknown. Some of them even do it just for the thrill of the hunt, not fully understanding the implications of the treasures they seek. Whatever the reason, having one or two in your employ is key for any conspiracy. **Suggested Skills:** Climbing, Driving, Investigation, Knowledge (History), Notice, Stealth, Streetwise, Swimming

Ufologist: Not all investigators of the paranormal are shunned by society. Some navigate their way into positions of authority, whether through their own television shows or writing books that purport to tell the truth of the world. These individuals have a modicum of celebrity, though some would consider them to be weirdoes nonetheless. **Suggested Skills:** Knowledge (Aliens), Knowledge (Government Conspiracies), Knowledge (UFOs), Persuasion

Undercover Agent: One of the surest ways to uncover and defeat a conspiracy is to send someone in to get to the bottom of it. Undercover agents fulfill just this purpose, secretly serving their government or corporate masters while they continue to investigate that which is unknown. They are capable of moving through the world, but are ultimately never truly a part of it, doomed to a double life. **Suggested Skills:** Intimidation, Investigation, Lockpicking, Notice, Shooting, Stealth, Streetwise, Survival



HINDRANCES

The following are some minor alterations to existing Hindrances along with new Hindrances for conspiracists to choose from.

EXISTING HINDRANCES

ARROGANT

Learning more about the world or knowing more about it than fellow members of the human race, or whatever race the character may be a part of, tends to impart a 'greater than thou' attitude.

CAUTIOUS

If there is one thing that tends to be bred commonly amongst conspiracies, at least the successful ones, its caution. Too much, however, can be as bad as too little.

DELUSIONAL

The problem with starting to pick away at the edges of the world and learning more about what lies beneath is how easy it is to stumble into something and read it for the truth. When every corner could easily have a conspiracy hiding behind it, it is easy to start to see and believe ones exist that is not actually there.

NEW HINDRANCES

AMNESIA (MINOR OR MAJOR)

There is some incident, or a series of years, the character does not remember. As a Minor Hindrance, there is a single incident they're unable to remember. As a Major Hindrance, it could be years of their life, if not a decade or more.

CHIPPED (MINOR OR MAJOR)

Often the stuff of conspiracies, for the character it is true. Whether they know it or not, they have a microchip inside of them. As a Minor Hindrance, it allows the character to be tracked, no matter where he is in the world, by the party that put the microchip into him, or anyone who steals this information.

As a Major Hindrance, it is much worse; the microchip has the ability to change a small part of the character's behavior, either preventing him from revealing a specific secret or acting against the interests of a specific party. Whichever party has chipped him is able to deter him at a moment's notice.

PARANOIA (MAJOR)

Paranoia surpasses mere phobias. Instead of being afraid of one thing, the character is afraid of nearly everything. The paranoia may be fueled by a delusion, or it may merely be the result of too much information about how the world actually works.

The character has a pervasive sense of fear that things are terribly wrong, or are soon about to go terribly wrong, regardless of where she travels. She continually looks around corners to spot incoming trouble, real or imagined, and may drive her allies to a similar continued state of fear or utter annoyance.

TRUE BELIEVER (MAJOR)

When faced with a revelation beyond what humans should know, some people are unable to handle it. They become convinced of the truth of a new worldview, perhaps turning to religion or some other cause. Whatever they are following, they truly and absolutely believe in it, and have to get to the bottom of it. Choose a revelation and how your character reacts to it, and he never gives up until revealing it as the truth or a conspiracy.

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XENOPHILIA (MINOR OR MAJOR)

If xenophobia is the fear of the unknown, xenophilia is the attraction to the alien. While it can refer to other cultures, this specifically refers to those aliens from other worlds or realms of existence. This attraction can range from fascination to outright lust or love to the alien and unknown.

For the character's allies, this can be an inconvenience to outright rage inducing. As a Minor Hindrance, it includes a view that the aliens are doing something better than us – perhaps they are biologically superior, or morally, or something else entirely. As a Major Hindrance, the character has either a sexual attraction or an obsession with one or more alien species.

XENOPHOBIA (MINOR OR MAJOR)

Fear of the unknown is common to almost all species. This kind of xenophobia is not limited to those from other countries, but rather species from other planets. As a Minor Hindrance, the character has a very difficult time doing anything other than fear the unknown, and will find it nearly impossible to trust or otherwise deal with aliens of any kind (or conspiracies about aliens).

As a Major Hindrance, the character has a complete unwillingness to deal with or trust aliens unless he absolutely has to (including the avoidance of conspiracies that include aliens). Even then, it will be an agreement out of convenience and will not last. There is no way not to see ulterior motives behind everything the aliens do.

EDGES

The following are some minor alterations to existing Edges along with new Edges for conspiracists to choose from.

EXISTING EDGES

ALERTNESS

Conspiracists and secret agents alike need to be prepared for nearly any eventuality, and they regularly demonstrate strong capabilities of alertness.

CONNECTIONS

Anyone who seeks to get to the bottom of the mysteries of the world quickly will come to the realization that it is not a task that can be easily undertaken alone. Whether the character has bribed government officials to look the other way for their activities, or made friends with security guards, connections can be integral for achieving their ends.

INVESTIGATOR

Amongst the ranks of both conspiracies, and those seeking to uncover them, there are a number of investigators who specialize in digging up information and trying to piece it together.



CONSPIRACIST CHARACTERS

LINGUIST

Many amongst secret societies need to have a variety of capacities to engage in communication with multiple other organizations.

RICH

Members of a conspiracy regularly have funds to support their organization, or at the very least the ability to gain resources through various other channels.

NEW EDGES

CONSPIRACIST

Type: Professional

Requirements: Novice, Investigator

The individual is either a hobbyist or seasoned hand at identifying conspiracies. This could be a member of a conspiracy used to coordinating with, and engaging in war with, other organizations, or it could be a researcher that has delved deep into the Internet.

With this Edge, the character is able to add an additional +1 to Investigation and Streetwise when researching a conspiracy, identify the strengths or weaknesses of one, or to determine its membership.

DEAD SPOT

Type: Weird

Requirements: Novice, Wild Card, Cannot have any Arcane Background

There's a dead spot in the astral plane where this character is supposed to be. Psychics can't read her mind, and she's otherwise just plain creepy to be around.

