

GAME PROFILE

SPIES EVERYWHERE!**A Game for the Entire Player Spectrum**

by Steve Fisher

In addition to doing the graphic design, I did some of the final development and testing on this very elegant game. Bob Ryer and I made it a personal challenge to pare the rules down to fit on one 8½" × 11" sheet (and succeeded). One of my main jobs was to act as policeman and keep the staff from needlessly complicating a basically simple design. For this reason we have a separate folder of rules known as the Long Game and set in smaller type to actually *discourage* you from using them (even though it's there if you *really* want it). Experienced gamers have a tendency to play the more complex version of a game even if they suspect they might like the simpler version better. It has to do with pride and built in expectations as to what makes a good game. In *SPIES!* the standard (short) game is truly the better game. I here offer personal testimony that just about all of you (and your non-gamer friends) will like *SPIES!*

—Redmond

In its eleven year history SPI has attempted several times to create a game which would appeal to a mass audience. Due to the complexity of the rules, the sheer size of the game or the obscurity of the subject, such games have met with only limited success. All of this will probably change with *Spies*. *Spies* focuses on the five major powers in pre-World War II Europe, and combines the best aspects of games such as *Diplomacy*, *Stratego*, and *Conquistador*.

During a player-turn an event tile is played, and spies in any cities listed on the tile may obtain money, action chits, or secrets. A player may then move his spies around the board, trying to pick up foreign secrets to return to the home country to cash in for money. Along the way, police may try to intercept a spy or a counterspy may appear and capture the spy. The object of the game is to obtain as many foreign secrets as possible while at the same time preventing friendly secrets from falling into enemy hands. *Spies* is vastly different from most adventure games; while it is an extremely simple game, there is no end to the variety of strategies the five countries can employ.

Spies' appeal to the inexperienced gamer is obvious. With a small four-page rules booklet (approximately equal to one page of standard SPI rules) the game takes only fifteen minutes or so to learn. The large print on the map and the lack of hexes remove the complex-technical look of most wargames. The lack of dice means that the players are relying solely on skill and need not consult any complex combat tables.

Experienced players should not shy away from the game because of the above mentioned features. The entire playtest staff of *Spies* was composed of experienced gamers who were not hindered by the game's lack of complexity. Several features are necessary to make the game more challenging to the veteran gamer. Each player should be allotted five minutes in which to move, and this

time limit should be strictly enforced. In addition, diplomacy should occur only during the turn of one of the players wishing to negotiate. Such rules will greatly reduce the time required to play the game and force the players to pay constant attention to the game and plan out moves in advance; players will find five minutes pass very rapidly. Those looking for a real challenge might try reducing the time limit to three minutes.

Balance

Spies is an extremely well balanced game; in playtesting the order of finish was radically different each game. The five countries can be divided into two groups: the central countries and the outer countries. Germany, Italy and France comprise the former group while Russia and Britain comprise the latter. The central countries are in an ideal position for gaining secrets. France has an easy access to Britain and Africa, Germany has easy access to Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, and Italy has easy access to the European Mediterranean nations and North Africa. While their central position affords Germany, France, and Italy this access, it also makes them good targets. Germany borders on all four other countries (airlines make the countries adjacent). France borders on three other countries. Italy borders on only one other country but is within easy striking range of Britain and Germany. The central countries must play the game offensively to the extreme, endeavoring to obtain as many secrets as possible; it is usually useless for these countries to withhold spies to protect friendly secrets, since too many enemy spies will enter the country in search of these secrets during the course of a game. Rarely do central countries end a game in possession of friendly secrets.

The outer countries are in a different position. While their access to foreign secrets is more difficult, their own secrets are better protected because of their distance from the other countries. Britain is actually not that distant from the majority of the action since it borders on France and Germany, and generally many enemy spies will enter Britain once the supply of secrets in Central Europe has been depleted. Only Germany has rapid access to Russia, via the Berlin-Moscow airline, and if NKVD units are placed in Moscow, use of this route is hindered. Because of the distance between Russia and foreign capitals, other countries will usually send their spies to Russia only after most of the secrets on the board have been captured. The outer countries usually do not capture as many secrets as the central countries, but they often manage to retain some of their original secrets, and often a game is decided on the value of these secrets. Counterspies are of little value to Russia and Britain.

Diplomacy

Players must use diplomacy to reap the benefits of event tiles and to prevent a single player from taking too great a lead. Each player starts the game with ten event tiles. Gaining action chits or money from the "neutral" (white) tiles may not require any negotiation. Since the seven colored tiles received usually list friendly cities, however, and since players do not receive money or action chits for a friendly spy in a friendly city, diplomacy is a necessary part of the game.

An example of such diplomacy is as follows: The German player wishes to play tile "Ge 6." He negotiates a deal with the British player where to move his spies in order to obtain action chits from the play of the event card. In this instance he allows the British player to move his spies into Essen, Hamburg and Berlin. The German police units do not search for these spies. In exchange for the information and the actions of the German player, the British player gives the German player three of the six chits he received from the event tile. Diplomacy should also be used to prevent a single player from gaining too great a lead. Chits may be exchanged, money loaned, or spies exempted from police searches in various countries to achieve this end.

