

# Columbia, Maryland: City of Secrets

## Part Three: Through the Shadow Government Lens

Any world that has some recognizable analogue to the Illuminati, the Conspiracy, the Shadow Government, or any other similar concept will have secret groups that would take advantage of the construction of an artificial city so very close to Washington, DC. If the original developers (the Rouse Company) were not originally members of any conspiracy, they would have been swiftly and relentlessly coopted from the very beginning. The clandestine infrastructure would have naturally been constructed right alongside of the regular one; it's much easier to simply include in the necessary secret rooms and passages when you're drawing up the original blueprints.

Not that the Conspiracy created **very** many secret lairs disguised as office buildings. Building from scratch allowed it to design for a few very *efficient* secret lairs - several of which were built to a generic plan and not intended to be activated for several years, or decades - and a large number of hidden observation stations, equipment caches, data centers, and at least one dedicated communications bunker. These mini-facilities are carefully compartmentalized and isolated; many are

found in house basements and retail 'broom closets.' It helps, naturally, that the Illuminati were playing with distributed computer networks when mundane scientists were still hashing out what the term 'cybernetics' means. And, needless to say: the Conspiracy has the entire city under a panopticon, at least theoretically.

Adventurers trying to unravel the Conspiracy in Columbia are therefore up against it: their opponents have the advantage of consistently using a security system designed to be harmonious with local conditions. Fortunately, there is one flaw; the machines and facilities still have to be maintained. Unfortunately, the company maintaining them is just as Illuminated as the rest of the Conspiracy.

## **Chesapeake Service Solutions**

Chesapeake Service Solutions is, on paper, a conglomerate of various local sanitation, construction, HVAC, and general maintenance companies bought up in the 1960s and maintained under their original names ever since. In reality, the companies owned by CSS are staffed by Illuminati members and work exclusively on Illuminati projects. As has been noted elsewhere: nobody thinks twice when they see a technician make a service call on a

residence, or pays attention to the garbagemen making a pickup. As a result, CSS can work on the Conspiracy's infrastructure in a manner that is neither public, nor furtive.

And CSS gets away with this because *a significant percentage of Columbia is directly run by the Illuminati*. At least one of the eleven villages that make up the 'city' is wholly populated by Illuminati agents, both residentially and commercially. The sheer size of the conspiracy - and the inhuman discipline implied by it - distracts prying eyes wonderfully. Surely **somebody** would have noticed before now that an entire town has been in the thrall of a Conspiracy for forty years. In fact, the entire idea sounds insane... which is entirely the point.

So what does the Illuminati actually **do** in Columbia?

A surprising percentage of them commute to work from there, actually. As noted, there is at least one Columbia village that is outright controlled by the Conspiracy; even Men in Black need somewhere to sleep, shower, and store their clothes. Plus, any number of mundane government agencies deemed worth infiltration or subversion operate in Columbia, which makes living in the city good cover for Conspiracy deep-cover agents.

There's also the traditional 'secret experiment' schemes so beloved by government conspiracies. Columbia has a reasonably diverse demographic pool from which to draw test subjects; it also has entire neighborhoods wired for vision and sound. And the residents who have been there long enough to put down roots (and have their sudden absence be noted) are probably part of the Conspiracy themselves. Columbia is the sort of place, in other words, where any sort of strange or dangerous study could be going on - and have people not even notice that it was happening.

It's unlikely, however, that the actual Illuminati HQ itself is located in Columbia, deep beneath (the artificial) Lake Kittamaqundi. But it could very well be where the Illuminati now hold their annual, well, convention. Even the Secret Masters are not immune to the lure of going to nice resort with good food and an open bar and other Secret Masters to good-naturedly connive with and betray. After all, who else really *understands* them? Also note: it's almost certain that the Secret Masters will want outside catering. After all, part of that understanding includes understanding just how to properly poison another Secret Master...

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