

MUTANT CITY SPIES

KENNETH HITE



Pelgrane Press

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF



CREDITS

Publisher: Cathriona Tobin
Written By: Kenneth Hite
Layout: Cathriona Tobin
Original Layout Template: Jérôme Huguenin
Artwork: Marc Steinmann, Jérôme Huguenin

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

Mutant City Spies is part of the Ken Writes about Stuff subscription series, featuring new and original Hite goodness every month for twelve months. A subscription costs \$24.95 and as well as giving you a generous 30% discount on the individual article price of \$2.95 or more, we'll be offering an exclusive extra later in the year to all subscribers.

Any time you order, you'll get all the issues of the current KWAS to date.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MUTANT CITY SPIES	3	JAPAN	11
ROE	3	KOREA, SOUTH	11
BUILD POINTS AND ABILITIES	3	PAKISTAN	11
FREE RATING POINTS	3	RUSSIA	11
ABILITY DETAILS	3	UNITED KINGDOM	12
BLACK BUDGET BUILT	5	UNITED STATES	12
GADGET POWERS	6	VIETNAM	12
GADGET FORMS AND		GIMA	12
FUNCTIONS	7	OPFOR	13
RECHARGING GADGETS	8	TERRORISTS	13
SITREP	9	BEM	13
GLOBAL PLAYERS	9	DHU-L-FIQR	13
AUSTRALIA	9	TOZHDESTVO A.K.A. IDENTITÄT	13
CANADA	9	A.K.A. IDENTITY	13
CHINA	10	ROGUE STATES	14
FRANCE	10	NORTH KOREA	14
GERMANY	10	SYRIA	14
INDIA	10	OSINT	14
IRAN	10		
ISRAEL	11		

© 2015 Pelgrane Press Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Pelgrane Press is owned by Simon Rogers and Cathriona Tobin.

MUTANT CITY SPIES

MUTANT CITY SPIES

Ten years after the ghost flu hit, the world is changed — but the secret world stays the same. Enemies of your country still plot, terrorists still scheme — but now they might have superpowers. This espionage-special ops frame for *Mutant City Blues* takes the super fights into the shadows, and adds a few hidden threats — and a few black-technological tricks — for your heroes to face.

ROE

Mutant City Spies is designed specifically as a campaign frame for *Mutant City Blues*. It avoids changing rules and assumptions from that game without a good reason. That said, there's a whole GUMSHOE game already dedicated to spies and special ops badasses, *Night's Black Agents*. If you have a copy of *NBA*, you can go right ahead and add the superpower rules from *MCB* to that game and run *Night's Black Mutants* instead. Or add any specific *NBA* rules you like to this frame; you may want Autofire but not Suppressing Fire, for instance, or chase rules but not Heat.

BUILD POINTS AND ABILITIES

Build *Mutant City Spies* characters with the same number of Investigative, General, and Power build points as regular *MCB* characters. This produces heroes somewhat weaker and less flexible than standard *NBA* agents — except *your* guys have superpowers.

As in the regular *MCB* rules, you can build a character with no powers and no gadgets; such an agent gets 10 extra General build points. He can put points into Blaster, but may not buy any blast powers.

FREE RATING POINTS

Take 1 free point of either Military Science or Tradecraft, to indicate your training in either special ops or espionage methodology.

Take free points in Blaster equal to half your highest rating (rounded down) in a blast power.

The PCs' employer provides the heroes with the resource equivalents of the *NBA* abilities Cover and Network. Abstract them in play with Interpersonal abilities such as Impersonate or Cop Talk.



THE NEW SERIES

Moving your heroes from their *Mutant City Blues* campaign into a *Mutant City Spies* adventure can be as simple as having them assigned to GIMA as liaison officers for six months. Or tie some criminal activity in their home town to the larger clandestine world — French industrial espionage, Identity terrorism (with a possible SVR handler in the mix), or a Chinese attempt to kidnap a heightened defector. Then when the heroes solve the case, they get recruited into the CSIS or OTFI or MI6 or some other secret service and now you're running a *Mutant City Spies* campaign!

