

Okhrana

A Story Game by Malcolm Craig

Okhrana

A Story Game of Espionage and Revolution

'Okhrana' takes place in the year 1899, in the City of Light: Paris.

Fleeing from persecution in their homeland, thousands of political émigrés from Czarist Russia have ended up here. But they are not alone.

For over fifteen years now, the Czarist secret police, the Okhrana, have been watching the émigrés, the revolutionaries, anarchists and assassins. They gather intelligence; they counter-plot, subvert, confuse and kill.

In Okhrana the players take the roles of both the revolutionaries and their shadowy tormentors, seeking to carry out their plans and execute their schemes, all the while avoiding the attentions of the men from the Motherland.

The Okhrana In Paris

In response to the assassination of Alexander II of Russia in 1881, the Czarist state formed the Okhrana. In the early days, its remit was to protect the person of the Czar, the royal family and the very institution of autocracy in Russia. But gradually, then with increasing speed, its mission expanded out to involve the infiltration, subversion and suppression of revolutionary, anarchist, independence and other groups throughout the Empire and beyond.

The Paris office opened in 1883, in a modest residence at 97 Rue de Grenelle, proving a western European base for the activities of this shadowy organisation. The Okhrana was adept at intelligence gathering, at espionage and in the use of the most modern police methods to achieve its aims. It had close ties with the French Surete Generale, which was at the time regarded as one of the foremost police agencies in Europe, if not the world.

The Okhrana employed three main methods in their work against émigré Russians. The first was naruzhnoe nabludenie or 'external surveillance'. In this they used teams of observers and informants, stakeouts, spy operations and the consultation of files held by the Surete. The second method was vnutrenniaia agentura or 'internal agency', where they cunningly planted their own men and women in subversive organisations or turned certain émigrés to be double agents and traitors against their own fellows. The final method was the use of agents provocateurs, seeming revolutionaries and activists sponsored by the Okhrana to carry out acts of political violence or unrest in order that the

secret police or their allies in the Surete could swoop in and 'resolve' the situation.

The key targets of the Okhrana office in Paris can be summarised, thusly:

Émigré and revolutionary groups operating outside the borders of the Russian Empire.

Known centres of conspiratorial activity, such as meeting houses, cafes, literary groups and so forth.

Revolutionaries arriving in Paris from Russia.

Russians with ties to known European socialists and socialist organizations.

Underground publishers and forgers (of passports, false identities, and so forth).

Bomb-manufacturing "factories and those concerned with the smuggling of weapons and explosives.

The City of Paris

In 1899, Paris is at the height of its golden age, the belle époque. The stunning grandeur of the wide boulevards envisaged by Haussmann contrasts starkly with the twilight world of the cabarets and cafes where conspirators from around the world meet to plot and scheme.

The streets and alleys around Montmartre throng with pleasure seekers, revolutionaries, plotters, policemen and secret agents. As impoverished artists lust after showgirls from the Moulin Rouge, equally impoverished would be world changers discuss their plans in steamy little cafes over a carafe of vin ordinaire.

Paris during the belle époque is a vibrant, lively dangerous, thrilling city. A city where it is only too easy for the Okhrana to machinate against the émigrés.

The Creation of Character

In Okhrana, no one person controls the game, everybody round the table gets the chance to input equally. Sometimes an individual will play the role of their protagonist, someone who acts against the Czarist regime. Sometimes they will be asked to play the role of a member of the Okhrana, one of their informers, a spy or an ally in the French police, the Surete Generale (these are known as antagonists).

Each player must create a protagonist for themselves. The protagonist is an individual upon who a story will focus. That story is told in the form of six scenes, with the story of each protagonist being told in order.

Creating a Protagonist

Protagonists are defined by the following terms:

Concept: A basic sketch, a line about the character, their name and maybe an origin.

Goal: What does the protagonist want to do? What is the main political ambition and what are they trying to achieve whilst they spend their time in Paris?

Motivation: What drives the protagonist on? What has caused them to reach this point in their life, to be in Paris at this time, doing what they do?

Fervour: Fervour represents political passion, will and the desire to see the struggle through.

Guile: Guile represents the cunning and wit of the protagonist. Their intelligence and ability to manipulate event around them, to gather what they need and execute their plans.

Doubt: Doubt opposes fervour and represents the gnawing worm of worry, fear and suspicion.

Stupidity: Stupidity opposes guile and represents all the bad decisions, reliance on poor intelligence and faulty planning that can plague even the best prepared political movement.

