

TOP SECRET
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(Agent's Note— *The document you are about to read is one of the most incriminating pieces of evidence available linking "The Administrator" to his own TOP SECRET organization. If you found the first document—exposed in The Dragon #38— to your tastes, this one will provide a full course dinner!*)

SECURITY CLEARANCE LEVEL: TEN IN ALL BUREAUS

BEGIN MESSAGE

TO: TOP SECRET operatives and participants

BY AUTHORITY OF: Merle M. Rasmussen, Director of Administration

PURPOSE: To provide an organizational history memorandum for *TOP SECRET* operatives and prospective participants.

MESSAGE: Since childhood, the clandestine lifestyles and adventures of espionage agents have held my interest. I grew up with Napoleon Solo, Illya Kuyakin, Maxwell Smart, Derek Flint, and of course, James Bond. Hours were spent in front of the television, watching their exploits, when I wasn't reading about them in books.

I tried to imitate their adventures by building electric eyes and alarms, picking locks, and practicing underwater swimming techniques. I became adept in archery and riflanship and collected knives as a hobby.

By the time I went to college at Iowa State, I was spending my

The Rasmussen Files: From Spy World to Sprechenthaltestelle

time matching wits with others in chess, *Third Reich*, *Diplomacy*, and *Clue*. It was during this time that a friend, James Thompson, showed me a copy of *Dungeons & Dragons*. I was very impressed with the idea of playing a single person (fighter, magic-user, or cleric) in a world of adventure, instead of just pushing a cardboard infantry division across a map.

Later, Thompson also showed me a copy of *Boot Hill*. Again, the idea of role-playing was awakening the muse inside of me.

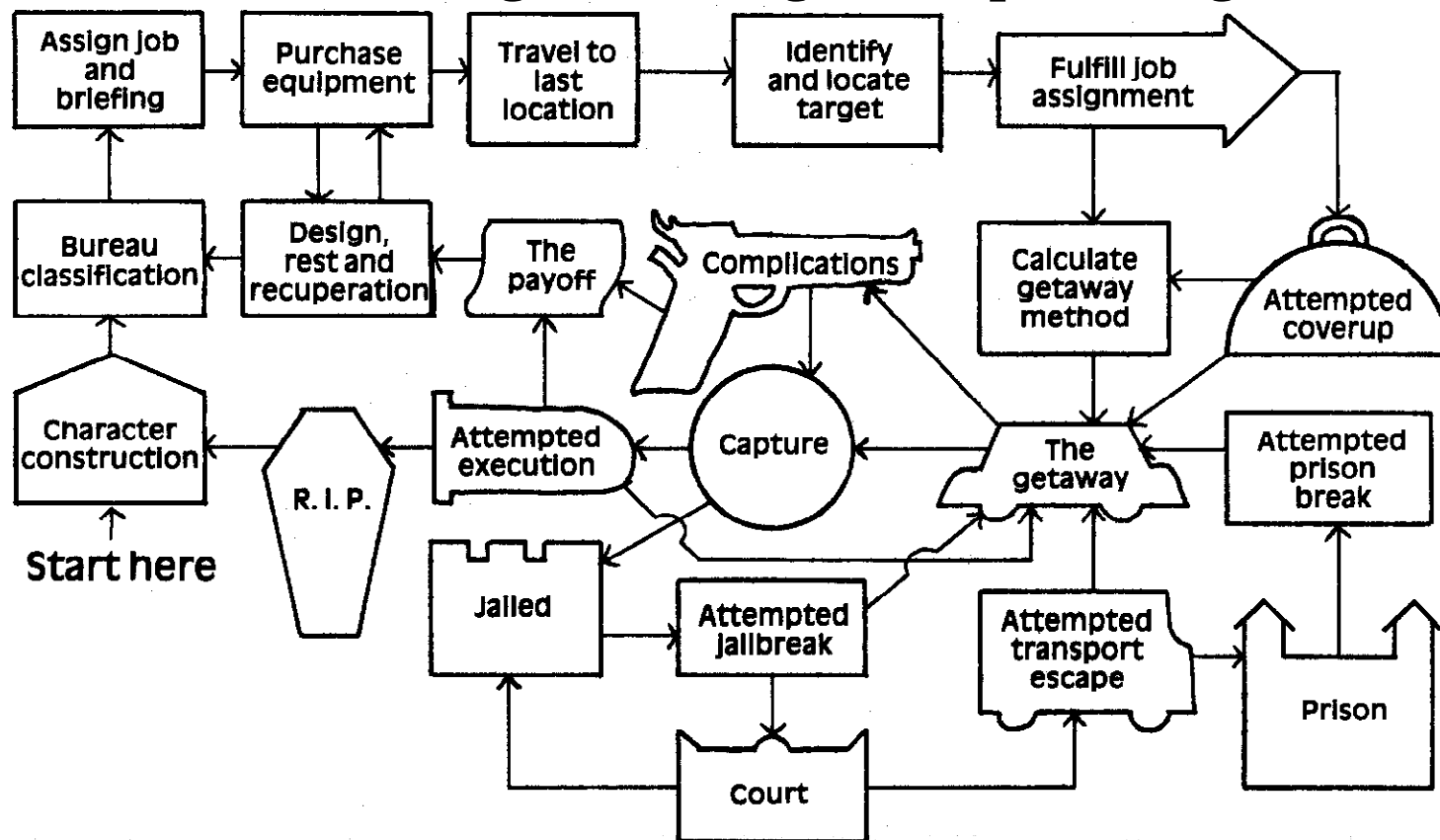
I began to wonder if the role-playing system could be used in other genres. It was then that the idea of an espionage role-playing game was born.