Adding superpowers to an ongoing, vampire-rich *Night's Black Agents* game might be a little tougher — unless the "ghost flu" is a vampire virus gone wrong and accidentally released by the Conspiracy, or by some evil biotech company trying to compete with it. Or just add the gadgets (from some DARPA or Mossad black site), and leave the question of actual super-soldiers as mysterious as the question of vampires.

ABILITY DETAILS

Most of the abilities in this campaign frame come from *MCB*. Here are a few clarifications and details (including page references for abilities derived from *NBA*) for the remainder:

BLASTER (GENERAL)

Similar to Shooting, this is the ability to reliably use a blaster (a gadget incorporating a Blast power) in combat or under stress situations. This ability applies to all blasters; you do not have to specialize by type.

CRIMINALISTICS (TECHNICAL)

Covers the technical side of crime scene analysis, incorporating the *MCB* abilities Ballistics and Fingerprinting, along with footprint and tire track identification, fiber and toolmark analysis, and other such techniques.

DIGITAL INTRUSION (GENERAL)

Hacking, or otherwise compromising, a computer system, digital archive, or online account. Also covers protecting or defending such systems against illicit entry (*NBA*, p. 28).

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF



MCB POWERS FOR NBA BACKGROUNDS

Certain powers seem ideally suited not just for spies of all sorts but for specific *NBA* Backgrounds. Use these as guidelines for *MCS* enemies and other NPCs.

Analyst: Technopathy, Translation; Cognition, Detect Influence, Empathy, Enter Dreams, Precision Memory.

Asset Handler: Observe Dreams, Read Minds; Induce Aggression, Induce Fear, Induce Mental Disorder, Memory Alteration, Nondescript, Suppress Influence, Telepathy.

Bagman: Hearing; Induce Fear, Pain Immunity, Resist Influence, Teleportation, Transmutation.

Bang-and-Burner: Thermal Vision, X-Ray Vision; Deplete Oxygen, Earth Control, Fire Control, Fire Immunity, Fire Projection, High Energy Dispersal, Radiation Immunity, Reduce Temperature, Regeneration, Self-Detonation, Spontaneous Combustion, Suppress Explosion.

Black Bagger: Hearing, Thermal Vision, Touch; Alter Form, Deplete Oxygen, Invisibility, Light Control, Limb Extension, Memory Alteration, Night Vision, Nondescript, Phase, Technokinesis, Wall Crawling.

Cleaner: Microvision, Plant Communication, Spatial Awareness; Impersonate, Memory Alteration, Nondescript, Possession, Secrete Acid, Spontaneous Combustion, Webbing.

Cobbler: Microvision, Touch; Night Vision, Transmutation.

Cuckoo: Observe Dreams, Read Minds; Absorption, Alter Form, Emotion Control, Empathy, Endorphin Control, Impersonate, Memory Alteration, Possession, Resist Influence, Sexual Chemistry, Telepathy.

Hacker: Technopathy; Magnetism, Precision Memory.

Investigator: Analytic Taste, Plant Communication, Read Minds, Spatial Awareness; Cognition, Detect Influence, Empathy, Precision Memory, Resist Influence, Telepathy.

Medic: Observe Dreams; Cure Disease, Detect Influence, Empathy, Enter Dreams, Healing, Induce Mental Disorder, Memory Alteration, Resist Influence, Suppress Influence, Toxin Immunity.

Mule: Hearing, Thermal Vision; Animal Command, Flight, Gills, Invisibility, Night Vision, Phase, Speed, Swimming, Teleportation, Wind Control.

Muscle: Spatial Awareness, Thermal Vision; Armor, Blade Immunity, Blast Powers, Blood Spray, Entangling Hair, Fangs, Induce Fear, Kinetic Energy Dispersal, Lightning Decisions, Natural Weaponry, Pain Immunity, Quills, Reflexes, Regeneration, Secrete Acid, Spit Acid, Strength, Telekinesis, Threat Calculation.

Watcher: Hearing, Olfactory Center, Read Minds; Alter Form, Flight, Gills, Invisibility, Limb Extension, Night Vision, Nondescript, Phase, Speed, Teleportation, Telescopic Vision, Tracking, Wall Crawling.

