

# Okhrana



**A Story Game of Espionage and  
Revolution  
by Malcolm Craig**

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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.

# Credits

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Thanks: Arthur Boff, Paul Czege, Daniel Hemmens,  
Andrew Kenrick, Gobion Rowlands

Okhrana was originally created in 24 hours for the Modus  
Operandi 24 Hour Espionage RPG Contest. It didn't win.

# Contents

The Okhrana in Paris	5
The City of Paris	8
What You Need To Play	10
The Creation of Character	11
Scenes	16
Resolving Scenes	25
Resolving the Epilogue	32
Protagonist Sheet	34
Antagonist Sheet	35
Crib Sheet	36
Notes & Feedback	37

# 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 monarchical 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 extensive 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 circles 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.

All of these areas were monitored and investigated by the Okhrana and its formidable and capable Paris office head, Pyotr Rachovsky. Rachovsky is a capable, astute and cunning political operator, a man with many friends in high places.

Another, unpalatable, fact about the Okhrana is its ingrained anti-Semitism. This was prevalent not only in the secret policy, but within almost all levels of Russian society at the time. Local pogroms against Jews were a regular occurrence in the Motherland, a distasteful and horrifying fact of life that the Okhrana was fully complicit with.

## 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 prepare their plans in steamy little cafes over a carafe of vin ordinaire.

But Paris is also a centre of political strife, unrest and bigotry. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Republic is still being shaken by the aftermath of the Dreyfus Affair that brought to the surface a simmering anti-Semitism. Only a year ago, one of the most famous figures of the age, Emile Zola, published his incendiary letter 'J'accuse!', a tract which caused outrage and unqualified support in equal measure.

It is not only the émigrés who are obsessed with revolution and change. The people of France are uneasy after a series of political, financial and military scandals. Attempts on the lives of politicians have leapt into the headlines over the past decade: the bombing of the National Assembly by Vaillant and the stabbing of the President by Caserio being but two of the most notable events. The radical émigrés find themselves in good company amongst anarchists, socialists, communists, and right-wingers from France and beyond.

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.

## What You Need To Play

In order to play Okhrana, you'll need to have the following to hand:

A pack of ordinary playing cards

A few sheets of blank paper

Some pencils or pens

A comfortable area in which to play the game

Some drinks. Depending on your preference, these can be alcoholic or non-alcoholic. However, some French wine or Russian vodka is thematically appropriate to the game at hand.

# The Creation of Character

In Okhrana, no one person controls the game; everybody round the table gets the chance to input. Sometimes an individual will play the role of their protagonist, an émigré revolutionary who acts against the Czarist regime. Sometimes they will be asked to play the character of an antagonist, a member of the Okhrana, one of their informers, a spy or an ally in the French police, the Surete Generale

Each player must create a protagonist for themselves. The protagonist is an individual upon whom a story will focus. That story is told in the form of six scenes, with the story of each protagonist being told, scene by scene, 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 cooling their heels or fomenting revolution 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 events around them, to gather what resources they need and execute their plans.

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

**Misfortune:** Misfortune 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 Misfortune.

In each scene that takes place, there must be a conflict. To resolve the conflict, the protagonist will use one of their two positive attributes. They will be opposed by the relevant negative attribute (plus certain advantages their

antagonist may have). But you should be careful when creating a protagonist! Each positive attribute must be used in at least two scenes out of six. 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.

Guile	2	Misfortune	3
Fervour	5	Doubt	4

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 Antagonist

Name: Grigori Sedorov

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

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

### The Relationship Map

Before the game begins, all the participants should write the names of their protagonists down on a single sheet of paper that sits in the middle of the table or area of play.

When a character is brought in to a scene, then their name a role should be written down somewhere on the sheet and they should be linked either to a protagonist or antagonist.

This enables a written record to be kept of all the characters that have appeared in the game, allowing all the participants to re-use or gain inspiration from the scenes and characters created by others.

Locations can also be noted down on the relationship map, again allowing everyone taking part to use or be inspired by what has gone before.

## Scenes

The structure of Okhrana is formalised into six defined scenes. Either a player taking the role of a protagonist or an antagonist must set the scene, describing where it takes place, who is involved and 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 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 being 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.

Example:

We return to our sample protagonist, Naftaly Timofeev. His goal is to alert the world to the atrocities being perpetrated against Jews in the Russian Empire. Timofeev's first scene takes place upon his return from a printer where he has been enquiring about the costs of printing pamphlets. He realises that he is being followed, but is unsure by whom. He decides to confront his pursuer by turning into a dark alley. The player states that in this conflict, Timofeev wants to find out who the man is and why he is following him. The antagonist wants to convince Timofeev that the remnants of his family back in Russia may be in danger if he continues along this path.

