

The Secret Wars

WE KNOW WHO YOU ARE

Sitting back one evening in your cozy London flat (or maybe it was the prayer garden of a monastery in Sri Lanka, or a seat in Air Force One, or a bench in Central Park, or the cockpit of your flying saucer), you flipped casually through the latest edition of The Watchful Eye, the one journalistic publication that's worth your time and trust. In the classified ads a Help Wanted message caught your eye:

IMMEDIATE OPENINGS AVAILABLE for upper-level positions in several global conspiracies bent on world domination. Top wages for individuals capable of coordinating large-scale cover operations involving diplomacy, treachery, mind control, and mindfuck. Good work habits and creativity a must. Mehums need not apply. Contact c/o TWE Box 23.

The more you thought about it, the more it seemed the perfect career for you.

After mailing in your resumé, passing a simple personality test and wrapping up your affairs, you found yourself well-placed in a job that promised challenge and reward for a lifetime - or more. You were placed at the head of one of the twenty-four secret societies that have been wrestling for control of the planet since the days of the Roman Empire. Using your knowledge of ancient secrets and the cutting edge of modern technology, you manipulate the unknowing masses, competing with other shadowy warriors from the safety (?) of your secret headquarters.

You are a commander in The Secret Wars.

WE'D LIKE TO KNOW A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOU FOR OUR
FILES

Before diving into the murky waters of this rulebook, start giving some thought about your part in this game. It's a roleplaying game, so you will be playing the role of one person (not necessarily human). You may want to make the character similar to yourself. Or you may wish to indulge in the most bizarre flights of fancy possible. Just keep the following questions in mind. Any ideas you come up with should be mailed in along with your orders for the first turn.

Player Character: Who are you, and why are you running this conspiracy? What special abilities enable you to bend others' wills to your purpose? What are your interests, hobbies, fetishes? Goals?

Conspiracy: Ready-made conspiracies are available from the gamemaster free of charge, but players are welcome to develop their own. Either way, the more details a player can supply regarding their group, the richer the game will be. What are the beliefs and goals of this cult you run? How do the members relate to their leader? What special symbols, numbers, animals, dates, etc. does it hold sacred? What does it abhor? What image (if any) does it present to the public?

Secret Headquarters: Where does the buck stop in your organization? How is the main base disguised and/or protected? Unless otherwise specified, it will be assumed that the player's character will be running from this headquarters, and living there as well. If the PC lives somewhere else, this home should also be detailed, as should any conspiracy "branch offices."

INTRODUCTION

The Secret Wars is a refereed play-by-mail game. Players mail in their orders to the gamemaster, who compares them, coordinates them, and determines their results, which are then mailed back to the players. With the new information the players make further plans and decisions, mail them back to the gamemaster, and so on.

This game was originally devised before the widespread use of email, and was played by physical mail, or "snail mail" as it is sometimes known. But it works just as well via email. It could also work in chat or forum software, but it is important that each players' orders be a secret between them and the gamemaster. Players should not see the information that other players are giving or receiving.

The game operates on a turn-based cycle. A ten-day cycle was used in the snail mail days, but something a little shorter (like a week) might work better in the digital age. What this means is that there is a deadline for orders: ten days (or whatever) after the execution of orders for the previous turn. All orders received by the deadline will be executed on the deadline or as soon as the last set of orders is received, whichever comes first. Any orders that are received after the deadline will be applied to the next turn, unless revised or replaced by another set of orders. Players who fail to meet the deadline may still receive feedback from the gamemaster, as the actions of other players might affect their conspiracy! So stay alert!

While TSW is like a roleplaying game in spirit, your PC will not actually have any stats or need to be written up as such. In TSW, your character is simply and purely a product of your imagination. Any powers or traits you crave are yours for the asking, because your character is out to conquer the world. Your character starts out as one of the most powerful individuals on Earth (or thereabouts), and is apt to grow in power with time. Through this character, you will coordinate the activities of a conspiracy of your own design, from a headquarters of your own design. You may wish to make a character much like yourself, or something larger than life like a comic-book superpowered being. Indulge yourself. And feel free to ask the gamemaster for help, if you prefer to be given some guidance.