I put in many long hours of research. It is amazing what you can find on the back shelves of a library. Charts and tables on armor penetration and muzzle velocities captivated my interests. I blended into the college crowds, tailed indoor-track stars, and explored campus buildings and drainage sewers—by flashlight—in the middle of the night. And after a few months, I had enough information to begin the writing process.

Further research began and continued for many months afterward. My files bulged with scraps of paper listing espionage activities, possible wages, price lists, and many, many flow charts. Most notes dated back to late 1975/early 1976, but the game continually expanded, right up to the time it was published in February 1980.

When first cataloguing the reams of notes into a form of playable game, I found it particularly helpful to use logical organization. Flow

Schematic diagram of original Top Secret game



charts helped to structure all facets of espionage activity, with very little difficulty. The entire process provided a sequence of events that could be followed from Character Construction to Rest and Recuperation, with each event having a separate sub-flow chart.

The player can follow the flow chart through its various events, using a marker to represent the agent. The agent would carry out the steps in the sub-flow chart and then proceed to another step.

The system worked remarkably well, but the game lacked the vitality of other role-playing games. The gremlin which had crept into the game was that of randomness. The way the game was built, Admins competed with Assassins and Confiscators; thus, the Admin could not be the gamemaster and set up the situations. So the system was handled randomly.

The problem was quickly remedied through playtesting, which began in mid-1976. James Thompson was the prime motivating factor in the removal of the Admin to gamemaster duties, through his assassination of several Administrators during payoffs.

Playtesting was the most important part of *Spy World's* (as it was originally called) development. Without it, I would have never found what ideas worked or failed. But through playtesting, several "bugs" were eliminated before they could ruin the game. To illustrate the game's development, I have found notes on playtesting sessions which point out the major difficulties encountered and the effect that each had upon the game.

CASE 1: Jackal's mission was to hijack a tank located on a fishing trawler off the coast of Asia. He would be paid \$1140 for the completed job and spends \$570 on equipment. Jackal, played by James Thompson, has a 35% chance of getting on the trawler and a 73% chance of unloading the tank.

The percentile dice would be rolled to determine Jackal's success or failure and that would be it: mission completed. But Thompson had other things planned and immediately undermined the simple, random chances of success through his self-instituted version of the game.

Jackal gained control of the trawler (killing everyone on it) and then steamed for shore, where he unloaded the tank. He then pirated the boat, rather than return for Rest and Recuperation. Using his ill-begotten craft as a vehicle of transportation on later missions, he plied the world's oceans, terrorizing coastlines like a 20th-century Viking.

EFFECT 1: Thompson's agents—Jackal and later Pong—helped to flesh out the skeletal rule system of *Spy World*. Do away with the Admin as a player character and institute a real role-playing game, rather than one which was based upon chance.

His conniving characters tested the validity of almost every rule in the game, and *Spy World* was much improved because of it.