*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.

Example:

Timofeev is attending a meeting of like-minded Jewish émigrés in a basement tavern in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Arondissement. The antagonist in this case states that the actions of the Okhrana will be taking place away from this location: their minions will be ransacking Timofeev's pitiful rooms. Whilst Timofeev talks and drinks, the men from the Okhrana are raking through his possessions, looking for name and contacts. The conflict here is as follows: the antagonist wishes to get information on Timofeev's allies. If the antagonist wins, they find a hand-written list of names and addresses. If the protagonist wins, then the list is safely tucked away inside Timofeev's waistcoat.

*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?

Example:

Timofeev finds himself in the train station, surrounded by smoke and noise. He wishes to meet an ally, a woman who is travelling to Calais and then on to London. He must meet her in order to pass over his written testimony, in order that she can pass this on to sympathetic persons within British high society. Will she be there or will she have been spirited away by the Okhrana?

*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.

Example:

Again, our friend Timofeev is meeting with some fellow travellers, clustered around a printing press that is running off their latest incendiary pamphlet.

Suddenly, the door bursts open and men of the Surete General crash into the room, led by a tall, moustachioed Inspector. Will Timofeev be able to make a break for freedom or will he be rounded up with the others and carted off for interrogation?

*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.

Example:

Timofeev's pamphleteering and relentless persuasion have gained him a chance to speak before an assembly of foreign dignitaries! Yet, as he stands before the distinguished gentlemen, he suspects that in the crowd there may be those who are opposed to him. Will he be able to persuade the audience of the rightness of his cause and gained further support for his goal?

Scene 6: Epilogue, for better or worse

Scene Setter: Protagonist or Antagonist

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

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

The player of the protagonist in the scene must draw a number of cards equal to the positive attribute they are using. 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.

## *Antagonist Advantages*

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

## *Gift Cards*

Participants who are not playing protagonist or antagonist in a scene may add a card to the hand of EITHER the protagonist or antagonist. The reasons for doing this can be many and varied: they think that one side deserves to win as it would enhance the story, they may think one participant has done something particularly entertaining or interesting and deserves a reward and so on.

## *Relationships*

If, as part of the scene, the protagonist has brought in a character with which they can be said to have a relationship, then they may take another card into their hand.

This new person must be noted on the relationship map: their name, their role in the scene (and perhaps in subsequent scenes) and their relationship to the Protagonist.

## *The Result*

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.

## *Jokers*

If Jokers appear in the hand of either protagonist or antagonist, there can be some unusual and interesting effects.

Black Joker: If the black joker is drawn by the player of the protagonist, then, even if they fail in the scene, there will be some small, positive effect in their next scene. This means that in their next scene, they may draw an extra card.

If the black joker is drawn by the player of the antagonist in the scene, then events are conspiring even more against the protagonist. In the next scene involving the protagonist, their antagonist (whoever it may be), gets to draw one additional card.

Red Joker: If the red joker is drawn by the player of the protagonist, then, even if they are successful in the scene, there will be some small, negative effect in their next scene. This means that in their next scene, they draw one less card than normal.

If the black joker is drawn by the player of the antagonist in the scene, then things are not going so well for the antagonist, even if they are successful in this scene. In the next scene involving the current protagonist, their antagonist (whoever it may be), draws one less card than they would normally.

#### *The Outcome of Scenes*

There will always be a change to the protagonist as the result of the conflict in a scene. This will have the effect of

changing either the positive attribute used in the scene or its negative opposite.

If the protagonist has won the conflict, they gain a number of points to add to the positive attribute that was used. If they won the conflict by one or two cards, they get to add one point to their positive attribute. If they won by three or more cards, they get to add two points to the positive attribute.

#### Example:

Doug is playing the role of his protagonist, Yevgeny Bishkoff and has just won his scene. He was using Guile and had 3 black cards in his hand, whereas his antagonist only had one black card. Therefore, Doug gets to add one point to Bishkoff's Guile attribute.

If the antagonist won the conflict, they get to add a number of points to the negative attribute used in the scene. As antagonists always win a tie, they always get to add a minimum of one point to the negative attribute.

#### Example:

In the next scene, Doug's protagonist loses the conflict. Doug has 2 black cards in his hand, while his antagonist has three. Doug was using fervour in this scene, so he must now add one point to its opposite, Doubt.

### Example of Play

It is now Doug's turn to play protagonist and play has moved on to Scene 3: The First Action.

His protagonist is Yevgeny Bishkoff, who looks like this:

Concept: Disgraced cavalry officer and committed Marxist  
Goal: To raise an émigré army and march on St Petersburg!  
Motivation: His humiliating demotion after his left-leanings were discovered by brother officers.