Wet Worker: Environmental Awareness, Spatial Awareness, Thermal Vision; Armor, Blast Powers, Disintegration, Fangs, Gills, Invisibility, Kinetic Energy Dispersal, Lightning Decisions, Natural Weaponry, Night Vision, Nondescript, Pain Immunity, Phase, Reflexes, Regeneration, Self-Detonation, Sonar, Spread Pathogen, Strength, Swimming, Telekinesis, Telescopic Vision, Threat Calculation, Toxin Immunity, Tracking, Venom.

Wheel Artist: Spatial Awareness; Disintegration, Illusion, Kinetic Energy Dispersal, Lightning Decisions, Magnetism, Reflexes, Technokinesis, Telescopic Vision, Water Manipulation, Wind Control.

Wire Rat: Analytic Taste, Technopathy; Deplete Oxygen, Gravity Control, Magnetism, Radiation Immunity, Reduce Temperature, Secrete Acid, Technokinesis, Transmutation.

MUTANT CITY SPIES

FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY (TECHNICAL)

Incorporates the **MCB** ability Forensic Entomology, along with blood and DNA typing.

HUMAN TERRAIN (ACADEMIC)

General expertise in the relevant humanities: incorporates the **MCB** abilities Anthropology, Archaeology, and Art History, along with sociology, politics, theology, and other topics relevant to counter-terrorism or intelligence work (**NBA**, p. 22).

In most campaigns, also incorporates the **MCB** ability Occult Studies; in a campaign with a strong magic or occult component, leave Occult Studies as its own ability. Other GMs may wish to introduce a Fringe Science ability, but remember that the “weird science” of superpowers already has its own dedicated ability, Anamorphology (**MCB**, p. 18).

MILITARY SCIENCE (ACADEMIC)

Expertise in military matters, from standing orders to spotting tactics. Allows you to reconstruct a firefight, impersonate a paramilitary guard, deduce a foe’s training, identify a uniform or weapon, and the like (**NBA**, p. 23).

NOTICE (TECHNICAL)

A broader ability incorporating Evidence Collection, and including spotting hidden objects and nearby witnesses, plus guards, exits, previous searches, and other non-immediate threats (**NBA**, p. 24).

Immediate threats remain under Sense Trouble.

PILOTING (GENERAL)

Carves out aircraft, watercraft, UAVs, and RPVs from Driving. A rating of 1 conveys the ability to pilot any one of: small single-engine airplane, helicopter, speedboat, civilian drone (**NBA**, p. 32).

TRADECRAFT (INTERPERSONAL)

This ability you to use and recognize the techniques of intelligence and counter-intelligence agents. It also covers clandestine meetings, dead drops, getting information out of the unit’s CIA liaison, and other similar activities (**NBA**, p. 25).

BLACK BUDGET BUILT

The annoying thing about the ghost flu, from the perspective of the Western intelligence and security establishment, is that it gave a lot of powers to dodgy weirdos, rather than only to clean-cut patriots. Much of



the special operations superiority of the West comes on the back of immensely superior technology and training; that a few degrees of fever ten years ago can wipe out that advantage is intolerable.

So the world’s intelligence establishment doesn’t tolerate it. China and India, with a billion potential recruits apiece, can relatively easily find mutants morally or politically suitable for clandestine work. Russia brute-forces its solutions, grinding out every trace of individuality in its *povyshenny*. (China and Vietnam do much the same, but China at least has a larger pool to pull from.) The West builds.