Unlike other roleplaying systems, in TSW the

players will roll no dice, nor consult any tables or charts. They will simply communicate their intentions, within a simple rules framework, and the gamemaster will take care of the mechanics "behind the scenes." The gamemaster may very well be consulting charts and rolling dice, but the players will never know. All they will know is the outcomes of the gamemaster calculations. They are welcome to ask the gamemaster questions about the rules, and who knows? - they might even be answered.

The roleplaying system of TSW is designed with flexibility as the foremost consideration. Players are given opportunities to stretch their fantasies and whims as far as imagination will take them. The gamemaster will make sure that the game universe is well populated with organizations for players to infiltrate and control, and with non-player characters for them to use as pawns. Above all, the TSW game system is a framework for a grand illusion, the latter to be built up by both the players and the gamemaster.

At the heart of TSW is the card game ILLUMINATI, from Steve Jackson games. There have been many editions and expansions of this game since it was first published. Information about it is readily available on the HoloMatrix or whatever they're calling the global computer network at the time you are reading these rules.

Like most card games, ILLUMINATI centers around the manipulation of cards with properties and values and rules printed on them, along with amusing art. Some cards are face up on the table where all players can see them, and others are kept secret in a hand. There are also dice, and money, and special tracking charts that come with some expansions.

In TSW, the rules of the card game ILLUMINATI are operating in the background, but there is no need to represent all these elements. The gamemaster can choose to if they want, but the idea is for communication to be free-form, mostly narrative. With imagination, one might see how the story could be represented by cards as in the tabletop game.

Also, in the tabletop game, there is teamwork and diplomacy. Since, in TSW, players aren't able to communicate directly with one another, all coordinating and backstabbing and other such conspiratorial shenanigans will have to be mediated through the gamemaster. TSW introduces a component not found in the original card game that can help with this thematically: the player is an RPG character, and there will be NPC characters to interact with as well.

Since the game is primarily a roleplaying game, players should feel free to play it a little fast and

easy. If they want to try something not covered in the rules, they should do so, and see if the gamemaster lets them get away with it. Certainly they can propose their own rules, addenda to the rules, and their own ideas for groups and special events not included in the original ILLUMINATI card game. TSW is a collaborative effort among the players and the gamemaster, as any roleplaying game is.

"BY YOUR COMMAND..."

This is the rulebook.

Ha ha ha.

It does not contain everything you need to win the game. It does not contain everything you need to play the game. It does not contain all the rules of the game. It's not even a uniform point of reference from which all players begin, because each player will start out with knowledge of the game beyond what is included in this rulebook. But it's a start!

There are two types of entities in TSW: groups, including conspiracy groups, and characters. At the start of the game, as a player you will be a PC who is in charge of a conspiracy group. Your first communication with the gamemaster will be to send them descriptions of yourself and of your conspiracy group. As explained in the introduction, your imagination is the limit.

The gamemaster will then get back to you with and qualifications or modifications they feel are appropriate. Depending on how greedy or hesitant you were, they may limit your original concept, or enhance it. You now have your starting set up, and are ready to begin the game.

Each turn you will send out orders for the characters you control, including yourself as a PC, which is all you will be able to do on your first turn. As your conspiracy grows and you recruit NPCs, you will have more orders to give, more things to get done, and more fun to have taking over the world.

Sending out orders in a timely manner is a player's most important job. There is no specific format to player orders, but they should be legible and comprehensible, and need to follow these basic rules.

You (your PC) gets two actions each turn. NPCs you (eventually) control get one action each turn. For each order of an action that you give, you will need to supply certain required parameters, depending on the action in question. Other parameters can be included optionally.

It's up to you how much detail you want to provide. For example, let's you have acquired a minion named Constance Creaming and want to have her assassinate another NPC, named Allah Nothing. The action for this is "Attack," which has required parameters of target,

location, and intention.

You could simply give the order as:

"C. Creaming: Attack to kill Allah Nothing at his home."

Or you could be more inventive: "Constance Creaming is assigned to kill Allah Nothing at his apartment home in Atlantic City. Constance will use a .45 automatic pistol like the one Allah was issued in the army. Constance will gain access to the home using her burglary skills while Allah is at work, and wait in ambush. She will make the death look like a suicide."

If you gave the simpler orders without the optional parameters, the gamemaster would fill in the details as needed. Based on their determination of the success of the action, they will communicate the results. Maybe there's a news story about a retired army officer who blew his brains out in his apartment; maybe just an ominous report that Constance Creaming was last seen arriving in Atlantic City but hasn't been heard from since.

