

BANG-AND-BURNER

"Bang and burn" jobs involve sabotage, usually through demolitions or arson. This skill set translates with unnerving ease to EOD (explosive ordnance disposal) and arson investigation. Bang-and-burners set and disarm everything from booby traps to car bombs to ship-scuttling charges.

Specific Examples: IRA or ETA bomb-builder, Albanian mafia arsonist, Polish Army combat engineer, Special Branch bomb disposal expert.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Architecture 2, Chemistry 2, Criminology 1, Intimidation 1

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Conceal 4, Explosive Devices 8, Infiltration 2, Mechanics 4

BLACK BAGGER

A "black bag job" is FBI slang for a breaking-and-entry intrusion, usually intended to copy (or steal) documents or plant bugs or wiretaps. British spies often call break-in artists "box men," a term originating in Victorian criminal slang. By any name, it's burglary.

Specific Examples: Cat burglar on the Riviera, Bundespolizei museum security specialist, DGSE or Mossad covert entry specialist, NSA contractor.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Data Recovery 1, Electronic Surveillance 2, Photography 2, Streetwise 1
Alternates: Architecture, Notice

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Conceal 2, Digital Intrusion 2, Filch 6, Infiltration 8
Alternates: Preparedness

CLEANER

The cleaner removes evidence of covert activity from the scene. Sometimes that evidence is just fingerprints or surveillance tapes; sometimes, it's bloodstains or corpses. This Background, especially, combines well with others; it's a good, useful skill set for any covert operative. A cleaner's abilities also come in handy when removing a living person from the scene, either willingly or involuntarily in "hostile extractions."

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES: FSB mole in the Interior Ministry, Special Branch security operative, Camorra-connected trucking supervisor



in Naples, Bulgarian NIS officer handling "renditions" for the CIA.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Bureaucracy 2, Cop Talk 1, Criminology 2, Urban Survival 1
Alternates: Chemistry, Data Recovery, Electronic Surveillance, Notice, Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Conceal 6, Disguise 2, Driving 4, Explosive Devices 2, Infiltration 2, Stability 2
Alternates: Digital Intrusion

COBBLER

In British spy lingo, the cobbler makes "shoes" — false passports, visas, identity documents, and so forth. In an increasingly digital age, it's good to see solid hand-craftsmanship rewarded. These abilities also point toward counterfeiting, or any sort of image or document manipulation, as well as toward stopping such behaviors.

Specific Examples: MI6 or SVR documentation expert, Nigerian facilitator for human traffickers, Interpol document-security officer, Italian Guardia di Finanza customs inspector.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Bureaucracy 1, Forgery 4, Photography 1

Alternates: Cryptography

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Cover 6, Digital Intrusion 4, Disguise 2, Infiltration 4, Mechanics 2

CUCKOO

The cuckoo lays its eggs in another bird's nest, convincing the stranger to raise its chicks. Agents with this Background specialize in social infiltration; they may be "face men," long-con grifters, or former moles or sleepers planted in an enemy agency or society by their patron. This Background blends very well with Asset Handler.

Specific Examples: CIA deep cover agent of influence, SVR "swallow" trained to lure Western men into "honey traps," BND-sponsored journalist, Iranian VEVAK agent monitoring dissident expats, scoundrel preying on lonely hearts in the Greek islands, MI6 "talent spotter" looking for foreign targets vulnerable to blackmail or recruitment.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Flattery or Flirting 2, High Society 2, Reassurance 2

Alternates: Human Terrain, Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES: Cover 3, Disguise 8, Filch 2, Gambling 3, Sense Trouble 2

HACKER

The 21st-century box man does his breaking and entering over fiberoptic cable and wireless networks. A clandestine-ops hacker alters data as well as steals it, suborning systems rather than crashing them. Real-world hacking depends at least as much on social engineering — working on human weaknesses — as it does on cybernetic savvy and 1337 coding skillz. This Background combines particularly well with the Analyst, the Black Bagger, or the Wire Rat.