The arrival of superpowers has sparked a huge surge in biophysical, quantum-physical, and what used to be called “paranormal” research. If a human being can turn into a nuclear weapon (Voronezh, you shall never be forgotten), then clearly 20th-century physics must be completely rewritten. And there is plenty of black budget money working on the first draft, building technological duplicates of mutant powers in an attempt to reverse-engineer the really useful (or scary) ones on an industrial scale. And in the meantime,

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF



MUTANT CITY SPIES ABILITY LIST

ACADEMIC

Architecture
Forensic Accounting
Forensic Psychology
History
Human Terrain
Languages
Law
Military Science
Natural History
Research
Textual Analysis
Trivia

TECHNICAL

Anamorphology
Chemistry
Criminalistics
Cryptography
Data Retrieval
Document Analysis
Electronic Surveillance
Energy Residue Analysis
Explosive Devices
Forensic Anthropology
Notice
Photography

INTERPERSONAL

Bullshit Detector
Bureaucracy
Cop Talk
Flattery
Flirting
Impersonate
Influence Detection
Interrogation
Intimidation
Reassurance
Streetwise
Tradecraft

GENERAL

Athletics
Blaster
Digital Intrusion
Driving
Filch
Health
Infiltration
Mechanics
Medic
Piloting
Preparedness
Scuffling
Sense Trouble
Shooting
Stability
Surveillance

clandestine operators field-test these gadgets (or ESHEs, for Experimental Simulated-Heightening Equipment) to try and keep the West's covert edge intact.

GADGET POWERS

Each gadget incorporates, replicates, or produces one power. If a suit of power armor provides Strength, Flight, Armor, and Concussion Beams, it counts as four gadgets, not one. Agents – both mutant and unpowered – may buy gadgets with their Power build points budget. Like mutant powers, gadgets cost a premium for the first build point; they're more expensive than mutant powers because they can be bought a la carte rather than strictly obeying the Quade Diagram.

A gadget replicating an Investigative power costs 3 build points to buy the first rating point:

A universal-linguistic software-sensor suite costs 6 build points to provide the equivalent of Translation 4; 3 points for Translation 1, and 1 each thereafter.

A gadget replicating a General power costs 8 build points to buy the first rating point:

A molecular-excitation beam costs 11 build points to provide the equivalent of Spontaneous Combustion 4; 8 points for Spontaneous Combustion 1, and 1 each thereafter.

As this example shows, some gadgets are perhaps less economical than their "normal" equivalent: in the case of Spontaneous Combustion, a few thermite darts and some Athletics points (to let you throw them accurately) provide about the same results. Players should absolutely think about what kind of regular devices could replicate powers, and add them to their agent's loadout if practical.

Power ability ratings for gadgets are capped at 16 for vehicle-mounted gadgets, or 12 points for other gadgets. So far, even the geniuses at DARPA haven't gotten power sources small or reliable enough to provide the equivalent power of a dedicated heightened human.

The Power ability rating inheres in the gadget, not in the agent who bought it. Any agent – or enemy -- operating that gadget can spend points

MUTANT CITY SPIES

from her power pool, in other words. That said, if she spends points from that power pool investigatively or for other reasons, the gadget still loses them.

If the way you've explained your gadget presents a hook, weakness, etc. not present in an innate power, the GM can apply that piece of "fiction" in the game, most likely as an increased (+1 or +2) Difficulty. Mutant powers are innately more flexible than artificial ones.

Certain gadgets on the fringes of plausibility cost even more (+3 build points for the first rating point) to buy, while some powers simply cannot yet be replicated safely or at all.

+3 to cost: Absorption, Control powers, Force Field, Healing, Invisibility, Read Minds.

Not available: Cure Disease, Disease Immunity, Gravity Control, Phase, Self-Detonation, Teleportation, Transmutation.

GADGETS AND DEFECTS

Gadgets incorporating powers with a connected defect also engender that defect in their users, just as the regular mutant power. This applies whether you bought the power yourself or not.

Agents without powers can take *one* "unnecessary" defect to gain 6 extra Power build points.

