

OPERATION FOOLE

AN AGENT PATRIOT ROLE-PLAYING GAME FOR TWO PEOPLE

BY KIRT A. DANKMYER

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The man rolled out of the plane, his trenchcoat flowing behind him like wings, his fedora held to his head with one hand, sheathed in leather. He waved with the other hand, which was bare.

"Tell Tunner to screw himself," said the man.

"Will do, Mister Patriot," said the pilot, grinning, watching boxes rapidly unloaded from his plane.

A man walked up to Patriot. He was small and precise, and he spoke to Patriot in surprisingly lyrical German.

Roughly translated, he said: "Herr Patriot, I am Lukas von Mises, the expert you asked for."

"Wonderful," said Patriot, in the same language. "Were you briefed?"

"My brother filled me in," von Mises said. His voice got quieter. "I understand that you a member of a Allied organization so secret it is merely referred to as 'the Agency'. I understand you are normally assigned to New Amsterdam, in the United States. Why are you so far from home?"

"Bugs," said Agent Patriot. "That's why I needed you, the entomologist, and not your brother, the Allied spy. Plus, I needed someone who spends less time in East Berlin than your brother. This is mainly going to be a problem for West Berlin."

The Skinny

This is a role-playing game for two people. One person takes on the role of Agent Patriot, the ultra-competent operative of the ultrasecret Agency, and the other will take the role of the Companion, someone who is tagging along with Agent Patriot, aiding and, sometimes, accidentally hindering Agent Patriot in his mission. At the start of the game, the Companion is

Lukas von Mises, entomologist and West Berlin native, a young scholar who managed to survive the madness of his country without being tainted by Nazism.

Operation Foole is more like the sort of game played with action figures, models, or toy guns than with chess sets or sporting equipment, though it uses rules and techniques common to more competitive games. It is a game of creativity that takes place in the imagination. The purpose of the game is to produce an interesting story, during which time the two players will often switch roles between them, not to mention fleshing out many other roles. The purpose of the rules is to make the creation of this story fun and engaging, completely independently of any potential value the resulting story might have from the point of view of a theoretical outside audience. In fact, rather than writing the story down, it will probably exist mostly in the shared imagined space inside the heads of the two players, generated as they discuss the story back and forth.

The Setting

The game is set on April 1, 1949, during what was called at the time the Berlin Crisis, what was later known in history as the Berlin Airlift.

Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union had occupied Germany at the end of the Second World War. Each country controlled a zone. They also occupied Berlin, which was surrounded by the Soviet zone, and divided the city into four sectors.

Co-operation broke down in 1947 and early 1948. The three Western powers decided to create a separate West German government in their zones, and started by creating a new West German currency. The Soviet Union tried to dissuade them by gradually escalating harassment of Western traffic to and from the city, which culminated in the Berlin blockade, imposed on June 24, 1948, cutting West Berlin off from its usual means of supply.

As the Allies did not want to abandon the anti-Communist block of people in West Berlin, they decided to vault over the Russian blockade and supply Berlin by air, in a precision airlift operation headed by General William H. Tunner. The Berlin Wall does not exist yet, but the Cold War mentality that led to its creation was just starting to get into full swing.

The world the game is set in, while having in many ways the same history as ours, is not the same as ours, however. Supernatural beings menace mankind, not to mention the aliens that have been buzzing the planet for quite some time now. The Agency, and operatives like Agent Patriot, exists to protect mankind from such unusual threats, while keeping such things a secret.

There are other differences as well between Agent Patriot's world and our own. Agent Patriot hails from the bustling US metropolis of New Amsterdam, which is *not* the same place as New York City. The players should not feel 100% constrained by reality while telling their story.

As we start the game, Agent Patriot has just arrived in West Berlin on one of the regular supply planes, with the scene outlined above.