Specific Examples: Ukrainian industrial-espionage contractor, GCHQ codes-and-signals “wrangler,” Swiss bank financial security specialist, IDF Unit 8200 cyberwarfare programmer, freelance American computer security specialist.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Cryptography 1*, Data Recovery 2, Electronic Surveillance 2, Traffic Analysis 1, Urban Survival 1

Alternates: Accounting, Bureaucracy, Forgery, Human Terrain, Reassurance

GENERAL ABILITIES: Digital Intrusion 10, Disguise 2, Infiltration 2, Mechanics 4

Alternates: Network

*free from 8+ in Digital Intrusion.

INVESTIGATOR

This is the straightforward, meat-and-potatoes sort of agent: given a problem, he tries to solve it. Sometimes that involves calling in the law or backup; sometimes it involves calling in a wet worker to “resolve” it; sometimes it involves calling in a Predator drone to really, *really* “resolve” it. Many investigators are reactive rather than proactive: counter-terror, counter-intelligence, counter-organized crime.

Specific Examples: MI5 or FSB field agent, French National Police inspector, Italian special anti-Mafia magistrate’s officer, Triad fixer.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES: Bureaucracy

1, Cop Talk 1, Interrogation 1, Law 1, Notice 2

Alternates: Criminology, Intimidation, Streetwise

GENERAL ABILITIES: Disguise 2,

Hand-to-Hand 6, Infiltration 2, Sense Trouble 2, Surveillance 6

Alternates: Athletics, Driving, Shooting

MEDIC

It’s not just about the healing, although it’s mostly about that. It’s also about the truth serum administering, or the talking agents out of (or into) collapsing, or the spotting viral-biological threats before they hit the headlines, or the figuring out just what killed all those Triad thugs.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLES: Scotland Yard forensic pathologist, CIA “shrinker” or MI6 “inquisitor”, GSG 9 trauma medic, Paris or Naples EMT, US Navy corpsman, WHO or Médecins Sans Frontières hematologist, Russian Army biological warfare specialist.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:

Bullshit Detector 2*, Chemistry 1, Diagnosis 2**, Forensic Pathology 1, Interrogation 1, Pharmacy 1

Alternates: Human Terrain, Languages, Reassurance

GENERAL ABILITIES: Medic 10, Shrink 8

Alternates: Driving, Health, Stability

* includes the free 1 point from 8+ in Shrink.

**includes the free 1 point from 8+ in Medic.

MULE

A mule specializes in taking things from one side of a border to another: drugs, girls, fellow agents, antiques, defectors, stolen cars, a mysterious silver briefcase, you name it. Many mules are part of a long family line of smugglers, especially in the clan-riven Balkans and Middle East; others are part of a wide network of criminals organized along vaguely ethnic lines. Still others work for specific agencies at specific border crossings; a few have good enough cover to get them across multiple borders multiple times. This Background combines well with Watcher to create a “tourist” or “lamplighter,” a long-term surveillance artist assigned to a highly mobile, high-value target.

MAKING YOUR OWN BACKGROUND

The Backgrounds provided are intended to be inspirational, not comprehensive. If they inspire you to make your own Background, more power to you! Since Backgrounds have no in-game mechanical effect, go ahead and make up any Background you like as long as the Director approves the concept. Each Background comprises 6 points in Investigative abilities, and 18 points in General abilities.

