20.6 Miles

A role-playing game – Threeforged RPG Design Challenge – Stage-3 entry #15145

A cool wind ruffled the gentleman's hair as he cautiously shadowed the woman in a somber black dress. No true widow, though – he had long suspected her of operating a spy network in London. Unless he overstepped his mission, the Dover ferry might be his last opportunity to nab her and bring her to English justice.

Meanwhile, a slip of a lad on the shipyard kept a cautious eye on the fine-lookin' gent with the lace cuffs. Wouldn't be such a shame if his pocket was cut, would it?

Far down the midway, a longshoreman hauled in the daily catch. Three nets full, and a false floor in the boat that held French silks and wine, waiting to be unloaded long after dark.

Amongst all this, a curious American with a notebook took careful notes. Her editor in New York would be very interested in this story, once she was done researching it!

20.6 Miles is a DM-less role-playing game of espionage and intrigue for 2-5 players. It's set in the Strait of Dover, encompassing the port cities of Dover, England, and Calais, France during the early 1800s. At this time, Emperor Napoleon was dominating Europe, and England, under the Regency of George III, was marshalling towards confrontations that would end with Waterloo in 1815. The Channel crossing, therefore, was critical to the spy networks operating in both countries – as well as to smugglers, law enforcement, revolutionaries, and intellectuals.

What You Need to Play

- A coin with both heads and tails
- Something to keep track of your Scene Points (corn kernels, pretzels, glass beads, more coins... whatever you have handy)
- An **Organization Sheet** and a **Characters Sheet** for each player (see the end of this document), or two sheets of blank paper per player
- Pencils and erasers

Optional Resources

About the English Channel: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Channel
About the Dover Strait: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strait_of_Dover
Map of Dover: http://www.dover-online.com/images/dover-map/
Map of Calais:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Calais#/media/File:Situationsplan_von_Calais.jpg

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Character Creation

As she tucked her hair into the cap, the unlikely investigator silently thanked her good fortune in finding Frederick, her valet. A capable haberdasher, he'd been more than able to tailor hats, shirts, and jackets to fit her curls and hide her feminine attributes to avoid detection on her riskier missions. Her work was invaluable to the Contre-Agence, France's most secretive agency tracking down the devilish English spies on French soil!

Each player needs an **Organization Sheet** and a **Characters Sheet** (see the sheets at the end of this document). Write large on your Organization Sheet; once you've filled it in, turn it around so that the other players can read it easily.

Each player creates their own Organization, Leader character, and Supporting Characters (SCs). Work in pencil, as everything is liable to change during play.

Organization Sheet

You represent an Organization or separate interest operating in the port cities of Dover, England and Calais, France. Perhaps you head up an assassin's league, intent on taking out targets for the highest bidder, or maybe you're an inspector for the French Empire, protecting the people from English spies. Name your Organization something appropriate and flavorful ("The Drowning Gents" smuggling ring, for example).

Who is the Leader of your Organization? Decide if your Leader operates openly most of the time, or under a false identity. Name the Leader with their real name and, if appropriate, an alias. Write these on your Organization Sheet and on your Characters Sheet as well.

Assets

Write down two Assets: these are people, groups or resources that your Organization has some influence over. You can set your Assets in Dover or Calais, or sometimes both. These Assets might be officially part of your Organization, or just related or beholden to it. They are abstract and are not run by players. An Asset can be under the influence of more than one player!

Some examples:
- The local constable's office
- A gang of street kids
- The local doctors and apothecaries
- The merchants' district
- The leading local nobility
- The military garrison
- The French government in Paris
- The British government in London
- A printing press

- A shipping company
- A "mad scientist" who is building a hot air balloon
- The masons' guild
- The criminal element of the town

Debts Owed

Now, each player in turn introduces their Leader and Organization to the group. Everyone writes down the names of the Organizations on their Organization sheets, *in the same order*. For example, Jamie goes first and introduces <u>Le Bureau 19^{em}</u>, a cell of French spies, and its spymaster Jacques Bastarache. All players write down "Le Bureau 19^{em}" on the first slot of their Organization Sheet. Ashley goes next, introducing <u>The Drowning Gents</u>, which everyone writes in the second slot, and so on.