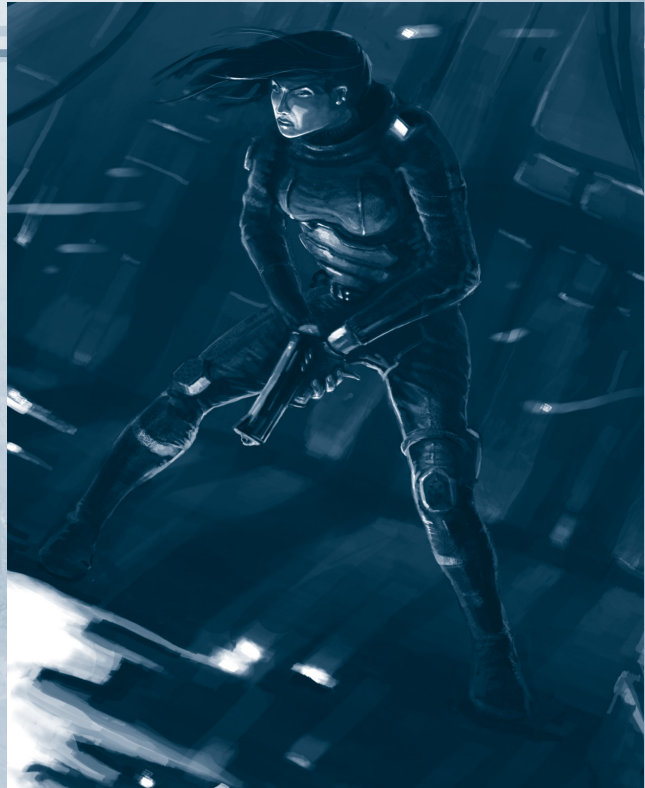
GADGET FORMS AND FUNCTIONS

Gadgets come in three basic forms: bulky, concealable, or injectable. Subject to the GM's veto, any given Power might come in any form of gadget: Invisibility might come from an EM-deflecting backpack, a flashlight projecting precisely anti-resonant light waves, or a brilliant blood-borne nanoflage system mapping the agent's skin and clothing exactly to its background. That said, the GM might rule that the backpack and nanoflage make sense, but the nanoflage only works with a specially treated uniform and the flashlight is just silly.

Bulky and concealable gadgets can be removed or stolen by your enemies, especially if you fail a Filch test to hold out the Memory Alteration wand against that border guard's Alertness modifier.

BULKY GADGETS

Bulky gadgets are obvious: powered exoskeletons, helmets, blaster rifles, large beam-projectors.



If they're so bulky and power-thirsty they must be mounted on or powered from a vehicle larger than a motorcycle, their cost drops to 2 build points for Investigative powers, or 6 build points for General powers. Their power rating is capped at 16. Powers that only work at "touch" range only work on someone inside the vehicle, or more likely inside its separate, very secure compartment. All agents in the team can use a vehicle-mounted gadget with any Power ability; although the interfaces are insanely complicated and finicky, a heightened unit cross-trains for such contingencies. Agents without the Power ability in question operate the gadget at +1 to Difficulty tests, however.

CONCEALABLE GADGETS

Concealable gadgets can be easily hidden, at least by covert operatives and the spytech geniuses who outfit them: compact Sonar projectors and earbuds, Light Blast lasers disguised as pens, Wall-Crawling gloves, molecular-weave Armani suits of Armor. Spotting such a gadget on a search is usually a Sense Trouble test, against the NPC's Stealth modifier. Hiding such a gadget from a search is usually a Filch test, against the NPC's Alertness modifier, although the GM may lower the Difficulty or simply allow the gadget to pass unnoticed if it's been disguised as another object by your agency's equivalent of Q Section.

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF



BLASTERS

The logic of milspec must partly override game balance: all gadgets incorporating Blast powers are generally interoperable. Agents must still buy Blast powers to have blasters in their loadout, and must define the form of each blaster: gun, gauntlet, bracelet, helmet-goggle combo, etc. Each agent then begins with a free Blaster ability rating at half her highest Blast power rating. She may buy more points in Blaster with General build points, or with experience. This ability allows the agent to operate any other Blast-powered gadget, although if she doesn't have that specific Blast power, her Blaster tests (including Hit Thresholds) are at +1 Difficulty.

Firing a blaster uses the Blaster ability or the relevant Blast power ability. The weaponer can spend points from either or both pools to increase damage, hit a target, etc.

Blasters visibly glow or show other signs of "power up" right before they fire: a blaster can be dodged (*MCB*, p. 43), unlike a regular firearm.

