GADGET GUIDE: SPY-TECH

Technology has long been used to provide an advantage when it comes to getting access to things one should not have, whether places, people, goods, or information. Necessity is the mother of invention, and the needs of criminals and spies have inspired a variety of technology, including a range of counter-measures.

Spy-Tech looks at gadgets used for infiltration, burglary, deception, disguise, and surveillance, and the equipment used to detect and defend against all of those things.

HIDDEN & CONCEALED TECH

A key element of a lot of spy-tech is its hidden nature: tools or weapons disguised as mundane items, for example, or able to conceal contraband or other cargo, or go unnoticed while doing their work.

- **Concealed** technology is disguised to look like something else, at least while it is not in use. Examples include "poison pens" with hidden hypodermics, watches with X-ray lock-picks, and other cinematic "spy-gear" intended to pass as something else. Such a disguise is generally a Feature of the item, unless the GM considers it too minor to bother (or the item is something the player whips up on the spot by spending a hero point). An additional Feature rank may be required for concealed items that can pass serious scrutiny like X-rays or similar scans.

- **Hidden** items are simply stashed away out of sight, making it more difficult to find them. This may involve the use of hidden compartments (see **Concealment & Stealth**, following) or just the effective use of available hiding places. As a general rule, trying to hide something versus trying to find it is an opposed check of Sleight of Hand or Stealth versus Perception or Investigation (the former to notice something out of the ordinary, the latter for a careful and deliberate search).

Characters can hide or look for things as routine checks (**Chapter 1** of the *Hero's Handbook*), meaning some characters have a sufficient skill bonus to hide things so most people have no chance of finding them or, conversely, have a sufficient skill bonus to be able to find most hidden items easily without the need for a skill check, so long as they are not under any immediate pressure or distractions. The availability of effective hiding places may provide a circumstance modifier to the check to hide the object(s), as can the size and composition of the objects themselves.

INFILTRATION

Gadgets from wire lockpicks and braided rope to electronic code-crackers and motorized harnesses are used for getting into places (and out of them) without being detected.

A good deal of infiltration work involves avoiding alarms and overcoming traps and security measures. See **Gadget Guide: Traps** for details on various sorts of traps infiltrators may encounter, need to avoid, or fall into, if they are not careful enough.

BURGLARY TOOLS

Simple breaking and entering and burglary makes use of various tools, from lockpicks and prybars to wiring, gloves, and glass cutters (to name a few). The default assumption is that characters trained in particular skills have access to the necessary tools to use those skills without incurring a circumstance penalty for doing so, unless a complication arises that deprives the character of those tools. So ordinary tools have no point cost and do not need to be listed amongst a character's equipment.

At the Gamemaster's discretion, a particular fine or high-quality version of ordinary tools may be available, providing a +2 circumstance bonus to checks involving those tools at the cost of a single Feature (1 equipment point).

BURGLARY SKILLS

Generally, the Technology skill is used to handle checks involving overcoming security measures, from mechanical locks and traps to sophisticated electronics. However, some characters who specialize as burglars and spies have a fairly narrow specialty when it comes to technology, in which case the following advantage may be useful:

Benefit (Burglar): You substitute your Sleight of Hand or Stealth skill bonus for Technology skill checks involving the Security uses of the Technology, but not for other uses of the skill (see **Chapter 4** of the *Hero's Handbook*). Choose which skill bonus you use when you acquire this advantage.

INFILTRATION CHALLENGES

The process of infiltrating a site—from approaching undetected to getting in and escaping—is generally handled as a challenge (**Chapter 7** of the *Hero's Handbook*) although it may well be a series of challenges, or even the bulk of an entire adventure, depending on how it is planned.

Relatively unimportant infiltrations and spy activities can be handled with a single skill check, perhaps even as routine actions (although spying is usually anything but routine). So a character might need a Stealth or Technology skill check to slip past security. More involved infiltrations become challenges, with a series of checks representing the different stages of the process—Stealth, Technology, possibly Deception or other interaction skills and Investigation or Perception—with a number of degrees of success needed before a requisite number of degrees of failure can accumulate. Like other challenges, these tests may be undertaken by a single character or they could be a team effort. Finally, some infiltration scenarios are scenes or whole adventures unto themselves, often with multiple challenges needed to succeed.

BIOMETRIC DECODER

A small (palm-sized) device able to bypass biometric security measures such as palm- and fingerprint scanners or retinal scans, either using stored (valid) information or by "cracking" the system and supplying false information that it accepts as valid. Successfully using a biometric decoder may require a prior effort to acquire a usable scan of an authorized user. If this is accomplished, the GM may waive the skill check needed to operate the decoder, or have the check take place when the information is acquired (although its success or failure can't be assessed until the data is actually *used*).