Dead spots are completely immune to all psionic attacks against them, but they cannot develop any psionics, magic, or other Arcane Backgrounds of their own. In addition, they have a -1 to Charisma because they're just a little bit creepy.

IN THE KNOW

Type: Professional

Requirements: Seasoned, Investigator, Persuasion d8+

The character has made connections with the right people in the right circles and is often "in the know" about things other people simply aren't aware of. This can be connections with investigative reporters, members of a secret society, or secret government agencies. However he has negotiated it, he is skilled at getting the appropriate tips.

With this Edge, the character has a narrower and specialized version of how Connections Edges work. Unlike the Connections Edge, it can only be used to gather information from the individuals he comes into contact with (as opposed to general knowledge about an entire organization). With a successful Persuasion roll, he's able to leverage his "connections" (e.g. name dropping, personal threats, calling in favors, etc.) to discern information that others wouldn't know (e.g. conspiracies, hidden truths, government cover-ups, alien species, etc.). This can



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be used against an NPC to “extract” information or as a way of reaching out to his associates to get the right answers.

NULL

Type: Weird

Requirements: Novice, Stealth d8+

The character has something utterly weird about him that makes him a null. A null character is unremarkable, and there is a weird tendency for him not to be noticed. Theorized to be a sort of psychic camouflage, people and animals just tend not to notice him.

Animals tend to avoid and ignore a null unless there is a trainer or other force driving them to attack. Without being pushed to attack a null, they act as if the null doesn't exist.

A character with null has a permanent +2 bonus to Stealth that goes up to +3 when in a crowd or otherwise taking advantage of there being more interesting things around (such as a distraction).

SECRET SOCIETY MEMBER (CHOOSE ONE)

Type: Social

Requirements: Novice, Charisma 0+ or Smarts d8

Upon taking this Edge, choose a given secret society.

The character in question is a member of a secret society, with all the details this brings with it. This can be used by the GM for a number of different ends and plot hooks. It should also be coordinated with the GM to ensure that secret society fits within the developed setting and will not undermine the story.

With the GM's permission, this can be taken multiple times with each time being membership in a separate secret society.

For the player, this means she can call upon members of her secret society to assist with various challenges she may face. The benefit to a secret society is that, unlike the Connections Edge, there is no Streetwise check required to make contact – it is inherent to a secret society that she has a way to contact members.

When speaking with a representative from the secret society, the player makes a Persuasion roll, with the GM making modifiers as appropriate. These modifiers should be particularly steep if the assistance goes against the aims and purpose of the society. On a success, the contact shares vital information about the challenge. On a Raise, the society is further willing to provide some small assistance – perhaps a keycard to get into the bank or funds to assist. With two Raises, the society is willing to provide an expert to assist (whether they are a safe-cracker, an occult specialist, or otherwise is up to the GM). However, the secret society will never engage in all out combat on behalf of the character as this goes against being a secret society.

TRADECRAFT

Type: Professional

Requirements: Seasoned, Agility d8+, Smarts d8+

Tradecraft refers to the capacity to engage in the proper techniques utilized in modern espionage, particularly the gathering of intelligence and ensuring that one's own intelligence operations remain untainted.

When engaging in espionage, Tradecraft provides the character with a +2 bonus to Smarts- and Agility-based rolls as appropriate.

ARCANE BACKGROUNDS

There is any number of Arcane Backgrounds, or just weird ones, available to those who are in the weave and weft of the world of conspiracies. Whether your character is an escaped experiment or has just seen too much, he too can have an Arcane and conspiracy-riddled Background.

ALIEN TECH

The character has spent years or decades researching and working with alien tech. Though she isn't fully able to explain how it works yet, the technology has been etching itself onto her subconscious. She's started to figure out how it works, and, worse, has started experimenting on herself.

ARCANE BACKGROUND (ALIEN TECH)

Arcane Skill: Xenology (Smarts)

Starting Power Points: 10 (see below)

Starting Powers: 1

The character is using alien technology of their own design to work on things. Similar to Weird Science, it is within a single device. However, rather than utilizing the Weird Science malfunction table, use the malfunction details below:

Clubs - That burns! - the character has done something wrong, triggering a self-defense system or otherwise triggering the strange technology. It does 4d4 damage to the individual and the machine will not work for d3 hours.

Spades - Wait, wait! - the device shorts and something bizarre happens. It stops working until the player rolls a successful Xenology to fix it, difficulty to be determined by the GM.

Diamonds - That's not quite right... - alien technology was never designed to be used by human hands, and there are all sorts of oddities that can occur. In this case, the device works as intended, but hits a target of the GMs choice rather than the one aimed at.

Hearts - I didn't know it did that! - It turns out they were using the machine wrong all along. The GM chooses a different Power and henceforth it does that Power instead of the one initially chosen.

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EXPERIMENT

ARCANE BACKGROUND (EXPERIMENT)

Arcane Skill: Otherworldly Powers (Smarts)

Starting Power Points: 5

Starting Powers: 2

The character has been subjected to horrific alien, or government, experiments. The source of her powers could be from genetic manipulation, implanted machines, and much more. Regardless of their source, it is tied to her Smarts via their capacity to access and control whatever changes have been wrought to their system.

Unnatural – the experiments were inherently unnatural and are not a part of the natural being of the character. This is the cause for low Power Points. If she runs out of Power Points, she can continue to use her Powers but with a cumulative -1 penalty to Otherworldly Powers for each Power she uses after running out of Power Points. Additionally, if she fails an Otherworldly Powers roll after running out of Power Points, she automatically becomes Shaken. This can cause a Wound.

MYSTICISM

ARCANE BACKGROUND (MYSTICISM)

Arcane Skill: Enlightenment (Spirit)

Starting Power Points: 10

Starting Powers: 2

Not all conspiracies are about aliens. Much of MK Ultra and other projects were oriented around trying to reveal the hidden powers behind humanity. They sought to develop psychic powers through the use of drugs, meditation, and more. With the mysticism background, the character has either been the successful subject of one of these projects, or achieved success in what he was trying to do. He is capable of unlocking the full potential of humanity, whatever that may be.