In TSW, actions corresponding to the ones from the ILLUMINATI card game can only be taken by your PC. These are called Group Actions, and count against the two actions per turn that your PC can take. Many Group Actions will take two or more turns to complete, because other players in the game will get a chance to react to them. For example, attacking to control a group, as in the ILLUMINATI card game, is followed by an opportunity for other players to help defend the targeted group. So the gamemaster may have to drag things out a bit to resolve the action. It may not be possible to initiate a Group Action while another one is still waiting to be resolved, and it is possible to delay or cancel Group Actions.

Actions that can be taken by NPCs are called Individual Actions; these are also available to your PC, at the expense of one of your Group Actions that turn. There are also Standing Orders for NPCs, which are conditional actions to take in specific circumstances, and override any Individual Actions ordered.

HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE GOVERNMENTS

At the start of the game you will only have your conspiracy group (the one you made up that represents a conspiracy for mastery of the world), but as the game progresses you will gain control of more and more groups. In the original ILLUMINATI card game, the groups available were a mix of powerful entities like the IRS and the Mafia, and lesser groups that were more flavorful or fun, like Sci-Fan Fans and the John Birch Society. It's the same in TSW in terms of power mix, but the exact groups that are around could be whatever the players and gamemaster think up, and what makes sense for the times.

As in the original game, in TSW groups have a Power value, used when attacking; a Resistance value, used when defending; and an Income in Megabucks. Some also have Transferable Power, which can be used to support other groups' attacks. Groups can control other groups, but only a limited number, based on how powerful they are. This number is represented by control arrows (typically at most 3). The weakest groups can't control other groups at all, and have no Power and 0 control arrows. Finally, groups can have Alignments, which affect the odds when attacking and defending.

To add to the fun and mystery of a game of TSW, and to give the gamemaster room to cheat (I mean, room to maneuver), the exact numerical Power and Resistance values of groups are hidden from the players. The gamemaster will use descriptive narrative to indicate how powerful a group is. Income level, and the amount of Megabucks in a group's treasury, can be explicit. Number of control arrows and alignments should also be specifically given.

Finally, as in the original game, sometimes groups have unique special powers, which you'll find out about as they enter into play.

GROUP ACTIONS

1. Attack to Control

required parameters: Attacking Group, Target Group, Megabucks amount to invest

optional parameters: Supporting Groups, infiltrated agents in the relevant groups to provide support

Through this command a player attempts to add a neutral or enemy power group into the ranks of their own conspiracy. The attacking group may be the conspiracy group the player started the game with, or

it may be a group that was taken over successfully in a previous attack to control.

The Megabucks invested must come either from the attacking group, and/or from the player's main conspiracy group if that is not the attacking group.

Supporting groups can be any other groups the player controls which have Transferable Power. An infiltrating agent would be an NPC given an infiltration order in an earlier turn (see below), and will provide a bonus to the likelihood of success of the attack.

The alignments of the attacking group and the target group also affect the odds. If the two groups have the same alignment, the chance of success is greater, but if they have opposite alignments, the chance is reduced. Here are all of the alignments and their opposites:

Government, opposite to Corporate
Liberal, opposite to Conservative
Straight, opposite to Weird
Violent, opposite to Peaceful
Criminal, which has no opposite
Fanatic, opposite to itself

After an order to attack is given, it may take an additional turn before it is resolved. This is because the owner of the target group (if any) will get a chance to defend the group by spending Megabucks from its treasury, or possibly using agents planted in the group, or other special powers. Money spent directly from the target group is doubled in value for the purpose of defending against an attack, which is a good reason not to leave any group's treasury empty.

While the attack's resolution is pending, the groups and agents involved in the attack cannot take further actions until that resolution occurs. Also, groups which are controlled by another conspiracy get a bonus to their Resistance which increases the closer the group is to the conspiracy in the power structure. Neutral groups make much easier targets.

If an Attack to Control is successful, the target group will now be controlled by the attacking group, as will all groups that the target group itself controlled. In addition, as a free action, the attacking player can immediately transfer any amount of Megabucks from the attacking group to the newly acquired target group.