Each player picks two debts (one small debt, and one VERY big debt) that they owe to other Organizations. These can be personal debts between the Leaders, or Organizational ones between your entire networks. You can owe both debts to the same Organization, but that's not as much fun. Tell everyone about the two debts you owe.

On your Organization Sheet, write down the *debts owed to you*, next to the Organizations that owe them. Mark small debts with a small tally mark, and big debts with a big "X".

Characters Sheet

Attributes & Descriptors

Decide on your Leader character's Attributes. Assign the following values to their Attributes in any order: 4, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1.
Example: Fitness: 4, Stealth: 1, Network: 1, Presentation: 1, Cleverness: 2, Intuition: 3.

Physical:
- **Fitness** – How physically fit you are for physical contests
- **Stealth** – Cat burglar skills are a must in espionage!

Social:
- **Network** – Who you know and how well you are connected
- **Presentation** – Can you convince people of your lies or to help you out?

Intellectual:
- **Cleverness** – How clever are you at planning a caper, improvising a device, or knowing how to read clues and information
- **Intuition** – How well can you "read" someone and see if they're lying, or if there is something weird going on when you walk into a room

Come up with two descriptors of your Leader. These are role-playing cues, and have no mechanical effect. They are there to help you get into character quickly, and to make each of your characters distinct. Some examples:
- Gruff and Practical
- Big and Taciturn
- Classy and Sharp
- Thin and Nervous
- Dapper and Cruel

The spaces for "Status" are left blank at the beginning of play (see **Status**).

Supporting Characters (SCs)

Finally, create up to three Supporting Characters (SCs) who work in your Organization or are otherwise associated with your Leader. Give each a title or role, for example: agent, dock worker, pickpocket, fishwife, legbreaker. Come up with two descriptors for each one, as well. SCs have the following points to assign to attributes: 3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 0.

Optional rule: leave some SCs blank at the start of play. *Between scenes*, you may define new SCs until you have three.

End Condition (Game Duration)

As a group, agree on the number of scene Victories that will signal the end of the game. This is the End Condition. When one player has a number of Victories equal to the End Condition, the game ends (see **Ending The Game**). Recommendations:
- For a short game, set the End Condition equal to the number of players.
- For a longer game, set the End Condition equal to twice the number of players.

Playing the Game

The gentleman groaned quietly as a sharp headache brought him back to consciousness. The dark room, lit only with a single, dimmed, lamp, reeked of saltwater. He glared around the room at his captors before one of them, the biggest and meanest-looking, stepped into the faint light. "Well, lads. Looks like we found us a sneakin' const'ble, eh?"

"I'm no constable, I assure you," he protested, hoping they'd hear the quality in his voice... and perhaps, smell the money he might be able to offer if they released him. Preferably, he thought, before his real quarry got away!

The story is played out in a series of scenes, which the players create for each other. The player with the most openly-known Organization frames the first scene. When you create a scene, you are using your own Organization to set up some kind of conflict or scenario for another player or players to encounter.

Setting a Scene

In each scene, one player is the "Framer" and another is the "Target." All other players can also participate in the scene. Each player selects one of their characters to play. There may be momentary alliances, and sudden betrayals! Debts are called in, and new debts are accrued.

When it's your turn to set the scene, you are the "Framer"; you get to choose the *where* and the *when*, *who* is there, and *what* is happening. Your scene will feature your Organization attempting to advance its agenda. The scene is not necessarily hostile, but you should always have some goal that your Leader wishes to accomplish.

Describe the location and what's going on as the scene opens. Be evocative; provide a few details to set the mood.

Who

Announce which of your characters is present: your Leader or one of your SCs. Pick one other player whose Organization is the "Target," i.e. your opposition in this scene. That player decides which of their characters is involved (sometimes, it will be obvious who should be in the scene; see also *Status*).

The Framer may call in debt(s) that are owed to them, to bring other Organizations into the scene as Allies (see ***Calling in and Repaying Debts***).

Each other player can appear in the scene, too, as one of their characters, either at the start or as the action progresses. They don't have to declare their allegiance until ***Scene Resolution***.

