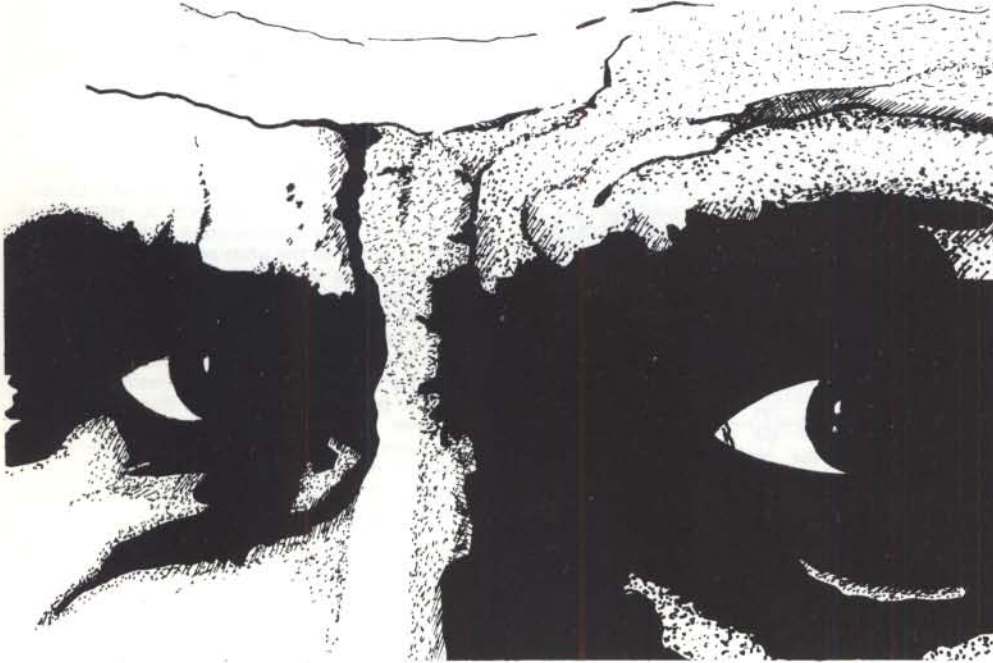


SPIES!

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When I was a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces many years ago I was well aware of the great value of the chit. If, for instance, you just happened to turn up for a spot of square-bashing wearing shoes instead of boots and were promptly approached by an indignant NCO, the magic phrase "... gotta chit, Corporal ..." would turn away his wrath, provided you could produce said chit, of course.

The same thing can be said for *Spies!*, a multi-player game of espionage and intrigue recently published by SPI, if you have the right chit you will get away with it, for chits are vital in this game.

Set in the years 1933 to 1939 *Spies!* is a seven turn game — each turn representing one year — in which five European nations compete in a struggle to steal each others top secrets. It is best suited for five players, each controlling the police and spies of a single nation but it works as well with four or even three players. With only two, however, you have a situation where each controls the affairs of two nations all the time and shares control of the remaining nation with his opponent on alternate turns, which can lead to some strange happenings. You *can* have a reasonable game with just two players but it is not to be recommended, so try to scrape up that third player if possible.

Apart from the standard game there is an optional long game that I shall deal with briefly at the conclusion of this article, so until that time everything you read here will be about the standard game.

When writing about a game it seems to be traditional to give a description of the 'bits and pieces' and I am a great one for tradition, so here goes ...

Unlike many SPI games the rules are written in narrative form and are commendably brief and reasonably clear. Just a single sheet, they are simple and easy enough even for the proverbial twelve-year-old to learn in a short time. There are one or two doubtful areas but nothing that a little common-sense won't handle.

The mapsheet is 22"x34" and has a number of

tracks and holding boxes on it as well as the map itself, with a time and victory point record track, a starting set-up, a bank track, three holding boxes, and a couple of displays that summarise the play of the action chits that control all a spy's actions except that of movement. Why these displays should have been positioned to be readable only from the south edge of the mapsheet remains a mystery. Fortunately their contents are easily assimilated and after a couple of turns you are unlikely to need to refer to them again, but how nice it would have been if they had been in more suitable positions in the first place.

The map itself shows Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, with the five opposing nations — Germany, Italy, Russia, France and Great Britain, in order of play — clearly shown in brown, yellow, red, green and blue respectively. Major cities and ports are indicated with the capital cities of the opposing nations being further identified by an appropriate national flag.

In order to regulate the movement of the spies, the cities are linked by a network of rail and air routes while sea zones have been created to allow movement by sea. All movement is rather abstract of course, remember that the length of a turn is one year so there is no need to get bothered if you see a railway going across the Channel, nobody is going to worry about ferries on that scale.