This is what Agent Patriot knows at the start of the game:

- A set of antique bottles was shipped to New Amsterdam from Berlin (whether West or East was not clear from the packaging) to be sold at auction for a mysterious antique dealer by the name of "Johan von Hilderbran".
- One of those bottles contained the essence of Beelzebub, the so-called "Lord of the Flies", an ancient demon which operates by possessing masses of insects. He proceeded to possess all the cockroaches in New Amsterdam, using them to swarm and eat several authority figures. Agent Patriot, who used a negative orgone energy device to destroy all cockroaches in New Amsterdam, thwarted him.
- However, after casting some runes and consulting several magickal devices in his possession, Agent

Patriot discovered that Beelzebub had possessed several beetles that were being shipped to West Berlin, supposedly to be examined by a local entomologist. However, the man it was shipped to is actually dead, and the beetles seem to have escaped soon after the package was airlifted into West Berlin.

- On Easter (April 16), General Tunner plans to have a massive, continuous airlift, to demoralize the Soviets regarding the failure of their attempt to blockade West Berlin. Agent Patriot suspects Soviet occultists have gotten wind of this, and that Beelzebub is part of a plot to stop Tunner's operation through occult means.
- Before coming to West Berlin, Agent Patriot performed some occult research, and is fairly sure Beelzebub is not the same entity as Satan or Lucifer. He's not sure how this fact will come in handy, but he suspects it will.

The Players

Agent Patriot is a young and up-and-coming operative of the Agency, easily one of their best. He has been highly trained in virtually every mundane skill, not to mention he has received briefings on the "real" occult and on various extraterrestrial races. He is so highly competent and well-trained that he should be considered invincible for all practical purposes. Agent Patriot cannot die in the course of the story, tho he can seem to have died, only to re-appear later. Inevitably, he will defeat Beelzebub, and thwart the Soviet plot against the airlift, if any.

This does not mean that he will not have a difficult time of things. While extremely knowledgeable and skilled, Agent Patriot is merely human. He has no inherent supernatural or extraterrestrial powers. While it is inevitable that Agent Patriot defeat Beelzebub, like such pulp heroes as Doc Savage and The Shadow, it's not so much the fact that Agent Patriot wins, but *how* he wins. The fun is the ride, watching him get dug in deep and then seeing how he gets out of it.

A lot of time, the obstacle comes from his personality. Agent Patriot is a sarcastic curmudgeon, old before his time. While he

believes in Freedom, Justice, and the American Way, and would never want any innocent to come to harm, he is exasperated by the people he ends up having to work with, or end up following him around (i.e. his Companions). Another part of the fun is the interplay and tension between Patriot and his Companion.

He comes to West Berlin armed mostly with his wits and a fake identity of John Q. Patriot, an insurance salesman from USA Insurance Limited (a division of HídalgoCorp). He does have some items of use – a pistol, some rope, some wire, rations, candles, cigarettes, and some minor occult doodads – but he does not have much in the way of special equipment, except for the Plot Device, which will be explained later. (For those of you familiar with the Agent Patriot short stories written by myself and others, in 1949 Patriot had not yet acquired his signature weapon, aka "Mr. Decision Maker", or the pad of forms that allow him to requisition almost anything, or most of the other devices that have shown up in the stories, except for the Plot Device. What few devices he does have, like the confiscated negative orgone energy device he used against Beelzebub, he has left back in the US, as he fears that the Soviets will be able to detect any of the stranger magickal charms and fringe technology he uses. He has brought only the Plot Device.)

The Companion is someone allied with Agent Patriot, who is nowhere near as competent. The Companion may disagree with Patriot, but he is not an enemy – in the end, they are on the same side. Even if von Mises (the Companion at the start of the game) dies or is in some other way taken out of the action, Agent Patriot, no matter how fervently he wants to be alone, will always have a Companion.