Note: players' original Conspiracy groups can't be the target of an Attack to Control, or any other kind of Attack, for that matter. Unless, of course, the gamemaster says otherwise.

Here's how an Attack to Control might play out:

You've started building up your vast conspiracy, the Ancients of Zuzu, and now control the CIA and Madison Avenue. You discover that a rival conspiracy controls the IRS, and think you have the chops to take it from them. You already have an NPC agent in the IRS to help you take it over from the inside.

You issue an order of Attack to Control the IRS, using a Group Action. For maximum chance of success, you attack with the CIA, and add in the transferable power of both the Ancients of Zuzu and of Madison Avenue. Since the CIA and the IRS share the Government alignment, you will get a bonus for that as well. Unfortunately, your enemy has a bonus because the IRS is directly controlled by their conspiracy, a shady operation you haven't quite sussed out yet. You give your NPC mole an order to support the attack, throw in a bunch of Megabucks, and hope for the best.

The gamemaster receives your order, but since the IRS is controlled by another player, they get a chance to respond (remember: money in the treasury of the IRS counts double!). So the gamemaster lets them know about the attack, and they do something, but you don't know what exactly. Meanwhile, you have another turn of orders to give as well, but you can't give orders to the Ancients, the CIA, Madison Avenue, or your NPC, because they are all tied up in the unresolved Attack.

After the gamemaster receives the other player's reactive orders, they do some gamemaster calculations (all on the level, of course) and determine if you are successful or not. If you are, the IRS falls under the control of the CIA. You can then issue an order to transfer any amount of Megabucks from the CIA to the IRS, but without using up an action. If you are not successful, you lament the loss of resources, or worse, as you have now enraged your foe.

Note: at the gamemaster's discretion, it might take an extra turn or two for an attack to resolve, if there are extenuating circumstances that justify giving players' more chances to react. Also, depending on whose agents have infiltrated what groups, other parties might be given the chance to interfere for or against the attack!

2. Attack to Destroy

required parameters: Attacking Group, Target Group, Megabucks amount to invest

optional parameters: Supporting Groups, infiltrated agents in the relevant groups to provide support

This is like an Attack to Control, except the target group is destroyed completely. You won't have to worry about it any more. Probably.

The target is not limited to neutral or enemy-controlled groups. You can attack to destroy your own groups if you want, though a group can't attack itself.

If a group is successfully destroyed, all groups controlled by it become neutral, that is uncontrolled. All Megabucks in the treasuries of destroyed groups or groups neutralized by the destruction of their controlling group are lost.

Groups that have no power and no control arrows can't be destroyed. Fnord.

The bonuses and penalties for alignments are reversed in attacks to destroy. In other words, like alignments reduce the chance of success, and opposite alignments increase the chance.

3. Attack to Neutralize

required parameters: Attacking Group, Target Group, Megabucks amount to invest

optional parameters: Supporting Groups, infiltrated agents in the relevant groups to provide support

This action can only be attempted against an enemy-controlled group. If it succeeds, the target group will be free from its master's control, as will any groups controlled by it. All Megabucks in the treasuries of neutralized groups are lost. There is a significant bonus to attacking to neutralize versus attacking to control, which is why you might try it instead. But it seems desperate, really. What kind of powermonger are you?

4. Transfer Funds

required parameters: Originating Group, Destination Group, amount of Megabucks to transfer

suggested parameters: delivery method, form of currency

For one action, a player may transfer any amount of Megabucks from the treasury of one group to that of another group that either controls or is controlled by it. Suggested parameters probably won't make a whole lot of difference here, but they might add some flavor. For instance, while the Fred Birch Society could make its contribution to the KKK simply by writing a check, it would be more romantic if they delivered lost Confederate gold, assuming they could get their hands on any.

5. Move Group

required parameters: group to be moved, group to become new controller

suggested parameters: rationale or excuse for the move

This is an order to change the control of a group in your power structure (network of controlled groups with your conspiracy at the center). The group being moved, and all groups it controls, are now controlled by another group you specify, which must have at least one open control arrow. All Megabucks in treasuries stay put when this move happens.

Suggested parameters, as with the transfer funds action, are mostly for flavor. Maybe your conspiracy controls the Democrats, and they control New York. You decide to give the order for New York to be directly controlled by your conspiracy. This is achieved by having all the high-level Democratic officials in New York City join your bizarre cult. Look carefully at their official seals and you will see mysterious ancient symbols. Layers upon layers!