> **Biometric Decoder:** Morph 2 (biometric access data), Precise, Limited to Biometrics, Technology Check Required (DC 15, –5 points) • *5 points*

ELECTRONIC LOCKPICK

A small device that, when attached to an electronic lock, will "crack" the combination needed to open the lock. At the most basic level, an electronic lockpick is simply a tool required to use the Technology skill to open electronic locks, costing no equipment points. Additional Feature ranks may grant a circumstance bonus for its use (see **Burglary Tools**, previously).

> **Electronic Lockpick:** Feature (circumstance bonus to Technology checks to open electronic locks, 2 ranks for major bonus) • *1 point per rank*

CLIMBING CABLE

A high-tension cable with a grappler at one end (magnetic, mechanical, or using some type of adhesive, depending on descriptors) as well as a gun capable of firing the cable out to grab onto a target point. The climbing cable makes scaling a sheer surface relatively easy (no check required) so long as the climber isn't stunned or left unable to hold on to the cable (the Platform flaw).

Some characters may upgrade from a climbing cable to a swing cable with the Swinging effect of Movement. See **Gadget Guide: Utility** for details.

> **Climbing Cable:** Movement 1 (Wall-crawling), Platform • *1 point*

GECKO GEAR

This climbing equipment consists of gloves, shoes, and often knee- and elbow-pads covered with a micro-adhesive or tiny suction cups, enabling the wearer to scale sheer surfaces like a gecko lizard. It's usually coupled with a stealth suit or other types of stealth gear (see the following section).

> **Gecko Gear:** Movement 1 (Wall-crawling) • *2 points*

SUSPENSION HARNESS

A torso harness connected to a set of motorized cables that can raise or lower the wearer from an anchor point above, suitable for working suspended over pressure-sensitive floors or networks of detection beams. Certain actions while wearing a suspension harness may require Acrobatics skill checks in order to maneuver.

> **Suspension Harness:** Movement 2 (Safe Fall, Swinging), Limited Range of Movement • *2 points*

SURVEILLANCE

While a great deal of information gathering is done in person, technology provides many more options for surveillance and intelligence gathering from afar, without ever needing to leave the security of one's home base (with the possible exception of setting up the surveillance in the first place). Many surveillance gadgets provide digital storage of information they gather (a 1 rank Feature) or connect to a computer that does so.

TRACERS

Tracers are tiny (DC 20 Perception check to notice) gadgets that can be planted on a target with a successful attack check (opposed Sleight of Hand versus Perception check to do so without the target noticing). The tracer emits a signal of a particular sense type (typically radio) that allows it—and the subject it is planted on—to be tracked. Sensory effects of the same type as the signal may also pick it up or interfere with it.

> **Tracer:** Senses 1 (Tracking) • *1 point*

BUGS

A "bug" is a small, remote surveillance device capable of transmitting audio (and often video) to a receiver. The DC to notice the bug is that of noticing the Remote Sensing effect, and can be further modified with Subtle. Bugs are Limited to where the transmitters can be and are placed and to the Medium of transmitters available to them. Removing the Limited flaw allows the bugs to change positions, making them mobile (perhaps disguised as robotic insects or the like).

Bug: Remote Sensing, Limited to Transmitter Placement, Medium (transmitters) • *1 point per rank for Audio and Visual, 1 point per 2 ranks for Visual only, 1 point per 3 ranks for Audio only*

MICROPHONES

Surveillance microphones include parabolic and laser microphones designed to pick up and amplify sound over a distance, providing the benefits of Extended Hearing.

Microphone: Senses (Extended Hearing) • *1 point per rank*

CAMERAS

A basic camera is just a storage device for visual information (a 1 rank Feature) but cameras often come with various visual Senses effects to enhance their capabilities, including Extended Vision and Infravision.

Camera: Feature 1 (image storage) • *1 point +1 point per rank for additional Senses effects*

CONCEALMENT & STEALTH

Of course, breaking into a locale can be for nothing if the attempt is detected too soon (or at all). A good deal of spy-tech relies on concealing people and things, and their activities, from both guards and surveillance measures.

Naturally, the Concealment effect most often comes into play here, with varying ranks based on which senses are affected and to what degrees. True "stealth" technology may provide total concealment to one or more senses, while more realistic gadgets have flaws, particularly Blending, Partial, or Passive.

