# The Eye in the Pyramid

## A game of creating and revealing conspiracies

By David Berg (bobsurface at gmail)

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Key words: Skull, Old

Brainstorm: fossils, relics, artifacts; cranial cavity, knowledge, knowledge gaps; stuff from the past that matters now

Synthesis: knowledge & knowledge gaps + history = forgotten knowledge, secrets, relevant mysteries of the past = conspiracies

**Pitch:** A good conspiracy hunt is one in which connections keep appearing, as analogies and patterns suggest an awesome and terrible scope to secretive machinations.  *"What?  The United States was founded to further a secret plan of the Rosicrucians?  You can see it in the layout of Philadelphia?"*  Let's do that!

**Note: This rules text is written assuming 4 players.**  Every mechanical quantity in the game is based on that.  To add or subtract players, basically add or subtract that amount from every number in the game.

### Step 1: Intro

This is a game about the piecing together of disparate fragments to reveal threatening conspiracies.  The characters are vehicles for turning this process of creation and revelation into a narrative.  The tone of that narrative is up to the group.  My biggest influences are Illuminatus! and Foucault's Pendulum, but feel free to draw inspiration from other far-reaching conspiracy fiction.  The following movies come to mind: Indiana Jones (Raiders & Last Crusade), The Da Vinci Code, Stigmata, Shutter Island, Sherlock Holmes.

Discuss this as a group and agree on roughly how much action, comedy, horror, and creepiness you want in your game.

You can do this before, during, or after reading the following aloud:

*"Your four characters are the foremost experts in your fields of knowledge.  Their expertise has given them the perspective to see what others do not; that the bad things happening in the world today are related, and intentional.  Earthquakes in Haiti.  Bombings in the Middle East.  Rigged elections worldwide.  Religious predictions.  Omissions in the nightly news.  Articles about the odd rituals of a local gang or cult.  Inscrutable investments of the ultra-wealthy.  Unexplained troop deployments and*

*government helicopter flights.  Each character believes in a secret organization which they suspect is responsible.  Each character has probed into this, and each character has paid a price.*

*"Now they have found each other, and determined to get to the bottom of this plot.  Though they suspect different culprits, they all agree that the threat is dire – manipulation, domination or destruction on a truly grand scale.  It's time to go hunt down the truth."*

Which conspiracies will turn out to be bumbled, small fries, pawns, or heroes, and which conspiracy will turn out to be the mastermind of the current threat?

## Step 2: Brainstorm Conspiracy Origins

Each player chooses an **era** from the following options, so that all 4 are covered:

**Ancient** - before 453 AD (fall of Rome)
**Distant** - between 453 and 1899
**Recent** - 20th century
**Current** – 2011

Each player then comes up with a time and place for the **origin** or heart of their conspiracy, as well as an identity for the organization responsible.  These first details are shared among the players, and are subject to group approval.  The two relevant standards are (1) whether it fits with the group's chosen tone, and (2) whether each conspiracy's **controller** thinks they can quickly churn out fiction based on it.  The most important point is to *choose something that inspires you!*

You will basically be the GM of the game when the conspiracy you control is being investigated.

*Example: The Knights Templar*

## Step 3: Flesh Out Conspiracies

Once the broad strokes are settled, each player should then secretly define and jot down the following for their conspiracy:

The organization's name

Their general aim and reason for being

The specific goal they're working on now (some version of control/destroy world/country)

3 items on their to-do list toward this goal (causality can be left vague)

Their mask or front -- who they pretend to be (bank, mafia, scholars, church, delivery svc., etc.)

Their symbol or hallmark (eye in pyramid, sextant, raven, the number 12, etc.)

3 locations where their secrets can be pursued in play (sewers, museums, Antarctica, etc.)

3 attacks they use to thwart their opponents (dogs or thugs or snipers to injure you; computer networks to delete your records; media or law enforcement to frame you; etc.)


**Step 4: Create Characters**

Each player creates a character who is an expert on a given conspiracy **origin**. This must be different than the conspiracy you **control**, and all four conspiracies must be accounted for.

In addition to their field of expertise, give your character a name, and answer the following:

*What have you lost, that you blame on the conspiracy? What are compelled to do about it?*

These losses should be seen by the character as conspiracy acts of (1) suppressing information, destroying their trail, thwarting efforts to unravel their secret, (2) intimidation to discourage pursuit, (3) punishment for probing too much, or (4) random collateral damage, like your kid falling in with some cult or your wife being killed in a bombing.

Things to lose:

colleague(s), contact(s)
support for studies (e.g. funding)
books, files, hard drives, papers
security (home invasion, property destruction, threats)
friend, spouse, child

Compulsions:

find and recover the stolen
save or fix the corrupted, tricked, or brainwashed
eliminate the threat
avenge the destroyed

*Sample character:*

*Susan Greenwood*

*Expert on the Knights Templar*

*Has been threatened with death by home-invading men in black; needs to stop their boss before they come for her again.*

**Note:** Your character's fate does not depend on how capable you make them, or on how you roleplay them beyond using them to contribute conspiracy theories. As long as you care about thwarting the conspiracy, how much you invest in your character is up to you.