After a year of pre-submission playtesting, *Spy World* was sent to TSR Hobbies, Inc. for possible publication. Once there, the title for the game was thrown out, but then no one could think of a good title. Finally, Mike Carr claimed the title was "top secret" and couldn't be revealed at the present time. The words "top secret" stuck and that became the game's working title.

It spent many months in development. Under the stem pen of Allen Hammack, the weapon lists were expanded, the combat system was worked and reworked, and a hundred pages of superfluous rules were deleted from the text.

CASE 2: In March 1979, *Top Secret* made its debut at Spring Revel II. I convinced one daring fellow from Pella, Iowa, to try my new spy game. We played Sprechenhaltestelle in a secluded area, since there was no space to play at the Rail Baron table, where I met him.

His solo mission went well and, I believe, he liked the game after only two or three hours. Soon, two other misplaced gamers found themselves in my alleyways and we played for a few more hours. Bursts of laughter, shouts of merciless glee attracted the attention of other gamers who were wandering down the halls. When the game ended, my three new acquaintances remarked that they couldn't wait to see it in print.

It was during the same convention that the Silencer, Tsuji, Wes Smith, the Inquisitor, Rachet, and the Shadow took to the darkened thoroughfares of Sprechenhaltestelle. They were each given a hand-

gun, one special device, a small amount of money, and transportation to the city.

First, they scouted the crime district by van before parking it to cover the ground in detail on foot. They entered the area in small groups which communicated by walkie-talkie.

Eventually the groups approached a sparsely populated outdoor cafe. Some of the agents took up positions outside, sitting at the dining tables. The others entered the inner dining room and sat down.

The Shadow made her way to the powder room to investigate the kitchen, while the others distracted the waiter. Through some very fast talking, Tsuji made his way into the kitchen. He tried to fool the cook into thinking that he was a public health inspector, which tied the cook up long enough for the Silencer to sneak down the cellar stairs.

Bullets started to fly when the cook wasn't fooled by Tsuji's false cover. The wine steward, the cook, and the waiter all bought the farm on the cellar stairs in a wild turkey-shoot. During the combat that ensued, agents were seen tackling, dodging, and returning fire on the unprotected hirelings.

Meanwhile, one of the agents used a suggestion mentioned in a rumor to activate a sinking table in the outer cafe. It found its way below street level, where a mysterious woman and an unconscious man were rescued from prison cells.

The groups rejoined shortly thereafter and made for the van, which they had parked off the streets of Sprechenhaltestelle, with their rescued additions in tow.

Pursuit was heard but not seen as everyone was getting into the van. Once safely out of the district, the woman was injected with truth serum (she lapsed into unconsciousness, but was later discovered to be a Soviet counterspy captured by accident). The unconscious man was found to be a valuable politician, but he died shortly after his rescue.

The task force was fairly successful at surviving and left behind them at least three enemy agents who would never live to tell about it.

In the infamous words of Tsuji, "This reminds me of a Spaghetti Western."

(Agent's Note—*This report was transmitted while I was under the employment of "the Administrator." The message was badly garbled and the task force, unfortunately, never made another report. We think that someone was extremely upset with their discoveries, but I think it was Rasmussen who masterminded their demise (?). It was the belief of the organization, at that time anyway, that some of the names were incorrectly deciphered.*)

EFFECT 2: Spring Revel II playtesting revealed many new ideas and also provided a good example of team effort and play. One of the most supported additions to the *Top Secret* rules was a section on a "technical bureau." Agents in this bureau are jacks-of-all-trades, but must pay for their training by attending "espionage college."

The technical bureau was an interesting concept which was not included in the *Top Secret* rules, but will probably find its way into a later addition, if interest is voiced in that area. The proposed idea was to present a college-style espionage coursebook, which agents could join. And in return for their time and money, they could gain valuable skills and training in such areas as Demolitions, Safecracking, Animal Handling, Acting (Disguises), Martial Arts, Weaponry Engineering, etc.

It wasn't until many months after Spring Revel that I decided to do some work on the subject, but the option to include it in *Top Secret* rested mainly with TSR; they vetoed it.

However, an example from the *Espionage College-Course Handbook* is shown for those persons interested in the idea.

CASE 3: By the time that GenCon XII was to be held, Allen Hammack and I were planning a double-blind tournament using *Sprechenhaltestelle*. Each team was designed to have four members (one agent on each side was a double agent, capable of contacting his teammates electronically) and conflicting objectives.