Each player should split 7 points between Guile and fervour.

Each player should also split 7 points between Doubt and Stupidity.

In each scene that takes place, there will be a conflict. To resolve the conflict, the protagonist will use one of their two positive attributes. They will be opposed by one of their negative attributes (plus certain advantages an antagonist may have). But you should be careful when creating a character! Each positive attribute must be used in at least 2 scenes out of 6. So putting all your eggs in one basket can be a dangerous move unless very careful planning is used!

Example Protagonist

Concept: Naftaly Timofeev, a Jewish anarchist whose family were killed in a pogrom.

Goal: To alert the world to the hideous atrocities being perpetrated in Russia.

Motivation: The sight of his mother and sister being dragged from the family home by Czarist army officers.

<i>Guile</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Stupidity</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Fervour</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>Doubt</i>	<i>4</i>

Creating Antagonists

Creating antagonists is slightly different from the creation of the protagonists.

Each player should fill in a slot on the antagonist sheet with the following information about an antagonist of their choice:

Name: Who the antagonist is.

Role: What is their role in the shady underworld of espionage, revolution and political scheming in Paris? Are they a member of the Okhrana? An informant? A double agent working alongside one of the protagonists? An officer of the Surete Generale?

Advantage: Each antagonist has an advantage. This is something that gives them an edge in a particular situation.

Once each of the players has created an antagonist, play can begin.

Example Antagonists

Name: Grigori Sedorov

Role: Okhrana agent and interrogator, a man of little moral conscience.

Advantage: Has little care for the wellbeing of others, so will use bystanders and other innocents to gain an advantage.

Name: Natalya Pomarenko

Role: A double agent within the revolutionaries in Paris.

Advantage: A beautiful woman, she can gain the confidence of men with ease and grace.

Scenes

The structure of Okhrana is formalised into six scenes. Either a player taking the role of a protagonist or a player taking the role of an antagonist must set the scene, describing where it takes place, who is involved, what the conflict in the scene will be.

Every scene should involve some movement or action on the part of both a protagonist and the Okhrana (or their minions and allies). They do not necessarily have to be even in the same location, but the activities must be related: the Okhrana or their allies will be investigating or hindering the activities of the protagonist

The game should start with one player, in the role of their own protagonist, setting the first scene (Foreshadowing & Discovery). Once this scene has been resolved, play moves round to the next player, where they can take the role of their protagonist and enact the first scene in their story. Play should move around the table, with successive protagonists being involved in their own scenes.

The 'scene setter' in any given scene is the player who describes the location, dramatis personae and the conflict that will take place within the scene. Some scenes can be set by someone in the role of a protagonist, others in the role of an antagonist.

When play has proceeded round through all players, everyone getting the chance to play out the first scene for their protagonist, play moves on to the second scene (Preparations & Tension). In the second scene the player whose protagonist will be involved

must ask someone to select an antagonist and they (the person playing the role of the antagonist) must set the scene for them.

Example

There are three players around the table: Doug, Lucy and Dave. Play started with Doug setting the scene for his protagonist, the scene was resolved and play moves on to Lucy setting the first scene for her protagonist. Finally, Dave sets the scene for his protagonist and the first round of scenes is complete.

It is now Scene Two and Doug's protagonist is once more involved. But in scene two, an antagonist sets the scene, so Doug asks Dave to pick an antagonist from those created earlier and set the scene. The scene is then resolved. Play moves on to Lucy's protagonist and she asks Doug to pick an antagonist and set the scene. Once this scene is resolved, play finally moves round to Dave's protagonist, who asks Lucy to select an antagonist and set the scene.

In any scene, the player whose protagonist is involved should ask other players to take the role of other characters within the scene, be they allies, enemies or those whose allegiance is unknown. One player must always be playing the named antagonist who was chosen for the scene.

Every scene should always involve a named antagonist from the list created at the very start of the game. Once all the named antagonists created at the start of the game have appeared at least once, new antagonists may be created in the same manner

and added to the list for use as the game progresses. This does not preclude the further appearance of existing antagonists.

Scene 1: Foreshadowing & Discovery

Scene setter: Protagonist

Where the protagonist finds that they are subject to the attentions of the Okhrana and their minions.

In this scene, we get to hear what the plans of the protagonist are and what their intentions might be. They also begin to understand that the Okhrana may be trying to infiltrate or subvert their group, find out their plans or disrupt their schemes in some way. They may even begin to understand that their lives could be in danger.