The listed Backgrounds are occupational: they narrowly track an agent’s role in a team of operatives, or on a crew of “deniable assets.” You could just as easily build Backgrounds intended to recall literary or cinematic models of thriller fiction, although the ones given here should take Athletics ratings of 8+ in addition:

BRAINWASHED BLACK PROGRAM BADASS**INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:**

Electronic Surveillance 1, Notice 1, Tradecraft 1, Traffic Analysis 1, Urban Survival 2

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Hand-to-Hand 8, Shooting 6, Surveillance 4

HOT VAMPIRE SLAYER**INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:**

Bullshit Detector 1, Flirting 1, Occult Studies 1, Reassurance 1, Vampirology 2

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Hand-to-Hand 8, Weapons 10

MI6 AGENT WITH LICENSE TO KILL**INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:**

Flirting 2, High Society 2, Intimidation 1, Tradecraft 1

GENERAL ABILITIES: Driving 4,

Gambling 3, Hand-to-Hand 4, Infiltration 2, Shooting 5

OFF-DUTY COP ON THE COAST**INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES:**

Architecture 1, Bullshit Detector 2, Cop Talk 2, Intimidation 1

GENERAL ABILITIES:

Hand-to-Hand 5, Sense Trouble 3, Shooting 5, Surveillance 5

TASERS AND STUN GUNS

Both tasers and stun guns use high-voltage, low-amperage electrical currents to disrupt a target's electro-motor system, functionally paralyzing them for several seconds.

A taser is a pistol-grip or flashlight-grip weapon that fires two metal darts on 7-yard wires, using compressed air. Firing a taser is a Shooting test; it can only be used at Close range (at Point-Blank range, the darts haven't separated enough for the charge to propagate). It is a single-shot weapon that takes two rounds to reload.

A stun gun isn't a gun at all, but a simple battery grip with two exposed electrical contacts. Touching the target and squeezing the handgrip releases the charge. Using a stun gun is a Weapons attack; it can only be used at Point-Blank range. (A cattle prod or stun rod can be used at Close range, like other longer weapons.) It carries hundreds of "jolts" in its battery.

Both tasers and stun guns deliver a **moderate shock** (see Electricity, p. 79) to anyone they hit. If they hit a flammable surface — a target soaked in gasoline or alcohol, for example — they may start a fire.

Whatever other effects they may have, tasers also short-circuit combat scenes, and turn fights into one-punch beats. In other words, tasers are boring. Tasers aren't invincible: three or four guys can always swarm someone with a taser, especially once they've (ahem) shot their bolt. But there's one thing you can be sure of. No matter what else turns out to be true about vampires in your particular game, they're immune to tasers. Tasers don't work on vampires, or dhampirs, or ghouls, or Renfields, or anything with so much as a drop of vampire blood in them. True fact. Try it and see.



THAT SAID, TASERS ARE PRETTY COOL

What stun guns are good for, though, is keeping a low profile. A single gunshot can rapidly escalate a situation in a crowded urban center, particularly in places with strict firearms control laws. While they're of limited

utility in the climactic confrontation of an operation, they're invaluable investigative tools during those minor excursions that precede it. Plus, they're handy for all sort of cinematic hot-wiring scenarios.

FIRST AID

If you are wounded, a character with the Medic ability can improve your condition by spending Medic points. For every Medic point spent, you regain 2 Health

points — unless you are your own Medic, in which case you gain only 1 Health point for every Medic point you spent. The Medic can only refill your pool to where you were before the incident in which you received this latest injury. He must be

in a position to devote all of his attention to directly tending to your wounds.

Even with 0 points left in his Medic pool, a character with Medic can restore 1 Health point per scene to another character or himself.

EXHAUSTION, INJURY, AND DEATH

Unlike most abilities, your Health pool can drop below 0.

When it does this, you must make a Consciousness Roll. Roll a die with the absolute value of your current Health pool as your Difficulty. You may deliberately strain yourself to remain conscious, voluntarily reducing your Health pool by an amount of your choice. For each point you reduce it, add 1 to your die result. The Difficulty of the Consciousness roll is based on your Health pool *before* you make this reduction.



GUNS KILL

The standard *Night's Black Agents* rules make shootouts and firefights somewhat survivable in the name of drama and thriller convention. While real life is full of chancy firefights with lucky results, a **DUST** mode game aims for higher and more reliable lethality.