Eight lucky players were in attendance when the two judges split them into two groups and led them to separate rooms for the game

session. James Pong was present and served as a liaison, taking messages to each judge and relating the events between the two rooms. A bevy of onlookers had started to gather together, waiting for the action to begin. They didn't have long to wait.

Hammack's team was assigned the job of rescuing and escorting a Soviet defector out of Sprechenhaltestelle, while my team was to assassinate the same defector. The rescuers worked together (reminders of Spring Revel II) and, except for barging into a casino with guns drawn, completed their mission without much of a problem.

On the other hand, my group of torpedos wound up in a bar, plagued with paranoia. When one of the members tried to establish some sort of control, he was killed by the others. When the smoke cleared, two agents had died and the attention of Hammack's team was drawn toward their location (excessive gunfire).

When the rescuers arrived, they captured one of the assassins who was wounded and he talked his way out of being immediately liquidated. The last of the would-be killers is still squishing his way

through the storm sewers of Sprechenhaltestelle, and probably will do so until the rats get up enough nerve to attack him.

EFFECT 3: It was discovered that through double-blind play the most enjoyment is derived from *Top Secret*. It was also discovered that the rules were fairly stable and covered most aspects of play. It also proved my basic theory that *D&D* players approach all role-playing games with the same philosophy of "hack and slay everything that moves," unless the players really work at it. *Top Secret* is a game that takes a little more finesse than is normally used in fantasy role-playing games.

In *Top Secret*, killing *anyone* just might destroy the most important contact (and inherent information) in a "web" of espionage agents. Information is usually more valuable than in other FRP games, as it will usually lead the agents to the important ringleaders behind the operations they are investigating. Of course, beginning agents should not concern themselves too much with collecting information before acting, but experienced agents should make

A page from the Espionage College-Course Handbook

CONFISCATION

Course: Animal Handling

cost: \$5,000

Time: 5 weeks

Prerequisite: Knowledge 25 or above; Courage 25 or above; Animal Science Knowledge 50 or above; and Fish and Wildlife Knowledge 50 or above.

Ability acquired: Given six or fewer birds or mammals, the agent will be able to either make them attack or prevent them from attacking 75% of the time. Given a single fish or reptile, the agent will be able to overpower the animal 75% of the time. Courage + (1-10). Physical Strength + (1-10).

Area of knowledge increase: Animal Science + (1-10), Fish and Wildlife + (1-10).

Credit: 70 Experience Points

Course: Cryptography & Forgery

cost: \$9,000

Time: 6 weeks

Prerequisite: Knowledge 50 or above; Coordination 75 or above; Fine Arts Knowledge 75 or above; Metallurgy Knowledge 75 or above; Photography Knowledge 50 or above; Arts and Crafts Knowledge 75 or above.

Ability acquired: Given an original example of the printed material to be duplicated and the necessary equipment and supplies to work with, any signature, document, blueprint, or any other printed material can be duplicated with 95% accuracy (85% for paintings and sculpture). If given a simple code or cipher and at least a microprocessor and a sufficient amount of time, any code or cipher can be broken 75% of the time.

attempts to unravel the invisible communications web that is inherent in every espionage operation. They can then execute their missions in the area with full confidence that they have assassinated the key members of an organization, bombed the correct building, have established surveillance on the proper target, etc.

CASE 4: It was shortly after *Top Secret* was published in February 1980 that a group of players met at my home for one of the most bizarre games of *Sprechenhaltestelle* that I have ever witnessed.

The group made their way into *Sprechenhaltestelle* on foot, near the witching hour (most of them were avid *D&Ds*). They made their way, cat-like, to the back of a wine shop, where they broke in and killed the owner as he awoke.

They found a set of hidden stairs leading into the basement and tried to descend after tossing a gas capsule into the darkness. One lively confiscator, too eager to consider his personal health, entered the basement with no ill effects due to gas. However, the others who followed found the gas too strong for them. They shouted directions to the confiscator from the stairwell, waking up the sleepers in their hidden bungalow.

The confiscator opened a cask of wine, only to be met by an avalanche of dried and broken bones. Being a confiscator, he took one of them with him.

When the gas had cleared enough to allow passage through the room, the group dispatched a guard who waited in ambush. They then proceeded to open each cask of wine they found and discovered a passageway inside one of them.