Better Blasters

For some groups, having blasters is an irreducible part of the game's fun. They are not at all wrong. For such groups, blaster damage increments up for every 2 (not 3) Blaster or Power points spent before an attack roll, and the maximum blast damage becomes +8, not +6. This also applies to mutant blast powers.

Also, blasters are closer to standard issue, at least for elite operators like the agents. Agents still need to spend 4 points to get their first point in Blaster, but don't need to buy blast powers to get issued blasters. Milspec blasters come with a 12-point power pool (16-point for vehicle-mounted blasters) in one blast power. Recharge time drops to 12 hours for both bulky and concealable blasters.

However, blasters aren't free. The GM reduces the experience award for an agent who uses a blaster on a mission by 1 point: "Blasters make you stupid. Duct tape makes you smart."

Concealable gadgets are fragile: on a natural Power ability roll of 1 while using them, they break or malfunction or usually both. (N.B. They never break on the *first* use in a session.) The GM can then use the gadget's power to freely hose the user or his squadmates. Broken concealable gadgets require a Difficulty 7 Mechanics test (Difficulty 5 if the repair expert also has the relevant Power) and at least an undisturbed hour to repair. At the GM's discretion their repair may also require special components, fuels, or other exotic materials available only in a major military base or covert research facility – yours or the enemy's.

INJECTABLE GADGETS

Injectable gadgets might be genetically engineered viruses granting Sexual Chemistry, nanobot implants that reshape one's face for Alter Form, or even surgical grafts of Magnetism-generating strips into your long bones. They can be detected, though not replicated, by a blood test – if the lab knows what to look for. At the GM's discretion, enemy forces (or untrusting allied forces) may have access to suppressants (inhaled, injected, etc.) tailored to that gadget; after 1-6 hours, the agent may make a Health test at Difficulty 8 to throw off such a suppressant's effect.

No injectable gadget can provide a blast power.

Injectable gadgets are experimental, and dangerous, as you might think. On a natural Power ability roll of 1 while using it, your gadget drains, burns, exhausts, or otherwise costs its wielder +0 Health damage.

INVESTIGATIVE GADGETS

Investigative gadgets (those replicating Investigative powers) never fail to deliver a core clue *during a scene*. One of them almost invariably, however, fails (or does damage to its wielder) at some point during the game session. On an investigative gadget's first use, it works fine. On its second use, the GM rolls a die; if she gets a 1, the gadget breaks or malfunctions when its wielder (or host vehicle) takes damage, loses Stability (especially good for implanted or injected gadgets), or otherwise encounters major stress. The GM can hold off revealing said failure until a dramatically suitable moment, or just after the core clue. Once one gadget has rolled a 1, the GM needn't roll for any more investigative gadgets.

RECHARGING GADGETS

Bulky or concealable gadgets recharge after a period spent connected to a mains power source, to a running vehicle engine, or (with a very unpleasant-looking adapter) to someone with the related mutant power. If

MUTANT CITY SPIES

the “coppertop” voluntarily spends 2 points of his own power pool, he can halve the recharge time (or 4 points to quarter it, etc.).

Bulky gadgets refresh their power pool in 24 hours; concealable gadgets refresh in 12 hours.

In sufficiently cinematic campaigns, an agent can make a Difficulty 8 Mechanics test to fully recharge a non-injectable gadget in five rounds. He can spend points from the relevant Power pool (or Blaster if the gadget is a blaster) on this test if he has them: if he does so, the time needed for emergency recharge drops to three rounds.

If he succeeds, the gadget is fully recharged, its relevant power pool fully refreshed. However, it cannot be recharged for the remainder of the mission.

If he fails, the gadget burns out; it must be completely refit at base, in the downtime between missions.

If he rolls a 1 and fails, the gadget discharges in an explosion. Use an explosion class (*MCB*, p. 99) equal to one-fourth (rounded down) of the gadget’s Power rating. A blaster with Ice Blast 12 explodes in ice shards and frigid air, doing damage as a Class 3 explosive, for example.

Injectable gadgets recharge using the wielder’s bioelectricity.

A standard bio-recharge takes 24 hours, but the wielder can voluntarily lose 2 Health to halve that time (or 4 points to quarter it, etc.). Health spent this way cannot be healed with Medic, and spending Health to recharge injectable gadgets does not count as restful activity for the purpose of healing other damage.