Treat all Hurt results to humans from firearms as Seriously Wounded results. Where bruising or even hacking damage might be "shaken off," any gunshot that drops your Health pool to 0 or below does an additional +6 points of damage.

Vampires and other once-human monsters don't suffer any such extra damage from gunshots unless the Director explicitly rules that they do.



NO, REALLY, GUNS KILL

Even outside DUST mode, firearms are extremely dangerous in the world of Night's Black Agents. An agent can keep barreling through a single gunshot, but that second one will almost certainly drop him to Hurt or worse. Two or three mediocre gunmen, concentrating their fire on a single target (which smart foes will), can take out almost anyone. Don't give them that opportunity. If there are multiple guns in play, cover is a necessity, as is sending your allies to flank an enemy position. Only leave yourself exposed if you are fairly certain that you can remove an opponent during your turn. Oh, and never forget the ability to Jump In (see p. 75) if you see a friend in need.

Ghouls are chasing you through a burned-out church in Norway, after a surveillance attempt that did not go your way. They hit you with a harpoon, dropping your Health pool to -3. You would really rather not gather first-hand intel on

ghoul feeding habits, so you must remain conscious. The absolute value of -3 is 3, so this is the Difficulty of your Consciousness roll. You spend another 2 Health points you don't have, pushing yourself on toward the sunlight outside where you left the car.

OPTIONAL RULE: MINIMUM DAMAGE

In *Night's Black Agents*, unlike most GUMSHOE games, the PCs are assumed to be trained, deadly combatants. In most GUMSHOE games, you can hit and still do no damage: a glancing blow, perhaps. In *Night's Black Agents*, the Director can invoke this optional rule:

any blow that hits does at least 1 point of damage. Of course, that's true for tough foes as well, and it's especially true for Renfields.

Armor can still reduce damage to 0, of course.

NON-LETHAL DAMAGE

Players may always announce that their agents are using their Hand-to-Hand attacks to do non-lethal damage: choke-holds, arm-locks, body blows, and the like. Such attacks never lower a target's Health pool below -11, but merely force yet another

Consciousness roll if successful. Similar conditions can apply to non-bladed Weapons attacks.

Bringing a knife or gun into a fight is a declaration of willingness to kill. There is no such thing as a non-lethal Shooting attack.

GRAPPLING

Several playtesters wanted to know about grappling rules. In GUMSHOE, grappling is functionally the same as any other type of Hand-to-Hand combat: when an enemy's Health is down to 0 (or they've failed a Consciousness roll), they're out of the fight, whether they were punched out, kicked out, or arm-locked out. Health isn't precisely "hit points," it's a dramatic measure of how much fight you have left.

Players who just want a little more flavor, riffing on krav maga or other lock-and-strike style martial arts, should use lots of Smashes (see p. 76), Called Shots to the throat or joints (see p. 72), or even Mook

Shield (see p. 76) if the Director allows it. Reckless Attack (see p. 76) can also model grapples, lowering the Hit Threshold of both the grappler and the grappled.

Some players want grappling as a way to make one roll and end a fight. The way to do that? Only pick fights with civilians, or with mooks. Quickly ending a fight with a grapple against a tough, trained opponent doesn't happen: that's why MMA matches last more than six seconds. Monsters like the camazotz (p. 149) and the lamia (p. 151) get special grapple-style powers against tough humans because they're superhuman monsters.



DEATH AND CONSEQUENCES

Killing people hardens the killers, and not in a good way. The operative word is "sociopath." But if you don't harden yourself to your acts, your guilt tears at you; you see their faces at night.

In a **BURN** mode game, every time you kill a human being, you lose 1 rating point of Stability or 1 rating

point of any Interpersonal ability. Your choice: haunted, or hardened?

You can rebuild these lost Stability and Interpersonal points with experience points (see p. 94); if so, you're consciously dedicating effort that could have gone into other pursuits to remaining human. Congratulations.