The passage led to an underground shopping center full of weaponry, equipment, and special devices. The bone-wielding confiscator brutally murdered a half-asleep employee of the compound.

The other agents in the group began hurriedly filling their pockets and packs with a variety of equipment. They were so enthralled by the abundance of free gear that they didn't even notice one of their own number leaving them for the safety of the ground level. Moments later, tons of wall separated from the foundations and chocked the underground area with rubble and dust.

The evacuating agent, now wearing a smirk of satisfaction, has planted a demolition charge in the explosives area of the arsenal, touching off 45 pounds of plastic explosives. Ten feet of solid stone-work slammed into four agents, killing one instantly and injuring the others.

The entire group evacuated the underground to track down the turncoat and in a later game riddled his flesh so full of holes that he could have been used to sift flour.

EFFECT 4: This is not the ideal way to carry out a mission, but it does help point out that *Top Secret* is very unpredictable. The players had more trouble in dealing with teammates than they did with the denizen of *Sprechenhaltestelle*. It was only after talking with the players afterwards that I found that the communication web, at least as it was explained to the players of *Sprechenhaltestelle*, was not a very clear description of what was actually going on. No one knew that a web existed for them to investigate; therefore, the group had no definite objective (sorry, guys).

My final advice to anyone who plays *Top Secret* is to just enjoy the game, without taking the outcome of each session too seriously. The result of paranoia is almost always failure, as it is for disorganization. But the rewards for success far outweigh the bad, so everyone should use a clear head when playing *Top Secret*, and enjoy. That is all!

END MESSAGE

END PAGE

(Agent's Note— *There is a lot more evidence of Rasmussen's corruption than that which is presented here. If positive feedback is received from readers, I will reveal more of his heinous secrets.*

Recently, I intercepted from "the Administrator" a message which was in code. Since his organization has changed the key to its codes, I have not been able to figure it out; perhaps some of you can. From past dealings with Rasmussen I would guess that this is a double cipher—it uses separate syllable codes and alphabetical codes—and a postscript. I will try to find the key, but I have doubts of my own success.)

* * *

"D.T. On ces teri ce ly erdastoan nder tureani ces weed neldatorb wond ly *Ced Degmen* horit. O ceca tirgvasep nder the ostsases of tureani wcu quwrt ly dentanor tgcenari torto orv orgastoant ostu ly hori degaleny ceca uggasted palerb ly emderto. Gvude ntehh relwest sery ony dtedorigcoan hal ly dentanor horit tu O el rucohyorb orv hoivp eberst ce wergc hal haname Eplorontnecoan Mameea degaleny orhlerbirestt. Ortu, werge hal haname arhogoor *Ced Degmen* lupari meriesas hlal NTS Cummoas, 'The Bere Wofoft'. Nder ot orv!"

And from Sprechenhaltestelle to . . .?

Paul Montgomery Crabaugh

"Space shuttles are built in California by Drax Industries?"
"Yes."

"Then California must be the place to start."

"Very well. Then off you go, 007. Oh, and James?"

"Sir?"

"No slip-ups. The situation is critical. "

That was how the *Moonraker* affair began, as far as James Bond was concerned. It didn't stop in California, though. What he found in California led him to Venice; from Venice to Rio; from Rio to the upper reaches of the Amozoco; and from the upper reaches of the Amozoco to Near Earth Orbit.

This was hardly a pattern unique to *Moonraker*. One needs hardly do more than glance at the other James Bond movies, at the 007 books (by no means the same thing), at *Mission: Impossible* and *I Spy* and *The Man From Uncle* to see the same pattern of chasing a tenuous series of clues around the planet in search of the object of the exercise.

This element is generally missing from *Top Secret*, which tends to centralize around *Sprechenhaltestelle*. The agents in the game virtually have permanent residences in this minor slum; their assignments tend to boil down to house-by-house sweeps of the area, quizzing the rapidly depleting citizenry.

For beginning characters, this makes a certain amount of sense. The familiarity with the area improves their slim chances of survival; the fixed location eliminates the heed on the part of their agency to give all neophyte agents unlimited expense accounts—although that can happen occasionally, as in Harry Harrison's *The Stainless Steel Rat*.

But as the players advance (and they don't have to advance very far), they will begin to wonder why they are on permanent assign-

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Tell them you saw it in *The Dragon*