Scene Points

The Framer chooses two Attributes that correspond with this scene and what they think is going to happen. For example, if your scene is a chase to capture a spy, you might choose Fitness and Stealth. If there is any disagreement on the chosen Attributes' suitability to the scene, then briefly discuss or modify the selection or the scene's starting conditions as necessary to reach agreement.

Note: Stealth or Presentation can be used when maintaining a disguise or hiding your accent. All agents are assumed to be capable, if not fluent, speakers of both French and English.

Everyone in the scene adds up the two chosen Attributes, and takes that many Scene Point tokens to use during the scene. For example, if you have Fitness 2 and Stealth 1, you get 3 Scene Points to spend during the scene.

When you are the Target of the scene, take one additional Scene Point.

During the scene, anyone may tag one of their Assets to gain an additional Scene Point, if it makes sense that the chosen Asset could be helpful. Be sure to narrate how that Asset creates an advantage for you in this situation. Untag your Assets at the end of a scene in which you were the Target (this means if you are targeted, you should definitely tag an Asset if possible!)

Any player can have more than one of their characters present in the scene. In this case, they must make clear which character is the Active one. Only the Active character's Attributes are used. If your Leader is present, then they are your Active character.

Calling in and Repaying Debts

Perched on the edge of the levy wall, she quickly realized that writing spy novels had not made her tremendously capable of hoisting herself out of danger. She clung for dear life, wishing – not for the first time – that she'd spent a little more time dancing and less time reading!

Suddenly, she sighted the ragamuffin she'd helped with that constable last week. A sharp whistle broke the night air and suddenly a thin, knotted rope thudded down the wall beside her.

"Help ya up, miss?" a light voice called down from above her. Saved! She quickly scrambled up, only to find herself surrounded by the smugglers she'd been trying to escape!

"Sorry, Miss," the urchin muttered, looking sheepishly at his feet. "Jus' bizness."

When you frame a scene, you can call in debts from other Organizations to gain momentary Allies. If it is a large debt, the Leader of that Organization will be present and will aid you in the scene. If it is a small debt, the Leader can decide whether to help you directly, or to send an SC to support you.

Beware of double agents! When you call in a debt, you get an Ally; but if your Ally also owes a debt to the Target of your scene, they can choose to aid the Target instead!

When you are in a scene but you are not the Framer, the Target, nor called in as an Ally, you can choose to support whichever side you wish.

Scene Resolution

Everyone role-plays the scene in character, and may also narrate in new features of the environment as needed, and the actions of non-player characters. Feel free to be aggressive. No matter how tight a spot you put someone in, the outcome will be determined by Scene Points – so go for the throat! Their escape will be all the more dramatic, if they can manage it!

The Contest

When you come to a point where the conflict between the Framer and Target has reached its climax, call for The Contest. Be explicit about what is at stake. For example: whether the smuggler makes off with his goods; whether the agent maintains her disguise or is revealed; whether the turncoat makes the crossing undiscovered; whether the journalist escapes the ruffians.

The other players in the scene secretly decide whether they will support the Framer or the Target (this time). Anyone who was called into the scene as an Ally by the Framer must support the Framer, unless they are a double agent (i.e. they also owe a debt to the Target), in which case they may support either one.

One at a time, players *besides* the Framer and Target narrate a momentary but pivotal action, revealing in no uncertain terms whom they are supporting in this scene, and then place their Scene Point tokens in front of that player.

Add up both piles. The player (Framer or Target) with the most Scene Points wins the scene. If there is a tie, toss the coin once: Heads means the Framer has prevailed; Tails means success for the Target.

Ending the Scene

After The Contest, narrate the outcome and its consequences.

The winner narrates what their success looks like, including the fates of the loser and the loser's supporters. Proponents of the winner may narrate how they each came through the scene. This is all fictional positioning, and has no mechanical effect with the exception of the following:

The winner may apply a new Status to the loser's (Active) character, as appropriate to the fiction (see **Status**). The loser notes the new Status on their Characters Sheet.

The winning character and her supporters remove any Statuses.

The winner adds a tally mark to the "Victories" box on their Organization Sheet.