Ascended – Many of the powers behind mysticism are similar to psionics, but there are key differences. For one, they do not suffer from Brainburn and instead have a revelation (i.e. a sudden discovery of a hidden truth) if they roll a one on the Mysticism Die. In this case, the GM should figure out the proper roleplay revelation, and it can be either good or bad, causing the character to see something that would disturb or frighten him.

ROLEPLAYING OPPORTUNITIES

CLASSICAL CONSPIRACIES

The idea of a conspiracy goes back beyond any recorded instance of there being a first conspiracy theory. Any two individuals allying themselves against a third is, by definition, a conspiracy against that third individual. The passage of time has merely provided more and more opportunities for just such a conspiracy to grow beyond mere murder.

Large-scale conspiracies require a developed government for the conspiracy to have any chance of success. There were a great number of conspiracies and counter-conspiracies that took place throughout the late days of the Roman Empire as different families and powerful individuals jockeyed for power. There are limitations, however, to the effects that just such a conspiracy can do without some sort of supernatural element behind them.

It has been argued that the capacity to have the net result of a nuclear weapon was capable long before the actual weapons existed – it would just require additional time and muscle power to enact the devastation. A new emperor would be capable of this kind of thing. Doing so, however, often results in their reign likely being short and bloody.

The golden age of conspiracy theories began with the French Revolution, allowing the opportunity for additional technology and individuals to unify behind one cause or another. This is also when the writing and theorizing about conspiracy theories began in earnest. Perhaps it was a side effect of the Enlightenment Era that as each individual became more aware of their power as an individual, they became increasingly infatuated with their own power. They began to link up and conspiracies began to form. From here came the kind of conspiracies that would break down governments, as was the case with the French Revolution, or would fizzle into nothing, like the Illuminati.

MODERN TIMES

Modernity is the closest thing there is to a golden age for conspiracies. There is a flood of conspiracies, both real and imagined, that plagues our world. Corporations have been accused of all manner of sins from stealing natural resources to engage in brainwashing of unwitting populations. Similarly, foreign governments, and rogue arms of our own governments, have been accused and suspected of engaging in any number of activities including the use of black budgets to hide these activities.

In the 1980s, the Iran-Contra deals, and several government agencies from different nations being caught with corruption within them, sometimes organized around the selling of drugs. This represented the demonstration of such a major betrayal from what was supposed to be an integral part of our own governments. This sowed the seeds for further doubt about government agencies. Each

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ongoing year, and each ongoing reveal about what the government has been doing behind closed doors, has demonstrated this more and more.

Terrorist attacks demonstrated both a failure of our own government agencies and the success of other players in the international community. Other agencies have demonstrated their capability to partake in conspiracies that it appeared we had no capacity to truly protect and address. More and more conspiracies have continued to spiral out of control, and it appears that at least some of them have been successful, including the growth of drone warfare beliefs and what we have seen with the Snowden revelations.

POST-APOCALYPSE

Conspiracies will continue to exist so long as there are ways for individuals to organize. The situation in a post-apocalyptic setting is likely to sabotage many conspiracies simply due to the limitations of communications. If the apocalypse were brought about by one particular conspiracy, however, they would certainly be sitting pretty afterwards. In such a situation, the post-apocalyptic world would be closer to a dystopian nightmare.

Within each of these circumstances, things would change drastically. Scarce resources, especially, continue to feed the need for parties to conspire and move against each other. In a post-apocalyptic environment, they are far more likely to move back to the domain of governments, or whatever passes for a local government, rather than exist in the hands of any particular corporation or individual.

DYSTOPIA

The dystopian setting is likely the best one for conspiracies to truly flourish. We have seen it happen in a number of videogames, novels, and other media. Within a dystopia, it is easier for the players to suspend disbelief, and it is easier to form some of the more complex conspiracies without being an expert in how various government organizations develop. Within these dystopian situations, we can also explore the tropes and themes of corporate overreach in compelling ways.

Some would go so far as to argue that the current situation is already in the realm of dystopian. Instead of there being some sort of ideal capitalism like people have claimed, the situation is instead one where corporations seem to have hijacked at least some of the Western Democracies. All of that depends where you're currently standing though.

CONSPIRACIST GEAR

This is a complicated issue to discuss as conspiracists can be everyday people from many walks of life. There have been a number of high profile individuals, both movie stars and news personalities, which have fallen victim to believing in one conspiracy or another. It has even gone so far as to include members of various militaries around the world, in both the Western world and elsewhere.

MUNDANE EQUIPMENT

Since conspiracists can come from all walks of life, their equipment matches that. Across all modern time periods, they can literally be any person in nearly any position in society. Prior to widespread education and the modern, or at least a semi-modern, press, conspiracists would primarily be limited to those of the upper classes of society. This is because these groups would be the only ones capable of spending time to determine what is actually going on, let alone have the resources for it.

Within modern times, they have top of the line equipment. Most conspiracists by contrast, are not particularly wealthy. They live at the peripheries of society and don't have a ton of money to dedicate to tracking down conspiracies.

ALIEN TECHNOLOGY

The mundane nature of most conspiracies is not the exciting part. The use of alien technologies, strange experimental equipment, and more are the interesting things to consider, and better fodder for many RPGs. Cost is not listed as these weapons are either confiscated or replicated through secretly funded projects.

MELEE ALIEN TECH WEAPONS

ION LANCE

The purpose of the ion lance is highly speculated upon. Given their relative impracticality in a firefight, it is theorized they serve a ritual purpose within some alien societies. They appear to be a tall metal spear, with strange designs on their surface. When used in combat, the weapon itself seems to glow and key portions electrify immediately before contacting a target. Scientists have been unable to replicate or understand this phenomenon from deconstructing them, a matter made all the more unsettling by some users reportedly hearing voices and having strange dreams.

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PHASAL BLADE

Made from an alien material, the weapon appears to flicker in and out of reality. At times, it appears to be utterly invisible, making it incredibly difficult to track. Attempts have been made to adapt the weaponry into a stealth armor, but with limited efficacy as the portions of metal do not phase in and out in a coordinated manner, resulting in a patchy appearance.

When used as a weapon, it makes the individual difficult to predict, as the weapon itself appears to selectively ignore the rules of physics.