Success for protagonist: Gain fervour

Success for antagonist: Gain doubt

Scene 2: Preparations & tension

Scene setter: Antagonist

Where the protagonist formulates their plans, but the Okhrana draw closer.

As the protagonist prepares and plans their political schemes, the Okhrana, its minions and allies delves deviously into their murky

world. They are more than keen to gather intelligence on the operations of these political undesirables.

Success for protagonist: Gain guile

Success for antagonist: Gain stupidity

Scene 3: The first action

Scene setter: Protagonist

Where the protagonist instigates the first phase of action in their plan.

The first phase of the plan being formulated by the protagonist comes to fruition. But how has it been affected by the devious espionage of the Okhrana? Has the plan been infiltrated by double agents and informers? Who can really be trusted? And as for the first phase of the plan itself, what is the outcome?

Success for protagonist: Gain fervour

Success for antagonist: Gain doubt

Scene 4: Increasing attention

Scene setter: Antagonist

Where the Okhrana become all the more interested after the events of the First Action.

Following on from the events in the previous scene, the agents of the Okhrana become even more interested in the activities of the protagonist. The tension increases markedly as their methods become more assured and devious. Or perhaps they become more desperate and unsubtle as the success of the first action bites them where it hurts the most.

Success for protagonist: Gain guile

Success for antagonist: Gain stupidity

Scene 5: The second action

Scene Setter: Protagonist

Where plans reach fruition or disaster for the Protagonist and the Okhrana make their final moves.

This should be the culmination of the protagonist's activities in Paris. It may not yet be the complete success of their goals, but it could be a huge step towards success and heroic return to the motherland. Or perhaps things teeter on the edge of disaster, propelled along by the inertia of previous events.

Success for protagonist: Gain fervour & guile

Success for antagonist: Gain doubt and stupidity

Scene 6: Epilogue, for better or worse

Scene Setter: Protagonist

Where the outcome of the proceeding scenes is decided: will it be success, arrest, deportation or worse?

The end of the story told by the protagonist. What is the final outcome? Are they sidelined in a revolutionary rush? Are they hailed as a hero? Do they die alone and desperate or are they whisked away by train to live out their lives in a katorga somewhere in the eastern vastness of Russia?

(see: 'Resolving the Epilogue')

Resolving Scenes

Scene are resolved in favour of the protagonist or antagonist by the drawing of cards from a standard deck.

The player of the protagonist in the scene must draw a number of cards equal to the positive attribute they are using in that scene. The player taking the role of the lead antagonist in the scene must draw a number of cards equal to the opposing, negative attribute that is being used.

Should the antagonist have an advantage which has previously been narrated into the scene, then they can take one additional card.

The side with the greatest number of black cards in the winner. In the event of a tie, the antagonist always wins.

The side with the highest card showing on the table after success has been decided always gets to narrate the outcome of the scene: telling the story of what happens.

It should always be remembered that the events of one scene should feed in to the next scene involving that protagonist.

Resolving the Epilogue

Guile > Stupidity

Fervour > Doubt

If the above is the case, then the protagonist can consider their plans a complete success. They have foiled the machinations of the Okhrana and their minions and successfully carried out their plans.

Guile > Stupidity

Fervour < Doubt

If the above is the case, then the plans of the protagonist are a moderate success, but they are plagued with nagging doubts about what has transpired. It is likely that, although they have achieved success, they have been usurped by other political figures and their contribution is minimised and sidelined.

Guile < Stupidity
Fervour > Doubt

If the above is the case, then the plans fail, but this does not affect the political will of the protagonist. However, their schemes have lead to the arrest of some close to them, perhaps their own families, friends, political allies and so on. They may have to go on the run and flee Paris for other parts of Europe.

Guile < Stupidity
Fervour < Doubt

If the above transpires, then the plans were a total failure. The protagonist has fallen firmly into the clutches of the Okhrana and a terrible fate awaits: imprisonment, torture, the revealing of allies, maybe even execution.

Protagonist Sheet

Concept:

Goal:

Motivation:

Fervour:

Doubt:

Guile:

Stupidity:

Scene

Outcome

Scene 1: Foreshadowing & Discovery

Scene 2: Preparations & tension

Scene 3: The first action

Scene 4: Increasing attention

Scene 5: The second action

Scene 6: Epilogue, for better or worse

Antagonist Sheet

Name

Role

Advantage