Stealth Technology: Concealment • *2 points per rank.*

STEALTH SUIT

A dark colored or camo-patterned uniform, typically with a mask covering all but the wearer's eyes, designed to provide additional concealment and make it easier to hide. A properly patterned stealth suit grants a circumstance bonus to Stealth checks to hide. For an additional Feature rank, the suit can change patterns and colors to suit different environments, although the change must be directed, and happens too slowly to keep up with the

environment around wearers as they move (but see the **Chameleon Cloak**, following).

> **Stealth Suit:** Feature (circumstance bonus to Stealth checks, 2 ranks for a major bonus, +1 rank for variable patterns) • *1 point per rank*

CHAMELEON CLOAK

A suit or device surrounds the wearer with a field or material that adapts to match the background, rendering the wearer virtually invisible, although there is some distortion around the wearer's contours, and rapid movement makes the effect difficult to maintain.

> **Chameleon Cloak:** Concealment 2 (Visual), Blending • *2 points*

IR CLOAKING

A special suit or field masks the wearer's body heat, matching the temperature of the surrounding air, and making the wearer "invisible" to infrared detectors, including hiding any footprints or other heat traces the wearer might leave by touching things. This also means that "heat-seeking" weapons cannot lock-on to the wearer without somehow overcoming the concealment.

> **IR Cloaking:** Concealment 1 (Infravision) • *2 points*

HUSH FIELD

A suit or field surrounds the wearer and muffles all outgoing sound, rendering the wearer completely silent. The effect is fairly close to the wearer's body, so while it silences things like breathing, speaking, footfalls, and the rustle of clothing, it does not affect external sounds like slamming a door or knocking something to the floor. A hush field makes its wearer "invisible" to accurate auditory senses like sonar.

> **Hush Field:** Concealment 2 (Auditory) • *2 points*

PHASING FIELD

This gadget takes the wearer "out of phase" with ordinary matter, able to pass through it harmlessly as if it were not even there. However, the wearer must turn off the field in order to touch or interact with anything in the physical world. The field is still vulnerable to visible-light based effects. The user of an active phasing field generally glows or appears ghost-like or translucent. Experimental phasing fields may have various flaws, particularly Unreliable.

> **Phasing Field:** Insubstantial 4 (incorporeal) • *20 points*

SENSOR CLOAK

A full-spectrum "jamming" device that makes the wearer completely undetectable by electronic sensor devices of all kinds. The wearer does not appear on video cameras, is not picked up by microphones, does not trip sensor beams, and so forth. Sensor cloak wearers are still visible to the senses of living beings, but hidden from any electronic equipment they might be using.

> **Sensor Cloak:** Concealment 10 (all senses), Limited to Electronics • *10 points*

DISGUISE

When not being detected at all is not an option, some type of disguise may be called for. Indeed, some spies are virtual chameleons when it comes to adopting different identities and personas to fool their enemies.

DISGUISE KIT

As with burglary tools (previously), the basic disguise kit simply fulfills the requirement for tools needed to use the Deception skill for disguise without a circumstance penalty (**Chapter 4** of the *Hero's Handbook*). More sophisticated disguise kits may grant a circumstance bonus as a Feature (with a major bonus requiring two Feature ranks).

> **Disguise Kit:** Feature (circumstance bonus to Deception checks for disguise, 2 ranks for major bonus) • *1 point per rank*

LAYERED DISGUISE

This is a more sophisticated form of disguise material, which can be applied in thin layers, allowing the wearer to quickly (as a move action) tear off, dissolve, or otherwise remove the top layer of the disguise, revealing the next, and so forth until all of the layers have been exposed or removed. Essentially, this allows for the preparation of multiple disguises with the usual 10-minute preparation time required for disguising, and switching quickly between them. Normally, the player must specify the descriptors of each layer, but the GM may allow a hero point spent to edit the scene (**Chapter 1** of the *Hero's Handbook*) to specify a different disguise for a particular layer. ("It just so happens that my next disguise is of the mayor!")

> **Layered Disguise:** Feature (doubles number of disguises in preparation) • *1 point per rank, up to 3 ranks (8 layers)*

MEMORY MATERIAL

Memory material can be "programmed" with a variety of different shapes and forms, which it can assume based on a cue, such as a mild electrical charge or a sharp rap (or shaking out, in the case of a flexible material like fabric). This allows for things like clothing that can instantly transform its color, pattern, and even cut, or tools that can change form into other useful shapes (or disguises).