SITREP

In keeping with the standard *MCB* campaign, *Mutant City Spies* takes place in a ten years’ future with few stark differences from the world of our own headline news channels. Russia is still expansionist, Europe is still unwilling to return to military superpower, China is still rising, America is still (kind of, pretty much) on top. Nobody has super-solved the Palestine problem, or meta-stopped global warming, or hyper-cured the financial sector. It’s all very familiar, very comforting even.

On the front pages, anyhow. Behind the scenes, every nation sees the SME as a possible global game changer. All the new supermen who *didn’t* go on the

news explaining that the ghost flu convinced them they were gods? They started recruiting armies and building island lairs. Rampaging gangs of hyper-killers may not be roaming through London or Delhi, but militias like the Sons of St. Michael and cartels like the Gardunes absolutely slaughter “sub-men” in eastern Congo and northern Paraguay. Every tinpot dictator and coldly inhuman pharmacorp has illicit labs full of mutant strains of the mutant flu, each one guaranteed to kill only the weak or deserving. Mostly.

And that’s on top of everything else the NSA was looking for even before the SME, of course. And everybody else.

GLOBAL PLAYERS

This provides a thumbnail guide to what the various big dogs of the clandestine world might be up to ten years after the SME. Consider them suggestions for PC backgrounds, not canon events to incorporate into your own game. Unless they suddenly put the puzzle together for you, of course ...

For more possible agencies, elite military units, etc., see pp. 165-167 of *NBA* or Wikipedia.

AUSTRALIA

ASIS (Australian Security Intelligence Service; foreign intelligence)

The ASIS has long had the remit of combating piracy in the Malacca and Sunda Straits north of Australia; such piracy became a natural career for the more dangerous sort of mutant, and a major funding source for heightened psychopath would-be masterminds. ASIS has thrown itself into the task of scouring the Pacific and Indian Oceans for islands showing signs of metahuman construction or energies; on plenty of them, the erstwhile supervillain’s experiments produced nothing more threatening than hordes of mutant cannibal zombies. Still, a good day’s work clearing them out.

CANADA

CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service; overall intelligence and security)

The CSIS engages in aggressive cooperation with Canadian local police and with the RCMP, taking a high-profile role in combating “heightened threats to Canada.” Cynics compare their actions to Hoover’s propaganda campaign against the “Ten Most Wanted” while trying to win acceptance for the nascent FBI in the 1930s. The ultimate goal, according to such skeptics, is

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF



for the CSIS to usurp or absorb the RCMP. If agents can tie a threat to a *Globe and Mail* headline, they can get CSIS cooperation.

CHINA

MSS (Ministry for State Security, a.k.a. Guóanbù; overall intelligence and security)

MID (Military Intelligence Department, a.k.a., Bu Er; military and cyber-intelligence)

There is nothing the Chinese government wants less than unauthorized mutants wandering around. Xi Jinping had already begun consolidating power before the SME; afterward came a real Tiananmen-style crackdown. The MSS aims for complete registry of all mutant DNA and biometrics, Chinese and foreign; China aggressively backs treaties prohibiting uncontrolled travel by unregistered mutants. The MID, meanwhile, steals anamorphological research from all over the globe; its foreign role has increased while Xi tames the MSS.

FRANCE

DGSE (General Directorate for External Security; foreign intelligence)

French diplomats are among the most eloquent in their insistence on mutant liberties; Paris and Nice have become major mutant hangouts and hotspots due to France's welcoming attitude. The Foreign Legion of course accepts mutant recruits, and its stated goal is "every Legionnaire is heightened, by blood or by steel." Action Direct, the paramilitary covert unit of the DGSE, likewise enrolls as many mutants as it can, from all over continental Europe. French intelligence is second only to the Chinese in its eagerness to obtain corporate anamorphological research, by hook or by crook.