CITIES

SO MUCH FOR THE OPPOSITION; on to the setting. You can set your *Night's Black Agents* adventures anywhere: a black-program prison in Lithuania, a desolate megalithic site in Brittany, the whisper-silent frozen woods of Lapland, a tramp steamer in the Adriatic. But many — perhaps even most — of your operations will at least start in a city. Cities provide anonymity for vampires and spies alike; they are feeding grounds and hunting grounds. Cities are where power concentrates, power that vampires manipulate and spies investigate.

Urban settings are integral parts of the spy thriller tradition: hunts through famous landmarks, chases into crowded marketplaces, firefights in factories and office buildings alike. Cities are just plain thrilling locations, and your game will be richer for including them.

Similarly, you can establish your vampire conspiracy in the sweltering new cities of East Asia, the war-ravaged frontiers of Africa, or the placid suburbs of North America. But you have to start somewhere — as do we. So we started in Europe, with

a look-in at the surrounding coasts of the Mediterranean. Spy thrillers began in European settings, in the drawing rooms of E. Philips Oppenheim and the anonymous offices of Eric Ambler. Vampire stories, likewise: *Dracula* famously features a thrilling chase from London to Transylvania complete with a boss fight at the end. Even now, Europe plays a starring role in the new James Bond and Jason Bourne film franchises; in the real world, it combines spies, organized crime, and cool gear quite like nowhere else.

DEEP BACKGROUND

Your Europe can be as realistic as you care to make it. The agents come from a world of shadow loyalties, where spies deal with criminals to trap terrorists, and the other way around. Intelligence agencies “on the same side” — even in the same country — routinely block, or even blow, each other’s operations, for reasons of national policy or institutional pique, to say nothing of outright treason or corruption. You can add fictional agencies like the IMF or SD-6, revive extinct ones like SMERSH, or simply allude to some sort of connection to “the Ministry.” You can do the same with criminal rings, terrorist groups, or even whole countries if you like. Most thrillers try to keep at least a façade of realism, but how thick you want to

make the scrim is up to you. The next two sections serve as jumping-off points for European espionage and illegality, not as hard-and-fast definitions. They are intended to get you up to speed, to give you some names to drop and some targets to shoot.

BACKSTAGE EUROPE

Although this section lists the main intelligence actors in Europe, it is far from exhaustive. Some countries (those with primarily domestic intelligence and security concerns) are not listed, and even some agencies in the listed countries are missing, mostly due to space limitations. Hit Wikipedia or elsewhere on the Net to dig deeper for any given country or agency.

BULGARIA

During the Cold War, the First Directorate of the Committee for State Security (KDS) actively cooperated with the KGB, murdering dissidents abroad and famously abetting the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. Its successor, the **National Intelligence Service (NIS)** performs extraordinary renditions and provides other assistance to CIA anti-terrorist campaigns.

CHINA

China’s **Ministry for State Security (MSS)**, colloquially known as the Guóanbù, performs both intelligence and security functions for the Communist regime. In Europe, its activities focus on industrial espionage and monitoring



Chinese students and residents abroad. Typical MSS practice is to flood the zone with hundreds or even thousands of short-term, low-level assets gathering a “mosaic” of OSINT and HUMINT to be analyzed in Beijing. The Seventh Bureau of the Bu Er, or (more formally) **Military Intelligence Department (MID)** hosts China’s famed cyberintelligence teams of hackers, cryptanalysts, and spyware programmers.

FRANCE

France’s security and intelligence apparatus rivals America’s for intentional bureaucratic tangles. Broadly speaking, the **Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE)** handles foreign intelligence (its clandestine, paramilitary arm is **Division Action**) while the **Direction Centrale du Renseignement Intérieur (DCRI)** serves as the primary domestic security directorate. Both engage in technical and industrial espionage against the U.S. and other nominal allies, as well as more conventional intelligence missions. The **Direction du Renseignement Militaire (DRM)**, the French directorate of military intelligence, concentrates on operational intelligence for the French military; it operates wherever French forces do (currently Bosnia, Libya, and various African states). France’s **Police Nationale** (the former *Sûreté*) generally takes the lead on organized crime investigations, although the intelligence arms often horn in on international cases, and the national customs police **Direction Nationale du Renseignement et des Enquêtes Douanières (DNRED)** has primary jurisdiction over smuggling, cybercrime, and counterfeit money.