The move group order can conceivably be used to give a group or groups to another player's conspiracy, or to sell those to them - if you can figure out how.

Note: in the original card game ILLUMINATI, there was a rule that groups in a power structure can't overlap when laid out on the game table. This meant that if two control arrows faced one another after two different cards were placed, only one of those control arrows could be used. Since TSW is a bit abstract and no one wants to keep track of such boring minutiae, this rule will be ignored. Unless your gamemaster is truly insane.

Note: there is no guarantee that your gamemaster is not truly insane.

FREE ACTIONS

There are a number of group-oriented orders that can be given that don't cost an action.

6. Cancel Action

An ongoing group action like an attack that has not yet resolved can be canceled. All progress is lost and spent resources are irrecoverable, but the groups and NPCs involved are immediately available for new orders.

7. Postpone Action

An ongoing group action can also be postponed; this does NOT free up the groups and NPCs involved, but it might make sense in the light of new information.

8. Drop Group

required parameters: group you control

You can relinquish control of a group you control, making it neutral. It's as if someone had successfully neutralized it with an attack; it and all other groups controlled by it become neutral, and all Megabucks in their treasuries are lost. Typically you would do this if your power structure was becoming unwieldy and you didn't see much value in controlling the group.

9. Spend Defensively

When a group is under attack, all defensive spending of Megabucks by the targeted group and by the main conspiracy group is a free action. A conspiracy group can even spend defensively when another player's group or when a neutral group is attacked, if there is knowledge of that attack happening. While groups are spending defensively, they can even take other actions, though you might be stretching your resources thin if you try this!

10. Play Special Event

In the original ILLUMINATI card game, there were special event cards that you could play for instant bonuses or to throw a monkey wrench in your opponents' plans. Something like these will crop up in TSW as well, and by their nature these "special events" don't use up an action (more typically they modify an action).

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

These are actions undertaken by your PC or by NPCs that you recruit in later turns. Remember that your PC (you in the game) gets two actions a turn, but that Group Actions count against these two actions, while NPCs only get one action a turn and can't undertake Group Actions.

Probably early in the game you will want to focus on reconnaissance and recruitment before slogging into the nasty business of extending your power structure,

and that's exactly what individual actions are for.

To facilitate resolving individual actions, PCs and NPCs will have a Power value and a Toughness value (similar to Resistance). At the start of the game these will be low numbers, and they will increase as the characters gain experience. So each NPC will basically have a mini-character sheet.

Other attributes to flesh out an NPC include alignments, similar to the ones used for groups, and specific skills that might give them a bonus to Power or Toughness when resolving actions. The gamemaster will keep track of all of this for you; as a player you will only encounter these details through the narrative of your orders and their resolution.

1. Attack

required parameters: target, location, intention

suggested parameters: details of the target or location

This is a very broad action covering all the ways a character might interfere in another one's life in some way. Intentions could range from murder to seduction to robbery or simply to confusing the target. Another potential use of this action is to attack a location rather than a character, say to demolish a building, or to buy it out. This might be more difficult.

An example has already been given in the rulebook in the form of the curious case of Constance Creaming and Allah Nothing.

2. Create Front

required parameters: Megabucks to spend (at least 1), details of the front including stated purpose, related symbology, and alignments

With this action a character attempts to create a new power group. Yep, just like that, out of thin air. Where do you think groups come from? The new group will have no power or control arrows to start with. It can start out controlled by one of your other groups, or can be neutral. The new group will mostly be useful for confusing other players or for recruiting new NPCs. It also requires at least a little money spent from a treasury.

Example: your conspiracy of alien overlord wannabes would like to recruit agents who are friendly to extraterrestrials. So you start the game off by having your PC use the Create Front action to found a new group called "Reach for the Stars" that is

dedicated to making alien contact. You decide to make them neutral so no one can trace them to you, specify that they have Weird and Peaceful alignments, and come up with a goofy logo for them with a stereotypical alien face. Once this is done, you are ready to infiltrate the new group to look for NPCs!

