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# Conspiracy Theories & Secret Societies FOR **DUMMIES**<sup>®</sup>

**Christopher Hodapp**

*Bestselling author of Freemasons  
For Dummies*

**Alice Von Kannon**  
*Historian*

**A Reference for the Rest of Us!**



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***Conspiracy Theories &  
Secret Societies For  
Dummies***

**by Christopher Hodapp**

# **Conspiracy Theories & Secret Societies For Dummies®**

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# About the Authors

**Christopher Hodapp** is a 32° Freemason and a member of the Masonic order of the Knights Templar. His first book, *Freemasons For Dummies*, has quickly become the most popular modern guide to the ancient and accepted fraternity of Freemasonry. He's also the author of *Solomon's Builders: Freemasons, Founding Fathers and the Secrets of Washington D.C.*, and co-author of *The Templar Code For Dummies*. He attended Indiana University, the University of Southern California, Los Angeles Valley Community College, and California State University Northridge. In 2006, Chris received the Duane E. Anderson Excellence in Masonic Education Award from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. He has written for *Templar History Magazine*, *Masonic Magazine*, *The Scottish Rite Journal*, *The Indiana Freemason*, and *Indianapolis Monthly*, and he's a monthly columnist for *Living Naturally First* magazine. Chris has also spent more than 20 years as a commercial filmmaker.

**Alice Von Kannon** has been an advertising executive, a teacher, a writer, and even a greedy and villainous landlord. A history junkie beyond the help of an intervention since the age of 14, her studies of Near Eastern religious cults and sects led to her first book, *The Templar Code For Dummies*, co-written with Chris Hodapp. She's studied film production at Los Angeles Valley Community College and history at California State University Northridge, and she's worked for many years

in advertising as a writer and broadcast producer. Alice has traveled widely in Europe and the Middle East and written on the subject of the Barbary Wars and the birth of the U.S. Navy. She's a member of Romance Writers of America and the Order of the Grail, the fraternal body of the International College of Esoteric Studies.

Both authors live in Indianapolis, Indiana.

## **Dedication**

To Norma for her boundless help, support, confidence, and love.

To Charlie who was at Roswell before the aliens took over.

And to Bob and Vera, who somehow always knew.

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# Introduction

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Napoleon said, “What is history but a fable agreed upon?” Of course, what nobody seems to remember is that Napoleon said a whole bunch of really questionable things. What’s wrong with it is that it implies that history is just a matter of opinion.

Entering the world of conspiracy theories and secret societies is like stepping into another dimension — a distant, parallel, alternate universe where the images, words, and names that surround you are vaguely familiar, but where the laws of physics have completely changed: Black means white; up is down; do-gooders are really Beelzebub’s Satanic waterboys; and the world seems to be viewed through a giant funhouse mirror.

We stepped into this alternate universe while Chris was working on *Freemasons For Dummies* (Wiley). In the alternate universe of conspiracy theories, the fraternity that he wrote about bore no resemblance whatsoever to the version found in stacks of conspiracy books and endless Internet information of anti-Masonic accusations.

Our exploration of the world of conspiracies and secret societies after working on the book about Freemasons led to extended discussions with Wiley’s *For Dummies* folks, and the proposal for this book grew and grew as our research became more extensive.

Researching a book about conspiracy theories and secret societies is a frustrating experience, most notably because it's all *supposed* to be a secret. But it's a balancing act, as well. Too little skepticism risks falling down Lewis Carroll's rabbit hole into a twisted wonderland of circular logic, but too much skepticism risks overlooking something critical that may become tomorrow's tragic headline. We talk a lot in this book about secretive and suspicious groups that are at the center of conspiracy theories around the world, but we also let you know what you can do to spot truly malevolent secret societies and tell the real conspiracies from the fakes.

## About This Book

For the millions of people who are true believers in their own favorite conspiracy theories, the type of information we cover in this book is all *very* important. Of course we feel that the material is important, but you don't have to read it in order. This book is intended to be a reference for you, so you don't need to read the chapters in order from front cover to back (even though we suggest it). So if you want to read about all the secret societies before you read about the conspiracy theories, or vice versa, that's fine with us. It's all interesting stuff!

Moreover, just because you may not believe the overwhelming majority of the conspiracies cited in this book, it doesn't make them all wrong. There have been

*real* conspiracies in the world, as well as real secret societies that were seeking to accomplish real evil. Or amass power. Or money. Or both. We try to separate fluff, fear, and fantasy from the facts, and we endeavor to present them with a minimum of personal commentary so you can decide for yourself.

But there's a much more vital reason we've come to feel this book is important, and it's not because we believe the world is about to end in an ultimate showdown between the forces of Good and Evil. No, it's a lot simpler than that. It's a question of what can happen when the lit match of a fiery, professional conspiracist touches off the powder keg of a susceptible believer.

## Conventions Used in This Book

This book is unconventional in a whole lot of ways, but we do follow a few rules:

- ✓ We *italicize* new terms, closely followed by an easy-to-understand definition. You also see names of secret societies in italics.
- ✓ We **bold** important keywords in bulleted lists as well as the action parts of numbered lists.
- ✓ We use monofont for all Web addresses.

# What You're Not To Read

This is a reference book, which means no one is going to whack your hands with a ruler if they catch you skipping ahead. In particular, anything marked with a *Technical Stuff* icon (more about those below) may make your eyes glaze over from information overload. Not that it isn't interesting, but feel free to skip ahead if you find yourself getting woozy.