As mentioned earlier, Lukas von Mises, the Companion at the start of the game, is an entomologist and West Berlin native, a young scholar who managed to survive the madness of his country without being tainted by Nazism, mostly by keeping his head down and burying himself in his work. His brother is more political, working for the Soviets but secretly spying for the Western powers. However, both von Mises brothers are, at heart, strongly anti-Communist, which is why Lukas agreed to help Agent Patriot. He, however, is completely unprepared to face down an

ancient demon, and should be played that way.

At the start of the game, flip a coin to decide who gets to be Agent Patriot and who gets to be the Companion, in the form of von Mises. Don't worry too much who gets what – generally each player will get a turn as one or the other, so you're not stuck in the role. Each player starts with zero Endgame Points (EPs) and will earn more in the course of the game. You can use tokens (pennies, candy, bullets, whatever) to represent EPs or you can just keep track of them on a piece of paper, like a scorepad. It will probably be helpful to keep the coin you flipped handy, as well as a watch or clock.

Basic Play

Each player takes on their individual roles, adding to the story in whatever way that they feel comfortable. They could verbally narrate the actions of the characters, act out bits of the story physically, engage in dialogue in the voice of the character, or even write down bits of the story. The players can switch between these techniques as they choose. The player who is currently Agent Patriot has full control over the character and full say over what happens to him, and the same goes for the Companion – anything that happens to the Companion can be vetoed by the Companion's player.

You can also discuss where you want the story to go between the two of you, without using the characters (yet) at all.

Everything else is up to negotiation. New characters can be introduced by either player, and are played by the player who introduced them into the scene. If one player objects to another player's contribution, flip a coin to determine which person's vision wins out. Try to keep it fast and flowing.

However, there are two things that you cannot do without formally invoking further rules:

1. Present a hurdle to Agent Patriot's mission.
2. Have Agent Patriot defeat Beelzebub

The rules that cover these situations are labeled Problems and Endgame

respectively, and are below, along with some other miscellaneous rules.

Problems

Only the Companion player may introduce an obstacle to Agent Patriot's mission, called a Problem or a "Capital-P Problem". Having the Companion character notice something usually does this. "Dear Lord, every one of this man's orifices are filled with maggots!"

The Companion player then indicates to the Agent Patriot player that this is a formal Problem in the rules sense by grinning in a manic fashion and saying "PROBLEM" in a loud, chirpy voice, while making a wild hand gesture.

The Agent Patriot player cannot object to a Capital-P Problem. He can only have Agent Patriot quickly and cleverly solve the Problem, or decide on a course of action that moves firmly toward solving the problem, preferably with some explanation of the source of the Problem if one hasn't already been provided. The player has thirty seconds to come up with Agent Patriot's solution and/or explanation. (This time limit can be adjusted up or down if both players agree beforehand, but should always been short enough to put time pressure on the Agent Patriot player.)

The solution must satisfy the Companion player, who should keep in mind while judging the solution that he will be judged later.

If the Agent Patriot player comes up with a solution in time and it meets the approval of the Companion player, then the Agent Patriot player earns one EP.

If the Agent Patriot player goes past the time limit or doesn't meet the approval of the Companion player, the Companion player has thirty seconds (or whatever's been agreed upon) to come up with a solution Agent Patriot can use. This is presented out-of-character, it's "really" just the solution that Agent Patriot comes up with, regardless of who currently controls Agent Patriot. This solution must meet the approval of the Agent Patriot player. If it does, and is within the time limit, the Companion player earns one EP.

If neither player can create a solution in time or to the satisfaction of the other

player, they must decide together on a solution, taking as much time as they want, so long as both of them agree on what the final solution is. In case of argument, do not flip a coin: Whichever player is willing to spend an EP (reducing the total by one – they cannot do this if their total is zero) wins the argument, and his or her "solution" becomes "reality" for the story.

Regardless of how the solution comes about, after the solution is introduced into the actual story, the *players switch roles*. That is, the Agent Patriot player becomes the Companion, and the Companion player becomes Agent Patriot. This has no effect on the actual characters, just on who is controlling them.