Players may find that they lack the action chits or financial resources to use all of their spies in a given turn. In such instances players should position their spies in foreign cities where they will be able to collect action chits or money from event tiles. Sometimes players will be able to move into cities mentioned on their own tiles. Often, however, such cities will be in friendly territory, and no action chits or money will be received for occupying these cities. In these circumstances, spies should be moved to foreign cities, for it is possible that another player's event tile may list the city the friendly spy occupies. Geneva and Istanbul are two such cities, for they are free of foreign police units and are listed on many event tiles (Geneva on ten, Istanbul on nine). Players who possess papers or escape chits may find it more profitable to occupy foreign capitals, for these cities are listed on far more tiles than the spy-haven cities of Geneva and Istanbul. Berlin is listed on twenty tiles, London on eighteen, Moscow and Paris on seventeen, and Rome on fifteen.

Rules Change/Clarification

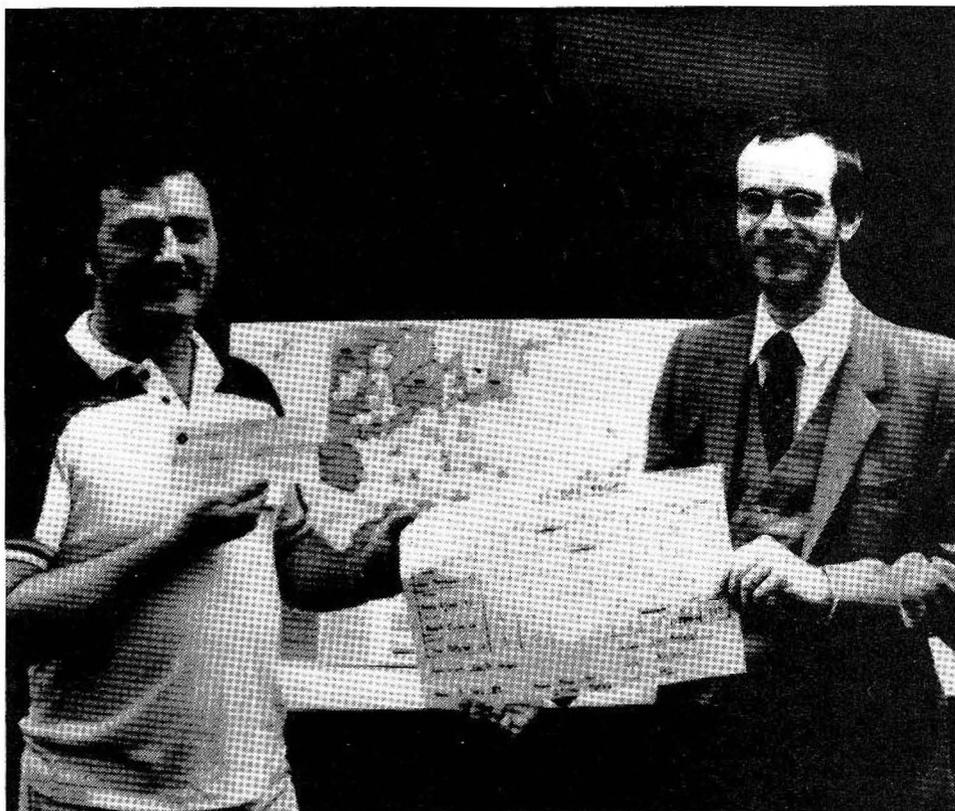
One major change and one clarification are necessary in *Spies'* rules. When playing with fewer than five players, the rules state that Germany and Italy are to be controlled by the same person. While this is feasible in the two player game, it is not practical in the three or four player games, especially the latter.

By giving the control of Germany and Italy to a single player, the rules lead to the

creation of a barrier down the center of the map through which no player may safely pass. In addition, in the four player game the German-Italian player is the only player to control two countries, and because Germany and Italy border on each other, it is quite simple for each country to take the other's secrets. Since it is unlikely that the Italian police will be used to stop the German spies and the German police used to stop the Italian spies, the German-Italian player has a tremendous advantage over the other three players.

In the four player game, it is better for one player to control Britain and Russia rather than Germany and Italy. While one may argue that such dual control implies an alliance that is not historical, the rules state that the countries should be controlled independently, as though they were two separate countries. Hence no alliance is supposed to exist. In the three player game, combining Britain with Germany and France with Italy prevents any north-south lines of control; units have much greater east-west mobility.

One additional clarification in the rules is necessary. The rules state that friendly secrets may be placed anywhere in friendly territory. It is important to note that France has territory in North Africa and the Middle East, Italy has territory in the Balkans and North Africa, and Britain has territory in the Middle East. Secrets may be deployed in these areas. Using the change in rules above and distributing secrets throughout the map should enable players to enjoy *Spies!* to its fullest. ■■



Congratulations to the Master Spy: Brad Hessel hands a check for \$1,000 to Jim Mattatall of Torrance, CA, winner of the *Origins 81 Spies!* contest. Second through fifth place winners were Barrett Eynon, Eric Elfbrandt, Rusty Rhoad, and Jim Hambacher.

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Don Lowmy

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