GERMANY

With a legacy of totalitarian security forces from the Nazi Gestapo to the Communist Stasi, Germany rigorously delimits its intelligence agencies. Despite this resolution, Germany’s **Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND)**,

the Federal Intelligence Service, began as a splinter group of Abwehr, SD, and SS operatives recruited by the CIA to spy on the Soviet bloc. The BND takes primacy not only in external intelligence operations (focused on HUMINT and close cooperation with Mossad) but in SIGINT, and in combating organized crime and WMD proliferation. The **Bundesamt für Sicherheit in der Informationstechnik (BSI)**, or Federal Office for Information Technology Security, covers not only government information security, but the information security of the German banking industry. Germany’s internal security agency, the **Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV)**, or Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, limits its remit to counter-espionage and monitoring and infiltrating extremist groups, leaving international crime, counter-mafia work, national criminal record-keeping, and anti-smuggling operations to the **Bundeskriminalamt (BKA)**. The elite counter-terrorist special forces unit **GSG 9** is a police agency of the **Bundespolizei (BPOL)**, responsible for border, embassy, and transportation security), not a military unit.

GREAT BRITAIN

The British intelligence apparatus is, for the most part, clearly delineated and quite competent. The Security Service, **MI5**, handles domestic intelligence, counter-espionage, and other threats to the Realm. The Secret Intelligence Service, **MI6**, the fictional home of James Bond and George Smiley, conducts external intelligence operations. Less well-known are Britain’s all-source military and security intelligence group **Defence Intelligence** and its SIGINT, cybersecurity, and cryptanalytic arm **GCHQ** (Government Communications Headquarters). In general, British espionage agencies rely more heavily on HUMINT, with networks in some areas of the Middle East going back a century or more. Founded in 1883 to combat Irish terrorism, the **Special Branch**

of London’s Metropolitan Police is now officially called the Counter Terrorism Command or SO15. Its mission remains the same: thwart terrorism in London and coordinate police work with MI5 and other intelligence services.

IRAN

Iran’s secret police and intelligence organization, **Vezerat-e Ettela’at va Amniyat-e Keshvar (VEVAK)** is also known as VAJA, MISIRI, and MOIS depending on the source. It assassinates dissidents at home and abroad, assists Iran-allied terrorist groups (especially Hezbollah), traffics in WMD precursors, and monitors expatriate Iranian populations, as well as carrying out more conventional intelligence functions. The **Qods Force** is the Iranian Revolutionary Guard’s special forces unit; it operates outside Iran advising allied militaries, carrying out deniable operations, and aiding terrorist groups.

ISRAEL

Israel’s external intelligence agency, **Mossad**, punches considerably above its weight in the espionage world. Its operations include kidnappings, assassinations of PLO and Hamas leaders, extraordinary renditions of Nazi war criminals, and sabotage of WMD components intended for enemies of Israel. It maintains generally good relations with the BND and MI6, as well as the CIA. Its katsas, or case officers, can draw on hundreds of sayanim, non-Mossad local friendlies (usually Jews) who support Israel. **Shin Bet** (officially called Shabak or the ISA), the Israeli domestic intelligence arm, handles counter-terrorism with the help of the “Duvdevan” and Sayeret Matkal special forces units of the IDF. **Unit 8200** is the Israeli SIGINT and cyberwarfare brigade under the Israeli military intelligence directorate, **Aman**.

ITALY

Italy’s intelligence agencies have been reshuffled twice in the last 40 years, following an attempted neo-fascist