3. Emissary

required parameters: message or gift to be delivered, destination, terms of delivery

This action covers delivery of gifts or messages between players. If a message, the player can explicitly write this out for the gamemaster to copy and paste to the recipient. The character issued the order will probably be delivering the gift (which could be money, a special event, or some other resource) or message to another character at a specified location, presuming that this character also runs a conspiracy or represents one. But possibly, depending on the game history, the destination could be a drop box and special protocols could be followed to maintain secrecy.

4. Guard

required parameters: character or location to guard
suggested parameters: specific threats to look out for

With this action, a character is focused on defending a target from attack. If the character or location being guarded becomes the target of an Attack action, the chance of the Attack succeeding will be reduced.

5. Illuminate

required parameters: character to become illuminated, some detail on method
suggested parameters: specific revelations or beliefs to impart

This action will cause a character's level of consciousness to be raised. Only an illuminated character can take this action (your PC is considered to already be illuminated at game start). The target character also has to use up their action for the turn. Illumination is an epiphany, a transcendental experience, shaking up the character's previous belief system in ways that are more...convenient...to the illuminating party. Not to be confused with brainwashing. Once illuminated, an NPC will be more

loyal to the conspiracy, will also be able to illuminate other NPCs, and might grow more capable at other actions.

6. Infiltrate

required parameters: target group

suggested parameters: existing connections in the target group

The goal of this action is for the character to enter the ranks of a power group other than the one from which they were originally recruited. Once they have infiltrated, there will be other actions they can take from within the group. A character can be in the ranks of more than one group. Failure at this action could lead to consequences that are trivial, painful, or even lethal, depending on the group involved.

7. Interfere

required parameters: target attack action against a group

suggested parameters: methods used

With this action, a character reduces the chance of success of an attack against a group by interfering with the attacker's plans. The character must have infiltrated either the group that is the target of the attack, or one of the groups that is doing the attacking (that is, contributing either Power or Transferable Power to the attack). Some flavor could be added in the form of a description of what exactly the character is doing to interfere.

Example: in the aforementioned attack by the CIA to control the IRS, Madison Avenue was supporting with Transferable Power. Unbeknownst to you, your enemy has an NPC agent infiltrated into Madison Avenue, and gives that agent the order to interfere with the attack. Madison Avenue starts planting subliminal messages in intra-agency emails that generate distrust between the two agencies and hamper your efforts. Nefarious!

8. Leak

required parameters: message or rumor to be leaked

suggested parameters: journalistic connections or special terms

This is how to get your name in the paper. Similar to the Emissary action, it involves the delivery of a message, except in this case you are delivering it to

the world at large. The message could be a simple rumor, true or untrue, or it could be a complicated interview. The source might want to remain anonymous. Successful leaks will be published in The Watchful Eye, the only magazine that dares to speak the truth these days.

9. Meditate

required parameters: none

suggested parameters: none

If you can't come up with something to do, maybe just think on it. Who knows, the gamemaster might drop you a hint or something.

10. Recruit

required parameters: target character

suggested parameters: something known about the character

With this action, a character will bring an NPC in to the fold of your conspiracy. If successful, the target character will now be an NPC to whom you can give orders on subsequent turns.

Note: it is possible for an NPC to be recruited by more than one conspiracy. What would a conspiracy game be without double, triple, and quadruple agents?

11. Scout

required parameters: target group

suggested parameters: traits desired in a potential recruit

Use this action to search a power group for potential targets of future recruit actions. The more successful the action, the more characters you will find and the more you will learn about them. This action involves no contact with the characters in question. Unless, of course, you fail, and that could be embarrassing.

12. Spy

required parameters: target group, character, or location

suggested parameters: relevant information concerning the target, specific questions you are trying to answer

This is simply an action to gather information about an entity in the game before doing anything else

involving it. It could amount to simply asking some questions about the entity. A failed attempt could mean being discovered and facing the consequences, or being given incorrect information about the target.

13. Support

required parameters: target attack action against a group

suggested parameters: methods used

This is similar to the Interfere action, except the character is attempting to increase the chance of success of the attack. Likewise, the character must have infiltrated either the group that is the target of the attack, or one of the groups that is doing the attacking.

Other Individual Actions may be revealed as the game progresses, and you can always try doing something not included in the list above. How can you find out what the gamemaster will let you get away with if you don't even try??

Fnord.

STANDING ORDERS

Characters can be given standing orders to switch to a specific action in certain contingencies. If you give a character a standing order, it will replace whatever order you otherwise have given them, should that contingency arise.