The Plot Device



The Plot Device is an unmarked black triangular object, with three buttons on the top. It can only be pulled out

of Agent Patriot's pocket by the Agent Patriot player (never by the Companion when making a counter-suggestion with regard to a solution to a Problem), and only in response to a Problem.

The first time the Agent Patriot player uses the Plot Device, he or she does not call it that. Instead, the player mimes pulling something out of a trenchcoat pocket, and describes Agent Patriot using the device, having Agent Patriot mention to the Companion character what the device is. *The Device is whatever Agent Patriot needs it to be at the time*. If Agent Patriot needs to detect ghosts, it's an Ectoplasm Meter. If Agent Patriot needs to destabilize genetic mutants, it's a DNA Flaw Enhancer. Whatever the Agent Patriot player needs it to be, it is.

For the rest of the game, the form of the Plot Device is then locked. It is what it was determined to be during its first use; if it was a Hostility Scrambler when it was first pulled out, it is now a Hostility Scrambler for the rest of the game. However, it can still be re-used by the Agent Patriot player to solve Problems.

Regardless, whenever the Agent Patriot player uses the Plot Device (and again, only the Agent Patriot player can suggest using it to solve a problem), no EPs are

earned by either player, and the roles of the players do *not* switch. This is the price for resorting to the Plot Device.

New Companions

Agent Patriot cannot be killed – he has plot immunity. But the Companion can be, so long as the Companion's player is okay with this – in fact, it's an excellent way to set up a Problem for the Agent Patriot player.

If in the middle of a Problem, the Companion is not replaced until after the Problem is solved and the players switch roles (assuming the Plot Device was not used). If not in the middle of a Problem, the Companion is replaced immediately.

The current Companion player chooses the new Companion. He or she can choose any of the characters that have been introduced before as a new Companion or invent a new character to become the Companion. The only stricture is that the character must ostensibly be on the same "side" as Patriot (tho that doesn't mean he or she must *like* Agent Patriot), and must have a good reason to follow Agent Patriot around or otherwise stay near Agent Patriot, at least until his mission is over. Both players must agree the Companion is suitable before play can continue.

The Laughter Rule

If one player gets the other player to laugh – laugh out loud, not just chuckle or smile – due to in-game actions of a character that the player controls, that player (the funny one, not the laughing one) gains 1 EP.

Metahumor Restriction

All characters in the game take what's going on seriously. The main form of in-character humor is sarcasm. Jokes that break the fourth wall – i.e. refer to the fact that the characters are characters in a role-playing game or a story, or imply situations aren't taken seriously by the characters, earn no EP even if someone laughs. In essence, the tone is parody and satire (mostly of the pulp genre), not sheer goofiness.

Endgame

Either player may declare Endgame at any point as long as certain conditions have been met by the story so far. Those conditions are:

- There have been at least five Problems
- At least one Problem involved Agent Patriot rescuing the Companion character
- The Companion character has provided at least one piece of useful information to Agent Patriot (usually about entomology)
- At least one Problem involved either Agent Patriot or the Companion character being accused of a crime he did not commit
- At least one Problem involved the Soviets
- The Plot Device has been used at least once
- At least one reference to April Fool's Day and/or "Operation Foole" has been made
- At least one Problem involved a former Nazi, recognized either by Agent Patriot or the Companion character

Assuming these conditions have been met, either player may declare Endgame at any point.

Once Endgame is declared, whichever player has the most Endgame Points must declare one player to be Narrator. She can declare either herself or the other player as Narrator – it's her choice.

The Narrator then narrates the final scene of the story, where Agent Patriot defeats Beelzebub. The Narrator has full authorial control over all characters, including BOTH Agent Patriot and Companion. The non-Narrator player is just an audience for the ending. The non-Narrator can, of course, suggest elements of the ending to the Narrator, but the Narrator is not required to listen.

After the scene is over and Agent Patriot has defeated Beelzebub, the game is over. Hopefully, you had fun along the way. Of course, at that point, you could play again to try to make the story go in a completely different way...