> **Memory Material:** Variable Descriptor (alternate shapes or appearances) • *1–2 points (depending on breadth)*

DISGUISE FIELD

The ultimate in personal disguise, a disguise field allows the wearer to instantly change appearance to any other individual of roughly similar size, including whatever the character is wearing or carrying. The disguise field may use stored patterns, scans of subjects, built-in controls, or some combination thereof. A disguise field provides a +20 circumstance bonus to Deception checks for disguise. Especially advanced disguise fields may have the Precise modifier, allowing them to fool even detailed scans or security measures (and potentially bypass things like biometric identity scanners). It might also provide Enhanced Advantage (Hide in Plain Sight) with an instant disguise.

Disguise Field: Morph 3 (humanoids) • *15 points*

VOICE MASK

A voice mask is able to change the sound of your voice to match someone else's or simply mask it as unidentifiable. A voice mask is a useful addition to disguises that do not use the Morph effect, and therefore do not provide any change in the user's voice or speech other than the use of the Deception skill.

Voice Mask: Illusion 2 (Aural), Limited to Voices • *1 point*

FORGERY

Often as or even more important than disguising one's features is having the right identification to confirm that new appearance. Forgery techniques and technology produce false information, documents, and even artifacts and works of art.

FORGERY BY HAND

Once, all forgery was a matter of artistry, copying penmanship, writing styles, and things like seals and other emblems used to authenticate documents. This falls into the realm of a suitable Expertise skill, including artistic or craft skills, as well as a specific Expertise: Forgery focusing on producing exact copies of things.

In the modern world, most hand-made forgeries are imitations or reproductions of artwork where the traditional techniques like line and brush strokes (as well as materials) are important and cannot easily be reproduced by fabrication.

The results of these forgeries are determined by a Expertise skill check (often routine), which then sets the DC for an Expertise or Investigation skill check to notice any flaw or deviation in the forgery that exposes it as such.

FORGERY BY FABRICATION

More modern forgeries are often reproductions using scanning and fabrication technology able to reproduce subjects in exacting ways, opposed by similar scanning technology able to detect such forgeries through telltale signs of their fabrication. This typically adds a Technology skill check to the forgery process, in some cases using the lower of the Expertise and Technology check results to set the DC for detecting the forgery, but with a suitable circumstance modifier to the DC for casual observation of the forgery (assuming there's any reason to believe it is not genuine in the first place).

POWER FORGERY

The Create and Illusion effects can produce forgeries, with differing results.

A Subtle Create effect "makes created objects not noticeable as constructs" (**Create**, **Chapter 6**, *Hero's Handbook*) while the Precise modifier "can create more precise and detailed objects." Together, the two modifiers make Create capable of producing convincing forgeries. The GM may require an Expertise skill check to determine the effectiveness of the forgery, perhaps with a circumstance modifier based on the rank of the Create effect used to produce it.

The Illusion effect is designed to deceive, producing sensory impressions that seem real. Some forgeries, especially purely digital creations, may be considered Illusion effects, with their rank determining the difficulty class of detecting that they are not what they appear to be (again, assuming the observer has any reason to disbelieve the illusion in the first place). See the effect description in the *Hero's Handbook* for details.

With the addition of the Psychic modifier from **Power Profiles: Illusion Powers**, an illusory forgery gains the additional benefit of appearing exactly like an observer *expects* it to appear.

PSYCHIC PASSPORT

This item is capable of appearing to be whatever identification or paperwork the viewer expects the holder to have, or that the holder should have, given the situation. If the passport's effect is also psychic, apply Limited to Minds (from **Power Profiles**). It may also be Resistible by Will in that case. An effective psychic passport grants a +20 circumstance bonus to Deception checks to masquerade as whomever (or whatever) the passport claims you are. For example, bluffing your way past government security guards is much easier of you appear to have high-level security clearance!

Psychic Passport: Morph 2 (identification), Psychic • *12 points*

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Writing and Design: Steve Kenson
Editing and Development: Jon Leitheusser
Art Direction: Pauline Benney
Graphic Design: Hal Mangold
Interior Art: Alex Sheikman
Playtesters: Leon Chang, James Dawsey, Glenn Hall, Nathan Kahler, Jack Norris, Aaron Sullivan
Publisher: Chris Pramas
Green Ronin Staff: Pauline Benney, Joe Carriker, Steve Kenson, Jon Leitheusser, Nicole Lindroos, Hal Mangold, Jack Norris, Chris Pramas, Evan Sass, Marc Schmalz

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Green Ronin Publishing

3815 S. Othello St., Suite 100 #304
Seattle, WA 98118
Email: *custserv@greenronin.com*
Web Sites: *www.greenronin.com*
www.mutantsandmasterminds.com