Example: let's say you really want to assassinate an enemy agent (call him Bob), but have no idea where Bob is. Your best contract killer is the suave operative Cornelius Leatherbottom. You give Cornelius the standing order to attack to kill Bob in the event that Bob's location ever becomes public. But you don't want Cornelius otherwise sitting around twiddling his thumbs, so you also give him the order to Spy on the Pope. Should Bob surface, Cornelius will immediately stop spying on the Pope (so now you don't know what the Pope is up to, there's always a price to pay) and head to wherever Bob was spotted to finish him off.

PLUG

THE WATCHFUL EYE is the only journalistic publication worth the time of an Illuminated One such as yourself

with important plans. Your time is valuable why waste it reading newspapers They control? The Watchful Eye is the only digest out there that dares to expose The Powers That Be. At TWE we have our own staff of cracked investigative reporters who will stop at nothing to bring the terrifying truth to the light of day. The Watchful Eye is available on a subscription basis only, and will be delivered directly to you for the bargain price of 1 Megabuck per turn.

NOTES FOR GAMEMASTERS

DON'T READ PAST THIS POINT IF YOU JUST WANT TO PLAY THE SECRET WARS AND DON'T WANT THE BEAUTIFUL MYSTERY OF THIS GAME TO BE SPOILED FOR YOU HA HA

You should have everything you need in the rules above to run a game of TSW. It helps to know the original ILLUMINATI game and if you are not familiar with that then why not get yourself a copy? There's probably rules in there that got left out of here that you could incorporate, plus you'll have a bunch of groups and special events to work with.

The key to running a game of TSW is to embrace the roleplaying aspect of it, and to be flexible with the rules. Luckily for you as a gamemaster, most of the details are hidden from the players so you have lots of room to fudge things as you go. With the anonymized game format, you have the ultimate DM screen!

Use The Watchful Eye as a tool for disseminating information that all players should know about. Stories about particular power groups will effectively act as the tableau of neutral groups available for all players to attack. Stories about power struggles among groups could be news about the major attacks that have occurred each turn. But no need to share everything that happens; you just want to put teasers out to give players something to act on.

Let players blaze their own paths if they show the initiative. Maybe you've never mentioned the Pentagon in any missive to a player or in The Watchful Eye, but a player decides to infiltrate it or attack it anyway. Go ahead and let them.

Reward players for planning carefully and for being creative, and if you must punish them for being reckless, give them some consolation in the form of a resource to use for later. Maybe they foolishly attack the Pentagon without bothering to investigate it first, wasting their time and money. You could have them catch the attention of an NPC who works there and decides to join them, to help them in their future conspiratorial endeavors.

THE FORMULA

This is the basic formula for resolving an attack from the original game. Well, slightly modified. If you don't like it, modify it some more.

Base number = (Power value of attacking group + all transferable Power values from supporting groups)
- Resistance value of target group
+4 for each like Alignment (-4 if attack to destroy)
-4 for each opposite Alignment (+4 if attack to destroy)
-15 if target group directly controlled by a conspiracy
-10 if target group controlled by another group that is controlled by a conspiracy
-5 if target group controlled by another group that is controlled by another group that is controlled by a conspiracy (that's as good as it gets)
+10 if attacking to neutralize instead of to control

Additional TSW-specific modifier:

+Power level of any NPC issued an order to support the attack
-Power level of any NPC issued an order to interfere with an attack

Once the base number is determined, roll 2d6. If the total is equal to or less than the base number, the attack is a success, otherwise it is a failure. Snake eyes (2) always succeeds, and box cars (12) always fails.

Gamemaster prerogative: you can just decide if an attack succeeds or fails based on what makes sense or contributes to the story. Remember that this is a roleplaying game at heart. But don't cheat the players too much, or they won't have any fun.

This is the formula for group action attacks. A similar one can be used for resolving individual action attacks. Basically, attacker's power minus target's toughness to get a base number, and roll 2d6 to determine success or failure. Alignment bonuses/penalties would also apply, but should be (+/-)2 instead of 4 in the case of individual actions.

A NOTE ON ALIGNMENTS

You might decide that the alignments from the original game don't make sense any more, depending on when you are playing the game. What do "Liberal" or "Conservative" even mean these days? Feel free to come up with your own alignments to suit the times.