SHOCK BATON

Based on an alien design, these weapons were quickly adopted to manage various dangerous species that had been captured. Though it was theorized they would be a form of nonlethal deterrent, it was quickly discovered that what was an annoyance to one species would be lethal to another.

SUBMISSION GLOVE

Another weapon used originally to subdue aliens and other captured individuals, the submission glove has a built-in computer taken from alien technologies able to synthesize drugs on the fly to affect the targeted creature.

In terms of the mechanics, each time the glove is used, it does normal damage as though the attacker was unarmed. Any time it does any damage, the glove injects a poison and the victim must roll Vigor -2 against Knockout, even if they are neither Shaken nor Wounded.

TUNGUSKA BLADE

The Tunguska event was an earthshaking incident, the origins of which are still unknown. When Western agencies began to discover strange bladed weapons in the hands of key USSR assets, rumors circulated. Though there is no definitive proof of their origins, the name has stuck. The weapons appear to be humble enough from their appearance, looking like a machete, but they are nearly indestructible, never dull, and have other bizarre properties.

MELEE ALIEN TECH WEAPONS TABLE

Type	Damage	Weight	Cost	Notes
Ion Lance	Str+d8	5	N/A	AP 8, Reach 2, 2 hands
Phasal Blade	Str+d6	3	N/A	Parry+2
Shock Baton	Str+d10	1	N/A	Parry -1, ignores armor
Submission Glove	Str	1	N/A	See weapon description
Tunguska Blade	Str+d8+2	10	N/A	AP 10



RANGED ALIEN TECH WEAPONS

COCOON THROWER

A particularly strange piece of technology, the cocoon thrower is a heavy piece of equipment theorized to have been used for hunting. When fired, it throws a glob of a strange, orange liquid that, upon contact with a target, begins to harden. Fortunately, it appears to create these cocoons from energy, and the government has been able to create batteries that can recharge it quickly by reloading.

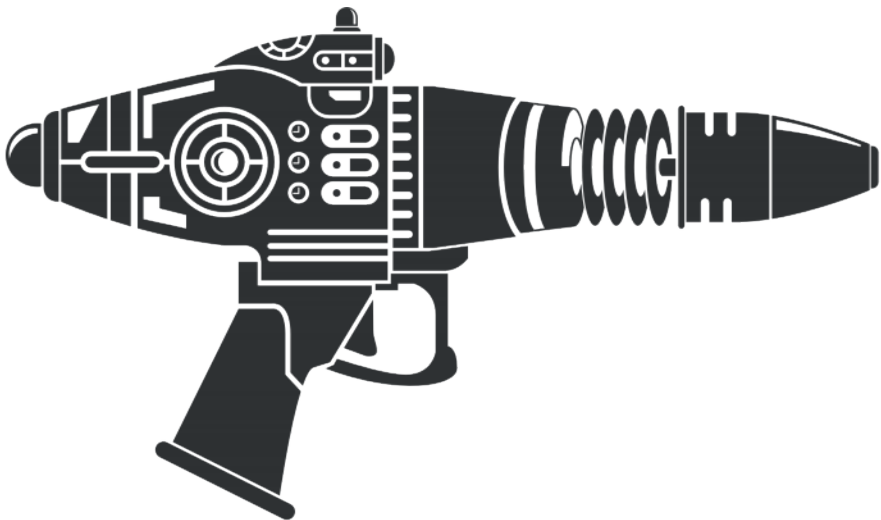
Upon contact with a target, the cocoon becomes hard and heavy. Each hit is equivalent to 30lbs of weight for the purpose of determining encumbrance. This is through a combination of weight and hardening, limiting movement. If the encumbrance limit is exceeded due to this hardening substance, the individual is completely within a cocoon and must be released. The wielder of the weapon can send the signal to release any individual hit by it, turning the cocoon back into liquid. Otherwise, it can be removed with a Strength -4 roll.

DISASSEMBLER

The disassembler is based on alien technology and is believed to be an adaptation of a form of nanotechnology. The weapon is not long range, but is able to literally tear things apart at a molecular level.

LASER RING

Utilizing advanced miniaturization technology, top experts have been able to create a ring weapon that is capable of being used for self defense. The laser ring does not have particularly long range, but is very stealthy.



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LIGHTNING GUN

Unlike many other alien technologies, experts have been unable to determine fully how this one works. It appears to be a twisted piece of metal, about the size of the average submachine gun, but when the appropriate points on the metal are squeezed, a lightning bolt bursts from the front, otherwise ignoring normal rules for how lightning determines its path.

HAARP GUN

Originally titled the High Frequency Active Oral Research Program, it was originally utilized in the ionosphere to attempt to create a high level and powerful weapon. Though the initial tests were absolute failures, continued secret research was able to develop a portable weapon with extensive destructive power. It throws a powerful plasma-like substance, though the specific science of how it operates is still unknown.

SDKF: THE MAGIC BULLET GUN

Made infamous by incidents such as the Kennedy Assassination, the Magic Bullet Gun is the common name, replacing Self-Directing Kinetic Firearm, or SDKF. The weapon appears to be a normal rifle, a design choice used to keep its presence unknown. The bullets are specialized, however, and work with the weapon itself to direct shots while in flight.

In mechanics terms, the SDKF gives +2 to Shooting for the purposes of trying to hit your target. This can stack with aiming to make it even more likely that the shot will hit.

RANGED ALIEN TECH WEAPONS TABLE

Type	Range	Damage	RoF	Shots	Wt.	Min Str
Cocoon Thrower	30/60/120	-	1	1	10	d6
<i>Notes: See entry</i>						
Disassembler	5/10/20	2d10	1	1	5	-
<i>Notes: Ignores armor</i>						
Laser Ring	15/30/60	2d6	1	12	-	-
<i>Notes: Worn on finger</i>						
Lightning Gun	10/20/40	4d6	1	3	4	d6
<i>Notes: Does not work underwater</i>						
HAARP Gun	Cone template	5d10	1	1	55	d10
<i>Notes: Heavy Weapon, Snapfire, ignores armor, does not work underwater</i>						
SDKF	60/120/240	2d10	1	1	35	d8
<i>Notes: +2 to Shooting when using</i>						

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Note: Characters included in this section are not real individuals. Any similarity between any person, living or dead, is coincidental. This is purely a work of fiction.