The winner increases one Attribute of the character that participated in the scene, by 1, permanently, to a maximum of 4. It must be one of the two Attributes used in the scene. Describe what revelation lead to your new insight or ability.

The Target refreshes any tagged Assets.

Discard all Scene Point tokens.

The Framer's turn is over. The role of Framer passes to the next player to the left, who then sets a new scene. Scenes can be moments, hours, days, weeks or months apart.

Debts

If you supported the Framer, erase one debt that you owe them. If your Leader was present, it may be a big debt that you erase.

If you helped the Target, they owe you a new small debt (this debt is always small, no matter how much you helped). A double agent either repays a debt or accrues a debt, not both.

If you supported a Leader character that had a Status, and that Leader won the scene, then that Organization owes you a new big debt.

Status

A Status is a persistent state like "captive," "injured," "wanted," "up on charges," etc. (but "killed" is not allowed) that may result from losing a scene. A Status applies to one character.

A character with a Status may only appear in a subsequent scene if it takes place under circumstances that correspond to that character's Status(es). For examples:
- The "injured" journalist may appear in any scene set where she may be recuperating, such as in the hospital or her apartment;
- The agent who is a "captive" of the smuggling ring may appear in any scene in that gang's hideout.
- The legbreaker who is "up on charges" may appear in any scene in the police station, jail or courthouse.

A character with a Status, and who is able to appear in a scene, can take any action that makes sense within the fiction. However, there are no limits to how that character can participate mechanically: they can contribute tokens, ally, repay and accrue debts, and win or lose the scene as normal.

At the end of a scene, the winning *character* removes any Statuses, as do any *characters* who supported her.

When you are the Framer, you have the opportunity to set a scene that will include your character with a Status. Conversely, another player might use their opportunity as Framer to control which of your characters you play by targeting the scene at that character's Status.

Ending the Game

Years later, writing a letter to her sister, she finally revealed the secretive tales of her "season in Dover," and how it had led her, ultimately, to move to America and start a new life, far from the dangers of French spies and assassins. The modest – and discreetly provided – pension from the Crown set her up well in Buffalo, New York. She retired happily to a small farm, where she raised chickens and never had to scale up a wall again.

Play until every player has been the Framer at least once, and one of the following conditions is met:
  ● One player has achieved a number of Victories equal to the End Condition; OR
  ● All Leader characters except one have a Status; OR
  ● Everyone agrees that the story has reached a natural conclusion.

Declare victory at Waterloo, and end hostilities between the two countries. In turns, take three minutes to describe the epilogue for your Organization's Leader and what happens to your Organization after the war.

2-Player Rules

Players alternate being the Framer and the Target of each scene. There can be multiple Contests per scene. In a Contest, each player secretly decides how many of their Scene Points to spend, taking that many tokens into their hand. Players reveal their hands simultaneously. Resolve the Contest as normal, and discard the spent Scene Point tokens. The scene continues, and either player may call for an additional Contest, until both players are out of Scene Points or agree to end the scene. There are no debts.
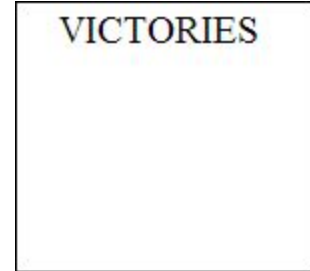
Organization Sheet

Organization:

Leader's Name:

Leader's Alias:

Assets:

1.

2.

VICTORIES

Organizations

Debts Owed To Us, And Why

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

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Write large enough for others to read. Turn the sheet to face the middle of the table.

Characters Sheet

	Leader	**SC**	**SC**	**SC**
Name:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Alias/Title:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Descriptors:	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____

Attributes–

	Leader	**SC**	**SC**	**SC**
Fitness:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Stealth:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Network:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Presentation:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Cleverness:	_____	_____	_____	_____
Intuition:	_____	_____	_____	_____

Status:	_____	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____	_____

Starting Attributes
Leader, assign in any order:
4, 3, 2, 1, 1, 1

Supporting Character (SC), assign in any order:
3, 2, 1, 1, 1, 0