

Conspiracy X

New Millennium Entertainment



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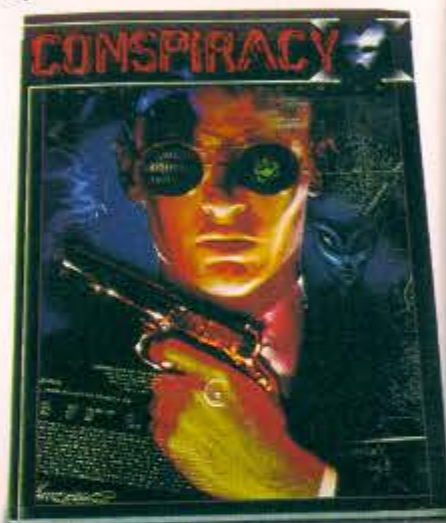


Enter a world of lies, deceptions and cover-ups, where the truth is the most dangerous thing of all...



Hardly ever has there been a television series as well suited to gaming as *The X-Files*. As well as being phenomenally successful and triggering a resurgence of interest in UFOs and aliens

among the general public, the show's structure, background and main premise translate perfectly to a roleplaying campaign. It's hardly surprising that *The X-Files* has caused a wave of interest in modern day investigation-style games. The influence of *The X-Files* is clear in *Conspiracy X*, the first roleplaying game



beliefs of even the most paranoid conspiracy freaks seem tame in comparison. In this world, not only do conspiracies exist, but the players are part of one.

As member of Aegis, a secret organisation concealed within the United States government, the players are dedicated to protecting humanity from the threat posed by both supernatural and extraterrestrial forces. But Aegis is not the only group at work within the government. The Black Book and its allies in the military-industrial complex support alien activities on Earth, offering aid with human abductions and experimentation in return for knowledge and advanced technology.

Hidden behind their cloaks of secrecy, Aegis and The Black Book are engaged in a clandestine war of covert operations that has been raging for nearly 50 years. Player characters in *Conspiracy X* must make use of every resource at their disposal to oppose The Black Book and its inhuman allies. The fate of humanity will be determined their actions.

BEHIND THE LIES

A 224-page softcover book, *Conspiracy X* is divided into eight chapters, each of which

begins with part of a short story that describes a typical Aegis operation. The design is attractive throughout, with clear fonts and effective use of icons and sidebars. Illustration is sparse, and of variable quality, but even the bad stuff manages to capture the correct atmosphere.

Things kick off with *Indoctrination*, which contains the usual 'what is a roleplaying game' and 'example of play' sections. We then move on to 'the world according to *Conspiracy X*' which outlines the history of Aegis, The Black Book and the extraterrestrial presence on Earth. The key to any good conspiracy theory is that it should be just plausible enough to give you pause for thought and insidious enough in its scope to make you worry. *Conspiracy X* succeeds admirably on both counts. Beginning in 1933, the timeline skillfully interweaves just enough fact and fiction to create a background that's frighteningly credible. Combined with the later explanations of psychic powers and the supernatural, the setting created is one of the game's greatest strengths - even the most jaded referees will find themselves overflowing with ideas and inspiration simply by skipping through the book.

WHO ARE YOU?

Personnel, the second chapter, looks at characters and their abilities. *Conspiracy X* uses a points-based generation system similar to but much simpler than that of *GURPS* or *Hero*, and players start with 100 points to spend on improving their character's attributes and traits.

Characters in *Conspiracy X* are rated from 1 to 5 in seven basic attributes. Strength and Size determine a character's build and resistance to physical injury; Agility and Reflexes rate his co-ordination and speed; Intelligence and Willpower determine his analytical ability and strength of mind, while Perception combines the sharpness of the senses with the ability to



interpret what is sensed. In addition, there are two 'special' attributes. Luck is split into ratings for good and bad, while Influence represents the agent's power and authority in his 'cover' occupation. All characters begin as 'average' people, rated 3 in the basic attributes, 2/12 in Luck and with a single point of Influence. Points can be spent

to increase these numbers, or gained by accepting lower ones in other areas.

Because nearly all Aegis operatives are recruited while working for some kind of government agency, and most continue in their chosen careers waiting for situations that require Aegis attention, the next step is to decide which agency or organisation the character works for. The career chosen determines which skills and training options are available to the character, as well as what the character can achieve by using his influence to 'pull strings'. There's a wide variety of choices available, from CIA agents to NASA astronauts.

Once the career has been chosen, skills, training and other traits can be purchased. Like attributes, skills are rated from 1 to 5. Training, on the other hand, covers areas where all that's important is whether a character can do something or not - for example SCUBA diving or parachute jumping. Finally, traits are miscellaneous special abilities or weaknesses that a character may possess. Examples of these include psychic powers and an overwhelming fear of spiders.

Although points-based systems are generally slightly more complex than other character generation systems, the simple rules used in *Conspiracy X* help to minimise difficulties and keep things from getting too complicated. Despite the overriding simplicity, though, there a number of neat ideas here and, once again, just reading through many of the available careers and traits will be sufficient to inspire the creation of many characters.

All in the mind

Over the last year there has been a wave of TV documentaries and magazine articles concerning the CIA's secret research into mind control and 'psychic spies' during the Cold War. According to the recently de-classified documents and reports, despite years of work and millions of dollars, none of the projects were successful.

According to *Conspiracy X*, these 'revelations' are part of a planned program of disinformation. The CIA's research was, in fact, so successful that it came to the notice of Aegis, which took control of the projects. The results demonstrated that nearly all humans possess the potential to develop psychic powers, and often use them subconsciously, and led

to breakthroughs in the training and utilisation of these abilities.

In game terms this means that almost any agent has the ability to perform limited feats of ESP, while some may already be trained in one or more of the recognised psychic disciplines. All such powers are resolved not with dice but Zener cards, using a modified version of the Rhine test popular in early research into telepathy. The referee shuffles the five cards; the player declares what they are attempting to achieve and names one of the symbols. Depending on the character's abilities, one to three cards are drawn, and if any display the nominated symbol, the power is used successfully.

Yes, it's a gimmick, but it's a simple and innovative one that makes a break from dice rolling and works well during play. Unfortunately, while the rulebook contains a sheet of the card diagrams that can be photocopied and pasted onto the faces of other cards, these tend to wear out quite quickly, and finding real cards isn't easy.



Conspiracy X seems set to become one of the best-supported new roleplaying systems around. NME is already working on a series of supplements for the game, beginning with a referee's screen next month and followed shortly by the *Aegis Handbook*. Look out for full reviews in coming issues of *arcane*.

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