GENERAL HOPWELL (CIRCA 1994)

U.S. Army Brigadier General Dean Hopwell graduated from West Point in 1974. After a brief stint in the U.S. Army, where his record shows little of note, he was transferred to a special research division undertaken through cooperation between the CIA and Military Intelligence. The purpose was, ostensibly, to determine how to make each member of the American military into as powerful of an individual as possible: to determine if super soldiers were even possible.

Hopwell moved his way up the ranks within the operation, codenamed Dark Dawn, largely because of his passion for the project and his willingness to believe false positives in terms of the findings of the operation. He was easy to manipulate by other members of the organization interested in utilizing Dark Dawn for their own, nefarious, means. Where some members of the military had their own passion projects specific to a piece of technology, Hopwell jumps from project to project, arguing that each one was more important and had a higher chance of success than the last. He is easily manipulated due to his desire to be viewed as powerful and important within the government. At the same time, he has a knack for ensuring each time something goes wrong, he places the blame elsewhere.

If one were to meet Hopwell in the hallway, he'd walk right past unless they are of higher rank than him. He is attracted to and focused on status and prestige. With each meeting, he follows this guiding light of attaining higher status within the military. Despite all this, he is not a traitor to his government and believes what he is doing is right and proper. Convincing him to turn against his government would be nigh impossible.

Despite being in his early forties, Hopwell is showing his age early due to a life that quickly turned to being mostly sedentary. His hair has beaten a hasty retreat towards the back and sides of his head, where it appears to be amassing to stage a counter attack. With an already large frame, he is beset with additional weight from eating heavily and not keeping up with the physical activity that he often claims to do.

Hopwell has no special powers of his own and no capacity to gain any of them. Despite this, he still retains the drive towards the development of such powers for himself. He wants to develop said powers as another avenue towards more power and justify his entire career to the rest of the military. As far as dreams go, he envisions being able to one day lead an entire army of American super soldiers

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GENERAL HOPWELL

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Skills: Fighting d4, Intimidation d6, Investigation d8, Shooting d6

Edges: Alertness, Brawny, Conspiracist

Hindrances: Habit (Minor) – Cigars, Overconfident, Yellow

Armor: None

Weapons: Glock (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF 1, Shots 17, AP 1, Semi-Auto)

able to defeat any other force in the world, resulting in Pax Americana. If this were ever to actually happen, it's unlikely he'll live to see it.

Mannerisms: Hopwell is a prideful glutton with a drawl that sounds like it heralds from the Southern United States. Between his weight and his smoking habit (exclusively cigars by the point in his life he is Brigadier General), he sweats a lot. This results in him regularly wiping the sweat from his face, a gesture that doubles as a nervous tic. He does whatever possible to avoid being blamed.

Distinguishing Features: A large man, Hopwell looks like he played football when he was younger. The years have not been kind to him and, between the unhealthy lifestyle and the poor diet, he has piled pounds of fat atop the once muscular frame. He has a doughy appearance and a bald head with hair ringed around it.

SPECIAL AGENT ELLIOT WONG (CIRCA 1994)

Special Agent Elliot Wong is sort of a double agent within operation Dark Dawn. He has been regularly leaking information to the press, Congress, and concerned outside parties to ensure they are able to serve as effective checks upon the project. The end of the Cold War in 1988 led to his belief that, finally, the project would be shutdown, or at least brought to the public's attention. Unfortunately, the decision was made above his pay grade that Pax Americana was beginning now and would be the result of America's military being able to "eclipse any other force." The situation is quickly becoming untenable, especially considering the rising tensions in a number of smaller nations now that the Cold War has ended.

Wong is a well-intentioned agent and, despite being the relatively junior member of the operation, is trying to do the best thing. His ethics are strongly guided by the principle that the government should strive to do the right thing, and people are inherently good. His actions as whistleblower have been undertaken



AGENT WONG

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 4

Skills: Fighting d6, Investigation d6, Notice d8, Persuasion d6, Shooting d4, Streetwise d4

Edges: Conspiracist, Tradecraft

Hindrances: Doubting Thomas, Habit (Major) – Amphetamines, Paranoid

Armor: None

Weapons: Glock (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF 1, Shots 17, AP 1, Semi-Auto), pump-action shotgun [at home or in his trunk] (12/24/48, 1-3d6, RoF 1, Shots 6, Shotgun)

almost entirely to check the actions of the organization, but taking care not to leak enough that the organization would collapse. By the mid 1990s, he is concerned about the continued existence of the organization and is beginning to look for ways to bring the entire organization down.

Wong is a relatively small individual; slight of frame he applied for a position within the CIA after he wasn't selected for the Marines due to his small size. Despite this, he maintains his physical fitness and has adopted a stance of constant readiness.

Mannerisms: Wong is a CIA career-man after failing to serve in the Marines. He is exceptionally skilled at bluffing his targets and invariably keeps his guard up whenever possible. The downside of this is he often seems to be on edge and robotic, in part due to his fear of giving too much away.

Distinguishing Features: A small man, Wong perpetually looks tired. He has not been sleeping well for the past several years and he has been keeping himself going with narcotics.

SPECIAL AGENT NATHANIAL BIGGINS (CIRCA 1994)

Biggins is the actual brains behind Dark Dawn, manipulating Hopwell over the past decade. Despite the apparent work on behalf of the organization, he actually works for the Illuminati and has been utilizing project Dark Dawn as a sort of outside research and development program. Throughout the project, he has been able to limit the actions on the part of Hopwell and the program as a whole through the fabrication and dissemination of results that do not match up with reality.

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It is through this entire process that he has been able to limit the activities and successes of the American government – the Illuminati has no interest in the American government, and especially the public at large, having any of this information. Despite his seemingly nefarious actions here, he is a believer in the Illuminati cause. He has a deeply held belief that a single world government, particularly with advanced technology and capabilities, will reduce violence around the world. He is a bit of a bleeding heart, in particular, for those suffering in countries around the world at the hands of the larger powers. Despite this, he is a big-picture person and focuses on strict utilitarianism.