**Step 5: Choose Patterns**

Roll randomly on the following table 4 times to generate 4 patterns of recurring themes across the 4 conspiracies.  Write each chosen pattern on a scrap of paper where everyone can see it.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | emerald |
| 2 | police |
| 3 | the number 3 |
| 4 | city planning |
| 5 | the number 5 |
| 6 | signals from space |
| 7 | the number 7 |
| 8 | the U.S. govt |
| 9 | the Chinese govt |
| 10 | the N. Korean govt |
| 11 | the Iranian govt |
| 12 | the Israeli govt |
| 13 | Hamas |
| 14 | Al Qaeda |
| 15 | drug culture |
| 16 | rock music |
| 17 | TV news |
| 18 | media corporations |
| 19 | advertising firms |
| 20 | science fiction |
| 21 | houses of worship |
| 22 | religious texts |
| 23 | the number 23 |
| 24 | tarot |
| 25 | astrology |
| 26 | hallucinations |
| 27 | natural disasters |
| 28 | global warming |
| 29 | cancer |
| 30 | ritual sacrifice |
| 31 | power plants |
| 32 | gold |
| 33 | birth |
| 34 | burning |
| 35 | purification |
| 36 | metamorphosis |

**Step 6: Create Elements**

Guided by your discussions on tone and the conspiracy origins, create one object or phenomenon inspired by each of the four patterns on the table. Each such element should be written on a scrap of paper and placed face down in a central pile.

**Step 7: Create and Introduce first elements**

Each player writes one recent bad news event (can be from real life or not) that was the most recent catalyst for their character to believe in a conspiracy and come forward to stop it. Each such element should be written on a scrap of paper and placed face up in the center of the table.

**Step 8: Queue up Revelations and Tokens**

On separate paper scraps, write each era 5 times, for a total of 20 scraps. Fold. Pick randomly out of a hat, laying face-down in a sequence of 4 positions. These are your narrative's 5 revelations, the points at which a new conspiracy will be implicated. The 5$^{th}$ position holds the final, true conspiracy behind it all.

Design note: manipulating these would be cool...

Throw out the unused scraps and fill the hat with 16 tokens.

Also give each player one token (so you need 20 total to play).

**Step 9: Play the First Scene**

The characters have assembled and are discussing their theories and the recent awful occurrences. Establish who everyone is and get thinking about the conspiracies! When each character is asked about their conspiracy of expertise, their player should ask that conspiracy's controller questions to prompt the character's answers. "Do I know that? Do I have reasons to suspect a particular answer?" This is a chance for each controller to get a feel for managing the info reveal and for introducing mysteries.

After every character has shared their theories, it is obvious that an investigation is necessary. But where to start? Flip over the first **revelation**. Whichever era appears, the corresponding conspiracy is the characters' first object of pursuit.

**Step 10: Playing Investigation Scenes**

The **controller** of the active conspiracy takes a moment to consult their conspiracy notes, choose a location, and grab as many as four **elements** from the pile. When ready, the controller frames the scene, and plays at least one element face-up next to the other elements already in play (so, at the start of the first investigation scene, that will just be the four "bad news" elements).

The players roleplay their characters exploring this location, by asking the controller questions, and by having dialogue with the other characters. Dialogue should be heavy on theories! This will get easier as play proceeds; in the early scenes, you will need to be very creative.

The controller will play a total of 4 elements (drawn before or during the investigation) during the course of each investigation. Pacing and cuts are up to the controller. You can bring out a new element the second the characters have finished analyzing the last one, or you can show off your creepy location, say, "You find nothing else before leaving, but five years later…" That said, the easiest solution is likely the best: follow the other players' lead.

After the 4th element has been played, the controller will count to ten and then unleash an **attack**.

At any time during investigation, any person at the table can narrate a **connection** between two elements on the table. The first other player to understand this connection and judge it to be acceptable (i.e., not hideously contrived or tone-inappropriate) reaches into the hat and gives a token to the player who narrated the connection.

Connections need to be plausibly right at the time, but they needn't be true at the end of the game. Controllers are encouraged to milk them for inspiration or use them wholesale, but neither is a strict requirement.

Connections must always be shared with all players, but which characters know them is up to the connection's narrator. That means that all of the following are permitted:

1) My character tells all the characters his theory. He says…
2) My character forms a theory, but doesn't say anything. His theory is…
3) Meanwhile, elsewhere, a withered hand places a raven skull on the Necronomicon.

Once an **attack** is unleashed, its **power** is determined (see below). For each player who has fewer tokens than that power number, they lose a token. Going down to zero tokens means their character suffers a severe, permanent loss, dictated by the type of attack. "Losing a token" when you have no tokens means your character dies.

After an attack's results are resolved, the next **revelation** is flipped over. This determines the new controller. The new controller narrates how the characters survive the attack and discover the clue that implicates the revealed conspiracy. If the revealed conspiracy is the one the characters were already investigating, the revelation is further evidence that, yes, this conspiracy is indeed up to no good.

Play then breaks briefly while the new controller prepares to frame the next scene.

**Power:**

An attack's power is based on the game's position on the revelations track. If one revelation has been flipped face-up, the attack's base power is 1. When the fourth revelation has been flipped, the attack's base power is 4.

An attack's base power is modified by a coin flip: heads = -1 power, tails = +1 power.


**Final Attack and Revelation:**

The 4th attack is the final conflict of the game. The controller should establish the form of the attack. Everyone should compare the attack's base power to their own tokens, determining which characters are at risk of death.

Then, before the coin flip for the attack, flip the 5th and final revelation to show the true conspiracy behind it all.

If the character who is an expert in the true conspiracy survives the 4th attack, the conspiracy is defeated! That conspiracy's controller describes a finding that enables the characters to do this. The character players narrate how they save the day, and the conspiracy's controller returns anything that the conspiracy had stolen from them.

If the character who is an expert in the true conspiracy is dead, the characters fall prey to the true conspiracy. That conspiracy's controller describes how it does whatever it wants with our poor heroes.

**Alternate method:** establish who survives first, then reveal true conspiracy.