Fervour: 4

Doubt: 5

Guile: 4

Misfortune: 3

As protagonist, Doug gets to set the scene. He asks Lucy to play the part of Captain Sherkov, an Okhrana man and someone well known to Bishkoff. He also asks Dave if he will take the role of M. Fresne, a French anarchist and ally of Bishkoffs.

Doug says that Bishkoff and Fresne have been drinking together and are now on their way back to their lodgings, when they are approached by Sherkov who has been watching them. Sherkov wishes to take Bishkoff into custody for suspected bomb making. He is armed and determined.

But, Bishkoff also has a small revolver concealed about his person and Dave brings in the fact that Fresne is carrying his favourite stiletto.

The three participants play out the scene in a dingy alley for a few minutes before deciding to bring out the cards and see what happens in the conflict. Doug states that he is using Guile, as Bishkoff wants to dispose of Sherkov in a stealthy manner.

Doug gets to draw 4 cards for Guile, while Lucy gets to draw 3 cards for Misfortune. As he has created a new relationship in the form of Fresne, Doug gets to add an additional card to his hand. Likewise, Lucy uses the advantage "Determined and cunning in moments of violence" that Sherkov has, giving her an additional card in her hand.

Finally, Dave gets to decide whom he will give his Gift card to. He doesn't have to give it to anybody, if he chooses. However, he thinks that he'd like to see Bishkoff have a better chance of succeeding, so gives Doug one additional card.

So, Doug now has 6 cards in his hand while Lucy has 4 cards in her hand. They reveal their hands!

Doug has managed to draw five black cards, while Lucy has only managed to draw two. Doug has also drawn an Ace, whilst the highest card Lucy has drawn is a Queen. This means that not only has Doug won the conflict, he also gets to narrate the outcome. His winning margin was 3 cards, so his Guile will now go up by two points.

Doug says that as Sherkov attempt to take him into custody, he falls in towards the man and press his revolver into his chest. There is a muffled bang as the gun discharges and Sherkov coughs and slumps to the ground. Dave chips in the Fresne goes white as a sheet as, despite his fondness for his stiletto, he's never actually killed a man. Doug concludes the scene by saying that Bishkoff bullies Fresne into helping him stuff the body into a manhole, letting the cooling corpse of Okhrana man float away into the dimness of the Paris sewers...

## Resolving the Epilogue

Guile > Misfortune  
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 > Misfortune  
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 < Misfortune  
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 < Misfortune  
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:

Misfortune:

## 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

Relationships:

# Antagonist Sheet

Name                      Role                      Advantage

# Okhrana Crib Sheet

## Scenes

1. Foreshadowing & Discovery (Protagonist)
2. Preparations & Tension (Antagonist)
3. The First Action (Protagonist)
4. Increasing Attention (Antagonist)
5. The Second Action (Protagonist)
6. Epilogue (Variable)

## Resolving a Scene

Declare what the conflict is, set goals for Protagonist and Antagonist  
Decide on attribute pair to use  
Can the Protagonist bring in a relationship? (+1 card if they can)  
Can the Antagonist bring in an advantage? (+1 card if they can)  
Do other participants wish to gift a card to either side?

Draw correct number of cards:

Protagonist = Positive Attribute+Relationship+Gift Cards

Antagonist = Negative Attribute+Advantage+Gift Cards

Count only black cards

If Protagonist has more black cards, they win.  
1 - 2 more cards = +1 o positive attribute used  
3 or more cards = +2 to positive attribute used

If Antagonist has the same or more black cards, they win  
1 - 2 more cards = +1 to negative attribute used  
3 or more cards = +2 to negative attribute used

Individual with highest card showing gets to choose who narrates outcome of scene.

# Notes & Feedback

This game was created for the 2007 Modus Operandi ([www.modus-operandi.co.uk](http://www.modus-operandi.co.uk)) 24 Hour Espionage RPG competition.

The rules of the competition were fairly simple: create a game in 24 hours that involved espionage and was set in an unusual time period prior to 1914. So I wrote Okhrana.

I think that, in its current form, it is certainly playable, but will require a fair bit of modification and play testing. Any comments that you might have after reading this text or perhaps even trying to play the game would be heartily appreciated.

You can give your feedback via the following methods:

By email to [malcolm@contestedground.co.uk](mailto:malcolm@contestedground.co.uk)

Or by posting your thoughts at The Collective Endeavour ([www.collective-endeavour.co.uk](http://www.collective-endeavour.co.uk)), Story Games ([www.story-games.com](http://www.story-games.com)) or The Forge ([www.indie-rpgs.com](http://www.indie-rpgs.com)). I browse these boards pretty frequently; so will likely stumble across any comments you make.

Anyway, thanks for reading and I look forward to hearing from you.

Thanks  
Malcolm