Biggins rose to his position precisely because he is, at the heart of it, uninteresting. Invariably, in photographs he appears to fade into the background. If the photo is of just him, you could be convinced that the photograph was of a cardboard cutout of him, rather than actually him standing for the photo. He has brown hair and brown eyes and stands 5'11" with an average build. In many ways he appears to be just that – average.

Mannerisms: Biggins has been exceptional in his position primarily because of his ability to avoid having any major tells. He appears to be a boring desk-jockey within the larger operation of Dark Dawn, belying his actual goals. If he were ever to be confronted by the truth of what has done, he quickly turns to violence

Distinguishing Features: None – he is distinguished solely by how indistinguishable he is.



AGENT BIGGINS

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d4, Investigation d8, Notice d6, Shooting d4, Streetwise d8, Persuasion d8

Edges: Alertness, Charismatic, Connections (Illuminati), Danger Sense, Tradecraft

Hindrances: Cautious, Enemy (Secret Societies Against the Illuminati), Loyal

Armor: None

Weapons: Glock (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF 1, Shots 17, AP 1, Semi-Auto), switch-blade (Str+d4, -2 to be Noticed if hidden)

OPERATION: DARK DAWN

Dark Dawn is a government operation started in the ashes of WWII. It was a research and development operation that existed under the auspices of the military establishment, but with significant input and support from the CIA and corporate interests. The operation was developed utilizing ex-Nazi scientists that specialized in various biological and chemical operations. It continued for decades throughout the Cold War, often promising results far beyond what they were delivering. Throughout this period, they did demonstrate certain key successes, but public documents examined by the CIA brass and Congress showed all the successes that existed were non-replicable. Still, the operation created jobs in a number of key areas and became a sort of dumping ground for generals like Hopwell and agents that were not exactly stellar. Despite this, certain individuals have consistently felt the allure of Operation: Dark Dawn and have requested positions within it.

Behind the scenes, Dark Dawn is much more successful than the military has let on. Special Agent Biggins has positioned himself in a middle management style position where every report he is concerned about crosses his desk before reaching the head of the operation, General Hopwell. As a result, only information he is comfortable being known outside of the operation ever reaches that level. He is, simultaneously, running a dark project for the Illuminati. These reports are sent out separately, and other members of the organization involved in the government help to ensure Dark Dawn continues to operate.

Dark Dawn's mission, both stated and for the shadow operation operated by Biggins, is the enhancement and development of human talents. These are developed through genetic testing, albeit in its early stages, and throughout much of the project, the development of proto-nootropics and various other methodologies. The majority of the test subjects come from two sources: university campuses and the military. When they are taken from university campuses, they come in one of two flavors. The first is voluntary individuals partaking in benign testing under the auspices of a research project by a professor. These include basic tests of whether an individual can 'psychically' identify a card without looking at it, and some basic drug tests for supplements. The second is certain individuals identified as having potential, whereas the next time they go out for a party they never make it home again. Individuals from the military similarly come from two different flavors. All are volunteers, but some are written off as killed in action to ensure the operation remains secure.

Officially, there have been minimal findings from the operation. One example is that creatine is capable of increasing the potential for performance of human muscles and the development of basic amphetamines. Off the record, they have begun to make major breakthroughs in the areas of pharmacology and psychic warfare. These findings are still in the early stages and are not at the level that

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would be necessary for creating super soldiers. Instead, the findings are capable of serving as something similar to a particularly potent steroid or provide the individual with basic precognition.

By 1994, the characters have begun to hear the whispers in the wind about what is going on behind the scenes at Operation: Dark Dawn. They could be written off as UFO nuts by most of their contemporaries, or they could be other members of the government attempting to figure out what is going on with this black sheep of an operation.

INVESTIGATION

The scenario begins with an investigation of Dark Dawn and bringing the players together. If they are from disparate backgrounds, maybe they had family members disappear into Dark Dawn's operation or live nearby and have heard strange rumors around town. The investigation into the operation begins here.

There are a number of different voices online that make all sorts of claims about what Dark Dawn is doing behind closed doors. Due to the sheer volume of the claims, there is inevitably some that are correct. A successful round of investigation on the Internet can determine the vaguest outlines of what the organization has accomplished. This includes the basics that research is for the development of better soldiers. Other claims made online include the entire operation being a front for mind control operations and that it's populated by lizard people using it to impregnate the strongest members of society to ensure they are able to survive the delivery.

A better line of investigation would be going through public records to investigate the financials of the base. Checking the records of companies supplying the organization, and particularly through oversight from an individual who knows what the chemicals involved were for, deduces the operation has been trying to test a variety of methods within theoretical organic chemistry, the kind of experiments that most laboratories would not allow due to ethical concerns.

There is also a major piece of information to be found amongst the rumors - in the early 1970s, a year after the construction of the wall took place, vast amounts of soil and other resources were hauled out of the base. Construction workers involved in this operation are harder to track down, and they can only find individuals responsible for driving the trucks. These drivers report only coming in at night, loading up the vehicles, and driving it elsewhere.

Finally, investigation of the base itself reveals basic information available to any member of the public. Approximate staff numbers can be deduced from just watching the base and who enters and exits. Watching the security also reveals they are well trained but, as the facility is in part civilian, they are not as heavily armed and armored as soldiers.

SUN'S REST

The base of operations for Dark Dawn is colloquially called “Sun’s Rest” by those involved in the project, as a result of the name leaking to the press and being picked up amongst conspiracy theory circles. The locals also call the base by this, and the name has stuck. The proper name is Facility 319, and this is what it is known as when mentioned within official government documents.

A scattering of half a dozen buildings, all apparently brick, within a walled area just outside the town of Springfield, the land and buildings were purchased from the state university in the 1970s. Even before that the buildings were used for that purpose. Seven-foot concrete walls were added shortly after this purchase, ostensibly because the base was dealing with important tests to help veterans of the war recover. No one believed the excuse, but construction went forward anyway. Members of the original wall construction crew can be contacted, but they honestly don’t know anything. All testing on sight was ceased during the construction so they were unable to witness anything of importance.