There are only two disturbing features about the map, Coventry and Birmingham have changed places for some reason, and as a true Coventrian I cannot help feeling a trifle aggrieved by that, whilst the removal of Scapa Flow from its rightful home in the Orkney Isles to the far-off Shetlands can only be as a result of a cunning deception scheme. As it happens neither of these re-locations has any affect on play and can thus be ignored!

There are three types of counter actually used on the map; secrets, police and spies. All are normally deployed face-down and are back-printed to show type of unit and in the case of police and spies, nationality. There are forty secrets all told, ranging from the humble limpet mine (with a victory point

value of 1) up to the greatest prize, the atomic bomb (with a victory value of 5). Each of the opposing nations has a number of security police units with strengths varying between 1 and 4, these strengths normally being concealed from the other players. Likewise each country has a number of spies similarly possessing strengths of between 1 and 4 and they are given individual names as well, just to add a little flavour. If you want to see what the counters actually look like take a peek at the illustrations, one picture is worth a thousand words.

Counters that aren't used on the map include event tiles and action chits, plus a few markers, and it will probably be easier to describe the functions of these as we come to them.

The first thing to be done when setting up the game is to record each country's bank balance. Finance is as valuable as the possession of action chits in *Spies!* and each country starts off with a certain amount of money in the bank, as recorded on the bank track.

Each country has seven event tiles of its own, plus another three drawn at random, whilst they also have an allotment of action chits that have been distributed at random. There are six types of action chit and no more than seven chits may be held by any country at one time. Eight secrets are placed in selected neutral cities and the remainder allocated among the opposing nations, being placed in any home city providing that there are never more than one per city. Police units are placed, no more than two per city, in any city coded for them, and the spies are deployed anywhere on the map with no restrictions on stacking or positioning. And with that done, the game can commence.

The players' first action is to play, or discard, an event tile. This is a large counter with a list of cities printed on it together with a brief description of a historical or hypothetical event. As long as he is not in his home country any spy in a city on that list will gain for his country one or more action chits or a sum of money, as indicated on the tile. It is entirely up to the player whether he plays or discards a tile so no-one is forced to play a tile that will benefit an enemy more than it will himself. This gives rise to a bit of a puzzle; some tiles can only benefit an enemy and will thus be discarded, so why were they included in the first place? The only thing that I have been able to think of so far is that originally it was intended to have players draw the tiles at random and that the system was

Spy (Italian): Front

NAMES → Piccolo

STRENGTH → 1

SYMBOL →

Spy (Italian): Back

ITALY

Counterspy: Front

Counter Spy

STRENGTH → 5

Counterspy: Back

Event Tile: Front (Back is blank)

YEARS IN WHICH TILE CAN BE PLAYED → 1937-39

NATIONALITY → Ge 1*

ID NUMBER →

EVENTS → Czech Crisis!

3c: Berlin, Prague.
2c: Paris, Moscow, Bucharest, Warsaw.
2E: Budapest, Vienna, Bratislava.

ACTION CHIT/
MONEY AWARD

later changed. To check on that theory I played a game doing just that, shoving them all in a stack and having each player taking one off the top in his turn, and in the event it made very little difference to the game.

Be that as it may, having done that the player can then move his police units. There are no restrictions on the move, he can put them where he wishes in his home country subject to the stacking limit, and as soon as he has moved them he may search for enemy spies in every city that contains enemy spies and his police.

The procedure is simplicity itself; if the police units are stronger than the spy then the spy is captured, no dice throw, a simple strength comparison. The spy goes into a box on the record track and the captor is rewarded with the handsome sum of £20,000 and a free action chit, it's as easy as that. Well, perhaps not quite so easy, because so far we have not taken into account the action chits.

One of these chits, 'Papers', is tailor-made for this sort of situation. 'Papers' will nullify a search immediately, before any strength comparison takes place. It will also cost £2,000 to play; espionage is an expensive business, so if you haven't got the money in the bank that's your hard luck. Of course, you don't *have* to play a chit, you might be one of those cunning types who send a low-grade spy into an enemy city with the deliberate intention of finding out how strong the police are, so that you send a top-grade chap in afterwards to sneak a secret.

Once the police have been moved, papers played, and the less fortunate spies thrown into the nearest cell it is the time to move the spies. They can move up to five spaces per turn, a space being defined as a city or sea zone entered, and any combination of land, sea, and air routes may be used as long as a spy doesn't end a turn at sea. Should a spy enter an enemy city that is occupied by police then those police may search for him — and he may evade — in exactly the same manner as previously described. If he should enter an enemy or neutral city containing a secret he can attempt to discover it, and by now you will not be surprised to learn that this will entail the expenditure of a chit, a 'Discovery' in this case costing £3,000. If the secret was unguarded it has been found and it only

remains for the spy to get it back to his home capital city for his country to receive £20,000 and a free action chit, plus a number of victory points according to the year of discovery. Had the secret been guarded by police then the spy would have had to have been stronger than the guard (and to have escaped capture) before gaining access to the secret. By the way, only one unit can guard a secret even though there may be more than one unit in the city, so it will be apparent that a strength 4 police unit will never lose a secret since the strongest spy is also 4.