## Foolish Assumptions

We don't know most of you, but we make a few assumptions about you and why you picked up this book:

- ✓ **You're confused and want the unvarnished scoop on secret societies and conspiracy theories.** You've watched the History Channel documentaries on codes, conspiracies, and secret societies until your eyes have swollen shut. This book puts it all together for you. It gives you the tools to tell the difference between the big players, the small fries, the truly scary stuff, and the piles of pernicious piffle.
- ✓ **You're a complete skeptic.** All the rumors about the Illuminati, UFOs, and underground government bunkers beneath the Denver Airport strike you as balderdash from a weak *X-Files* episode. We separate fact from fiction and let you know when to really put on your tinfoil helmet.

- ✓ **You're a true believer.** You just know that at any minute black helicopters are going to land on your lawn and the Men In Black will bash down your door. We're here to help you sort through all the conspiracies. We'll help you come to grips with what's real, what's made up, who made it up, and why.
- ✓ **You're a member of what the rest of the world calls a "secret society" and you want to know why everyone is talking behind your back.** Does everybody shut up when you walk into the room? Is your daughter asking why people on the Internet claim you're the spawn of Satan. We examine the origins of secret societies and the more benign groups that have become the major suspects in the New World Order.

# How This Book Is Organized

If you just plowed in here without bothering to look at the neatly organized Table of Contents, we don't mind. We prefer you to start at the top, but we won't call out the black helicopter guys if you don't. We're about to tell you all the important stuff about the way this book is laid out. It's chopped up into four neatly packaged parts, and you can read them in any order.

# **Part I: Conspiracy Theories and Secret Societies: The Improbable Wedded to the Inscrutable**

About 99.9 percent of all respectable conspiracy theories are tied hand and foot to some sort of secret society or organization. This part lays out easy-to-understand models, with no cryptic double talk about all the “theys” out there, and all the dark conspiracies behind them. Chapter 1 is an overview of the world of conspiracies and secret societies, while Chapters 2 and 3 get down to the nuts and bolts of defining and identifying them.

## **Part II: A Colossal Compilation of Conspiracy Theories**

This part covers the best and the brightest in terms of conspiracy theories — from the sublime to the ridiculous. Chapter 4 discusses some of the most common theories, the conspiracies *so* secret that *everybody* knows about them. Chapter 5 is the hit parade of, well, hits — conspiracies related to famous assassinations. Chapter 6 covers the range of race, genocide, and apocalyptic doom, just to bring a little cheerlessness to your humdrum life. Chapter 7 covers conspiracies not of this Earth — from Roswell to the Moon-landing hoaxes. And finally, Chapter 8 covers the unsettling growth of the ever-wilder 9/11 conspiracies.

## **Part III: Secret Societies and Societies with Secrets**

You can't tell the players without a program. This part exposes the major secret societies of the last century and a half — the ones that still haunt every conspiracist cubbyhole in the bookstore and on the Internet. Chapter 9 discusses the Freemasons, the world's least kept secret society, and Chapter 10 ventures into the world of Rosicrucian and occult groups, while Chapter 11 explores the origin and modern incarnations of the Illuminati. Chapter 12 delves into the tales of secret societies of assassins like the, well, Assassins, along with the Invisible Empire, the Ku Klux Klan, and other hate groups. In Chapter 13 you find a gallery of both frivolous and frightening secret societies, from the golden age of fraternalism and college groups, to a lineup of military and revolutionary cabals. And Chapter 14 rounds out the list with the criminal underground and the godfather of all secret societies, the Mafia.

## Part IV: The Part of Tens

A *For Dummies* book wouldn't feel right without the Part of Tens — chapters divided into quaint lists of ten items of importance. In this part, we serve you ten conspiracy theories that skirted the edge of madness; ten conspiracy theories that really turned out to be true; ten secret societies with the goofiest names; and ten of the drop-dead weirdest secret societies of all time.

## Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, you spot certain icons hanging around in the margins. They're there to help you navigate the conspiracies, conspiracists, and conspiratorial plots.



This icon indicates little-known or “unusual” information or facts that were originally kept secret. Consider the info in these icons to come from a legendary group or inner circle of an all-seeing, all-knowing Master within any number of secret societies. Think of him as the Mister Know It All on all things secret or conspiratorial.



This icon marks key points that are vital to understanding truly important topics. Don't skip them!



This icon highlights stuff like additional data or side trips with more detail than you may be interested

in. They can be ruthlessly skipped without missing the really important topics of the chapters.



This icon gives you handy tidbits and helpful advice.



This book stinks with conspiracies. It's loaded with them. They're all over the place. This icon points out the ones that are the bedrock of conspiracy thinking — either the most important allegations, the best known, or in some cases, the most ridiculous.

## Where to Go from Here

The best part of a *For Dummies* book is that you can start at page 1, or you can go all the way to the Part of Tens and read the book backwards. So, start with any chapter you want. Each chapter and section is pretty much self-contained, and if we think there's stuff you should've read about in order, we warn you and cross-reference other chapters as those instances pop up.

A *For Dummies* book isn't supposed to be the last book you pick up on a subject — it should be the first. But we hope that what you ultimately say about this book is that we've lifted the veil on topics you may have only vaguely heard of and presented you with enough facts to make up your own mind, or to study further. Or to just creep out your relatives.