Two of the buildings are residences three stories tall and function as apartments. They are primarily filled with test subjects compliant with the procedures, but have bars on the windows nonetheless. Each apartment is a simple one bedroom with a bathroom and kitchenette containing a fridge and a microwave. Boiling water is available through a specialized nozzle next to the sink. There are no sharp knives available in any of them, and no containers larger than a cereal bowl or a mug.

Three of the buildings are offices; there is a wealth of military research and intelligence within them, but most of it is within paperwork and would be incredibly difficult to remove without an army. These offices are where Hopwell, Biggins, Wong, and dozens of others work every day. Government standard offices, all but Hopwell’s are basic and essentially identical. Hopwell has an opulent office with a large wooden desk. It smells of the cigars he regularly smokes and continues to smoke despite government regulations that prohibit him from doing so.

The final building is the one of interest; though it stands only four stories tall, there are an additional three basements below the building. These were added in the 1970s and include a floor of cells, an armory (containing riot gear for crowd control), and a basic server farm. This building includes a full surgery ward (second and third floors on one end), various interrogation rooms (first floor and first basement), basic medical facilities (adjacent to the surgery ward), and a series of rooms in the fourth floor and first basement that can be reconfigured as needed for experiments and testing of subjects.

Any attack on the facility should be undertaken with proper planning and should be a stealthy operation. A full-on attack, or any infiltration that triggers any alarms, will result in a military assault within thirty minutes. There is almost no way to properly win a fight against this kind of assault, but the PCs may be able

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to escape it. The military will be, first and foremost, aimed at securing the base and the intelligence within it.

The Illuminati, however, will be close behind. The military will do what they can to identify the people who broke into the facility. They will pass this information on to the Illuminati, who will in turn attempt to assassinate or capture all those who were involved.

Bodies of the deceased, those who die during testing or interrogations, are removed from the base via military transport under the guise of routine deliveries of reports, resources, and other documents. The bodies are cremated offsite and records are fabricated to distance Dark Dawn from any potential allegations.

ILLUMINATI ASSASSIN

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d8, Tracking d6

Armor: None

Weapons: Glock (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF 1, Shots 17, AP 1, Semi-Auto, silencer)

THE BREAK-IN

The break-in should play like a heist movie; the goal is based on the team's motivations. Either the prisoners or the reports should be the main object of interest for most people trying to break into the facility.

Depending on how much information the PCs have leaked during their investigations, particularly if they attempt to hack government databases or something of the like and fail, the Illuminati will be expecting their operation. They may have additional forces on sight that will make attempts to infiltrate difficult.

At any given time there are fifteen security guards on duty. Four are in the residential buildings, either in the security room off the lobby or with two out on patrol to ensure everything is in tip-top shape. They break into teams of two to address any threats. There is one in each of the office buildings stationed in the lobby monitoring the cameras of the building they are in. Of the remaining eight, there are four in the testing building and four patrolling the grounds.

In addition to the fifteen on duty, there are an additional ten "on call". These are used for moving difficult residents, assisting with testing, or other tasks that may be relied upon. If they are working an overnight shift, or there is nothing else required to be done on the base the ten on call guards are bunked in the first floor of one of the residences, where they are allowed to rest, though they are not supposed to be sleeping. The guards operate on eight-hour shifts and hand off at seven in the morning, three in the afternoon, and one in the morning.

The extra guards do not live on site, but all live nearby. If a guard is identified, and they are dealt with outside of the facility, someone will be pulled from the on-call staff if available. If more than one or two individuals are "out sick" (or

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whatever excuse the characters use) without a very compelling reason, the facility goes on alert and increases the guards.

A daylight infiltration is difficult as there are a large number of members of both the CIA and the military on the base during the day. Occasional tests or interrogations go on at night, though this is usually only when new captives are smuggled in. Shipments go into and out of the building, always through the military and they tend not to be on predictable schedules, except for food and waste. Food and waste are handled via the same trucks that arrive on the base in the morning on Friday, and leave shortly after being filled with garbage.

Scaling the wall is difficult, but not impossible; the largest difficulty will be not being noticed as the group does so.

BASE GUARDS

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d6, Shooting d6

Armor: None

Weapons: Glock (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF 1, Shots 17, AP 1, Semi-Auto), M-16 (24/48/96, 2d8, RoF 3, Shots 20, AP 2, Auto, 3RB)

THE POWER STRUGGLE

An alternate adventure is to reach the parties involved with the operation while they are outside of the base. Hopwell regularly goes out for dinner and drinks at high-end restaurants in town, though he regularly goes with political visitors or other key members on the base. He is also called out of town to testify in Washington D.C., report to the Pentagon, and other things like that. By contrast, any visitors from the Illuminati come to the base to meet with Biggins. When they do so, they also have to meet with Hopwell, though they usually play off their visit as a visit to the base proper, and then meet with Biggins late at night.

If the PCs are able to make contact with Wong, or manipulate Hopwell into behavior that would panic the Illuminati, they can trigger the power struggle. In the power struggle, first a small group of politicians will converge on the base. They meet first with Biggins and then with Hopwell about the transition of power within the base. Unlike the rest of Washington, they are not fooled by Hopwell's excuses. Their only interest is the continued existence of Dark Dawn and the continued state of affairs. Hopwell was useful, but not necessary to the process. Essentially, he is in a position to serve as the scapegoat.

Despite being a bit of an ass, Hopwell is not an idiot. Shortly after the meeting with the members of the Illuminati, he realizes he is the fall guy for everything that has gone wrong at the base. Soon after, he also concludes things are more complicated than he had feared and concludes that Biggins is a Russian sympathizer who has turned on his country.

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The final step of the power struggle is both Hopwell and Biggins going about the base attempting to shore up their power and, ultimately, assassinate each other. Hopwell is unlikely to win this fight as his reports to the government that Biggins and probably others are Russian agents lack credibility. The Illuminati, by contrast, can bring in assassins to secure the situation. They can make Hopwell's death look like a suicide, even if only on paper.

AFTER THE END

Even after things are dealt with, it is unlikely this is going to be the end. By breaking a test subject out, or even just stealing the data, the team has made a powerful enemy in the form of the Illuminati. It is likely they will have assassination attempts against them afterward, or something far worse. This may just be the beginning.