It is of course possible for a secret to be guarded by a spy and in this case the intruder has another obstacle before him. A defending spy has the opportunity to play a 'Cover' chit to foil the attempted discovery, but at least in this case the intruder can have another attempt by playing yet another 'Discovery' should he have one. Since this is one of the situations where one chit can be used to counter another this can go on until one or the other decides to call it a day.

Thus far we have assumed that the secret has been a genuine one, but it so happens that a quarter of the secrets are not real secrets at all but nasty things called 'Counterspies' that come as a most unpleasant surprise to the spy who is unfortunate enough to come across one. Counterspies have a strength like any other unit and, if stronger than the spy, the latter goes straight into the slammer with no opportunity to play a 'Papers' chit. If the capture were to take place in a neutral country he would go into a holding box from which he could only be released in the same way as from a hostile jail, by playing an 'Escape' chit, and these are expensive, at £10,000 a time.

You will have noticed that *Spies!* is a bloodless game with captured spies merely being taken out of circulation until they can be released. There is, however, an ultimate weapon in a spy's armoury, the 'Sanction'. This chit has a picture of a Luger on it so you shouldn't need to have three guesses to know what that means, and it is in fact the only way in which spies can be killed off. It's not cheap, it costs £20,000 to use a sanction and tends accordingly to be used sparingly, but since this time there is none of that business about comparing strengths it means that even a low-grade spy can

'do in' the top enemy bloke without any trouble. It is true that there is a counter to a sanction in the form of the 'Escape' chit but there aren't so many of those around and they are usually reserved for releasing spies from jail. Victims go into yet another holding box and can be brought back into the game only by playing a 'Recruit' chit, which is quite cheap considering, at a mere £4,000.

You can see from this that a successful espionage operation is going to require a lot of money, the right chits, and a lot of luck. It is possible to negotiate with an opponent during your turn but it cannot be regarded as a reliable way to get the all-important chits and money. I have played a game in which I had only three 'Discovery' chits during the entire game — and they are among the most numerous in the counter-mix — and all three of the secrets I found were counterspies! Yes, there's a lot of luck involved.

That's about all there is to the standard game, easy to play but not at all easy to play well, it carries on until at the end there is a grand totalling of victory points to find the winner. It can easily be played to a finish within three hours, and although SPI recommend a time limit of five minutes per player there is no real need to impose one, it works very smoothly.

The long game is a different kettle of fish. For a start the rules are written in the familiar SPI case-number style. They are again simple, brief and clear. In addition, as well as having to expend action chits and money whenever they want to do something, spies now have to use up 'action points', of which each country receives twelve to last it for each turn. They have to be used when moving, conducting police searches, playing action chits, and Initiating diplomacy. Surprisingly, it isn't as restrictive as you might think but it does slow you down a bit.

Event tiles in the long game take on a new importance in that certain of them can affect the neutral status of some countries such as Austria and Czechoslovakia. There is now no limit on the number of action chits that a country can hold and there are another four types to play with. There aren't many in the counter-mix, another fourteen — but they can change the complexion of the game.

'Double Cross' reverses strength comparisons and the effect of a 'Sanction' and can also be used to counter an 'Escape'.

'Source' enables a player to examine all the spies and police of another player, and just think what you can do with that sort of information, perhaps it is possible to win by negotiation after all.

'Drop' is expensive at £20,000 to £30,000 but it can establish an effective 'capital city' for the purpose of 'cashing in' enemy secret in any city on the map; you can nick a secret in Berlin, say, and drop it in the same place for your £20,000 reward, very satisfying.

'Intercept', the last of the newcomers, acts as a counter to 'Drop' and 'Source' chits.

Istanbul, Tangier and Geneva are now 'spy havens' nice restful places where spies cannot do anything to each other at all and I'll leave you to think of the implications of that.

Each country has a top spy called 'Cousin'. In the standard game 'Cousin' behaves as a normal spy, but in the long game he (I assume that it is a 'he') has some useful attributes in that he can never be caught by a counterspy and can never be 'Sanctioned' unless it is by another 'Cousin'. Any other common-or-garden spy trying a sanction ends up dead himself.

And that's about all the difference between the two versions, the long game is no longer, you can still manage it in three hours or thereabouts and our twelve-year-old can still play it all right, there is just a bit more to think about.

Spies! makes a nice change from the run-of-the-mill wargame and there is always plenty going on. It's light-hearted, enjoyable nonsense but the more you play it the more you find out that it has hidden depths. All we need now is for someone to write an article on how to win it, because I'm hopeless!

