

Role-Playing

Reviews

Roll out the oddballs

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I lost my favorite socks, the yellow ones with the zebra stripes and the holes in the heels. They're in my closet, I'm pretty sure, somewhere among the boxes of old Tarzan paperbacks, back issues of *Spin* magazine, and my collection of Captain Beefheart albums.

Hmm... here's a 1988 GEN CON® Game Fair T-shirt... a ham sandwich, probably from the same year... the first three volumes of my autobiography... and — hey, here's a whole pile of game products I intended to tell you about, but for some reason never got around to.

Forget the socks. Let's dab a little mustard on what's left of the ham sandwich and see what we have here . . .

Conspiracy X* game

224-page softcover book

New Millennium Entertainment \$25

Design: Rick Emst, Shirley Madewell, and Chris Palace with Mike Lewis, Jim Parks, and Willie Williams

Editing: M. Alexander Jurkat

Additional editing and development: Tina Beaven, Brian Herbek, and Bernard C. Trombley

Illustrations: C. Brent Ferguson, Francis Hogan, Heather McKinney, Chris Pallace, Robert Taylor, and George Vasilakos
Cover: C. Brent Ferguson

Extraterrestrials have taken over the game business. How else to explain the flurry of alien-inspired RPGs in the past few years, such as the *Don't Look Back**, *Pandemonium**, and *Nightbane** games? Either that, or game designers have been watching too many TV shows, like, oh, I don't know, *The X-Files* maybe?

Conspiracy X is the latest entry in the Aliens Walk Among Us sweepstakes, and it's also the best. *Conspiracy X* has no official link to the *The X-Files* — as far as I know, the RPG license for *The X-Files* is still up for grabs — but it wouldn't surprise me to learn that Mulder and Scully have crossed the design team's field of vision on more than one occasion. Here's the premise: players assume the roles of secret operatives charged with investigating mysterious abductions, psychic experiments, and other bizarre phenomena on behalf of a government agency called Aegis. For 40 years, Aegis



has been aware of an extraterrestrial presence but prefers to keep the general populace insulated from the truth because, well, you know, regular folks like you and me can't be trusted. *Conspiracy X* fosters a more paranoid world-view than *The X-Files*; it has almost as many secret societies crawling out of the cracks as the *Illuminati: New World Order** game. And its poltergeists and zombies might strike you as refugees from *Tales From the Crypt*. That said, *Conspiracy X* captures the paranoia and general creepiness of *The X-Files* so effectively that it'll more than suffice until an official product finds its way to the stores.

Each player constructs his character from a pool of 100 points, buying ratings for everything from basic attributes (Agility, Reflexes, Willpower, Perception) to skills (Demolitions, Martial Arts, Photography) and resources (Media Connection, Police Contact). Depending on the number of points invested, ratings range from a low of 1 to a high of 5. You can boost your point pool by saddling your PC with disadvantages; Schizophrenia adds an extra 15 points, Wanted by the Law adds as many as 20. A PC's skills derive not so much from his choice of career as from the organization to which he belongs (or, more accurately, the organization to which he belonged before he joined Aegis). A PC from the Center for Disease Control, for instance, has access to Computer Use, First Aid, and Science skills. A Drug Enforcement Administration agent knows Lockpicking, Small Arms, and Stealth.