CONFIDENTIAL



TOP SECRET

CREATING YOUR OWN CONSPIRACY

Though the world of conspiracy theorists is filled with more gameable concepts than the average GM could conceivably grapple with, there is always room to create your own take on a conspiracy theory, or your own conspiracy. When doing so, there are a few basic steps you should follow.

THE COVER-UP

One of the biggest questions of any conspiracy is what are they covering up, what are they hiding from the rest of the world, and what are they doing in the shadows?

CUI BONO?

Many conspiracy theories are undermined by the simple fact there is no benefit to a particular action. Each real conspiracy is undertaken for a specific end – and it is through the unified approach to a specific issue that the conspiracy is able to maintain itself. As a result, this is a question that needs to be addressed for any conspiracy to make a lick of sense.

WHY?

It is one thing to shrug and say “just because” at the motivations behind a conspiracy, but there needs to be a unifying reason for the many individuals who are part of the conspiracy to coordinate and work together. Without that motivation, why are they doing any of it in the first place?

THE LEAK

The final question becomes how the players are going to learn about the conspiracy, figuring out their way in. This is most often through the leak, the situation here exposing not only the weakness of the organization, but also providing a way into the story.

USING THE TABLE

To make things easy, a table is provided that will put together a conspiracy with a few dice rolls. Roll a d10 for each column and pull together a conspiracy from that. It covers each of the portions of a conspiracy shown above, and can be used to make something on the fly.

For example, if you rolled 4, 6, 3, and 4, you would have a conspiracy of something supernatural that is covering up visitors to our world in their quest for ongoing and ultimate power, and the leak came from a cop who has stumbled in over her head.

Taking this roll, a unique conspiracy can be created. Given that there is something supernatural covering up alien visitors, the natural question is whether

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these two groups are somehow related. The supernatural can become lizard people who are actually hyper-evolved dinosaurs. Faced with extinction from an asteroid killing off all other dinosaurs, they created humanity as a servitor race. Over time, their numbers continued to dwindle while humanity did better and better. They established themselves as the true ruling class, hiding behind the scenes. When aliens came to make contact, they recognized this group as the true rulers behind the scenes.

The two groups are conspiring for continued power and control over humanity. The lizard people are trading various products from Earth in exchange for a slow trickling of technology to improve the lot of humanity. The lizard people will continue to control the main development of technology for all of humanity, while keeping it all under their control. A cop was investigating a missing person's report and dug a little bit too deep. During the investigation, she witnessed a lizard person in its true form, and is now looking for help.

As you can see, some truly unique conspiracies can be developed through this system, giving your players a one of a kind experience.

Roll	The Cover Up	Cui Bono?	Why?	The Leak
1	Murder(s) – it is a classic, but so many conspiracies are around covering up the death of a third party.	A Mysterious Secret Society (Illuminati, Freemasons, or other)	For the cold, hard, cash.	A disgruntled former employee
2	Body-snatching and Replacing – whether they're replacing them with clones, look-alikes, or brainwashed versions of themselves, people are coming back different.	A powerful and public corporation	For the good of humanity – protecting them from their own flaws.	A deep cover agent
3	There's been a breach in containment – whether it is chemicals, a biological weapon, or something else, and they're covering it up.	Your own government – whether it is the local mayor or the president – someone is behind it	The perpetual quest for power – it is a cliché, but they are sometimes right	A plucky but unlucky journalist on the run for his life.
4	Visitors – there are visitors to our world, whether malicious or not, and they're covering it up. These aliens are being kept from the public, leaving you just to wonder why.	A shadowy branch of your government, acting against the leaders	To maintain the balance of power – the world is spinning on a tilted axis, but at least it is still spinning.	A cop who stumbled in over her head, discovering a crime in progress that is being covered up.



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5	Contract manipulations – Not every conspiracy can be sexy, and it is often the most basic that get away with it. Somehow, they're putting their finger on the scales of justice to affect contract negotiations.	A group of powerful people with shared interests	They're fighting an even greater threat – sometimes bad things have to be done to fight an even worse force.	Accidental declassification – sometimes files are declassified in batches, and a couple revealing the truth were accidentally released into the wild.
6	Political control – whether through assassinations, blackmail, or something else entirely, they're controlling a political system for their own interests	Something supernatural – vampires, lizard people, who knows?	The rest of the world wouldn't understand – maybe they're vampires and humanity isn't ready yet, or maybe attitudes aren't where they need to be yet.	A victim wasn't quite dead – there was an attempt to cover something up, and the victim of it managed to survive. Barely.
7	Changing hearts and minds – maybe they're using false flag operations, maybe they're just in control of the media, but somehow they're changing the hearts and minds of vast swaths of society in order to enact their nefarious ends.	Aliens, of one form or another. They could be greys, the Mi-Go, or something more terrifying	It's just the way things are done – tradition can have its own weight and force. The original cause has been lost to history, now they continue just because.	An accountant who followed the money – they tracked expenses, or shipments, or something and have uncovered the tip of the iceberg.



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8	Suppression of technology – for one reason or another, they’re keeping a tight control over a new technology. Maybe they’re suppressing it because it destroys a market for their business, or maybe it’s to keep it in the hands of the elite.	A foreign government meddling in your affairs	To have a finger in the pie – maybe they aren’t running everything; maybe it is just in the interest of being able to have a seat at the proverbial table, keeping their eyes on it.	Law of large numbers – a group of online conspiracy theorists stumbled into something actually real.
9	Their business itself – everything they do is in secret, hidden in the shadows. Maybe they’re dealing in arms; maybe they’re a government branch that doesn’t officially exist.	A single family planning for generations	Only for the good and the great – for as long as humans have had civilization, they’ve had hierarchies. Those in charge of the conspiracy think this is the natural state of things, and they’re part of those at the top.	A rival conspiracy – they aren’t the only game in town, and their enemies and your enemies just happen to align.
0	Roll Twice for this table, use both	A cult	Reasons beyond mortal understanding – there’s dark and powerful forces at work in the universe, and most of us just can’t understand them. It is something mysterious, perhaps written in the stars, and it will be done.	Anonymous – the documents just appeared on the internet, or on your doorstep, or somewhere else. Who knows who was behind them?



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