GERMANY

BND (Federal Intelligence Service; foreign intelligence)

Given Germany's unfortunate ideological past, its covert and military agencies cannot recruit or provide special training for as many *übermenschen* as they might like. The security police, the BfV, spend plenty of time stomping would-be supermen and self-proclaimed Heightened Reich messiahs. As a result, Germany is at the forefront of ESHE creation and deployment. All of the elite GSG-9 special police are cross-trained in assault rifles and blasters, for instance. Germany also (more quietly) leads in anti-power suppressants and control technology; many major police departments worldwide buy German power-scanners and inhibitor booths.

INDIA

R&AW (Research and Analysis Wing; foreign intelligence)

India has the advantage of a huge population and an increasingly nationalist ethos; the R&AW and other security agencies have no trouble filling all the available slots for heightened recruits. Although predictably tangled up with thwarting ISI plots, the R&AW deploys its extra metas as "force multipliers" in conventional anti-terrorism and anti-organized crime actions. A squad of elite soldiers led by two or three HCOs (heightened-commissioned officers) is the standard pattern as India expands its security footprint around the Indian Ocean coast.

IRAN

VAJA (Ministry of Intelligence, a.k.a. VEVAK, MOIS; overall intelligence and security)

Iran's mullahs came down (after some brief confusion while the ghost flu seemed confined to the West) on the side of mutants being called by Allah to special service

MUTANT CITY SPIES

for His glory. The SME, if anything, strengthened the hand of the regime more even than the nuclear deal, which Saudi Arabia essentially nullified with its own bomb project. Mutants serve in VAJA and in the special-operations Quds Force all over the Middle East and Europe, mostly trying to undo the Saudi bomb and harass American and Israeli assets and allies in the region.

ISRAEL

Mossad (foreign intelligence)

Israel's mutant population by and large willingly serves in the IDF when drafted, not least because they are guaranteed special training and relatively good postings. (A large international protest movement makes much of Israel's "mutant boot on the face of Palestine," and indeed mutants provide a real security multiplier for the occupation forces.) However, fewer of them go on to careers in Mossad, not least because Israeli companies preferentially hire mutants for security work. Germany supplies Israel with advanced ESHE designs and partners with Israeli weaponeers to manufacture them, keeping Mossad in the game for now.

JAPAN

Naicho (Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office; foreign intelligence)

DIH (Defense Intelligence Headquarters; signals, military, and cyber-intelligence)

Japan, unlike Germany, has no philosophical problem with exalting its *tenshi*, but its demographic dearth means very few mutant recruits of military age. DIH focuses on ESHE-heavy loadouts and research, dreaming of powered gundam battlesuits for its elite intervention troops (increasingly active in the western Pacific as China and mutant piracy both get more aggressive). Naicho, long ignored by major policymakers, especially recruits non-traditional subjects: young girls, old men, anyone with mutant powers.

KOREA, SOUTH

NIS (National Intelligence Service; foreign intelligence)

The NIS takes a similar line to India's R&AW, and for much the same reason: a relatively large, relatively young, increasingly patriotic population allows it the recruiting room. Its main nightmare remains North Korean mutant defectors: in theory, the ideal recruits,



except they might be double agents, or mind-controlled, or possessed, or ...

PAKISTAN

ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence; overall intelligence and security)

ISI mutant agents lead not special operations units, but terrorist groups in Afghanistan, Iran, India, and the wider Arabic world. Pakistan's nuclear partnership with Riyadh has given the Islamic republic a new lease on global power leverage, and the ISI intends to provide heightened cadre to every Sunni soldier with a car bomb and a grudge just as it did the Taliban thirty years ago (although with explosives instead of mutants).

RUSSIA

SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service; foreign intelligence)

GRU (Main Intelligence Directorate; military intelligence)

Everyone remembers the Voronezh disaster on December 9, PY+9, when an unknown mutant used

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

nuclear Self-Detonation to destroy that Russian city and kill 250,000+ people. But nobody remembers it like the Russian security services, whose antiquated technology missed the physical evidence until it was too late. (The Kremlin has blamed everyone from the Chechens to the Ukrainians to the CIA for the blast; finding out who actually did it doesn't appear to be a priority for the FSB, Russia's internal security agency.) Russian diplomats use the specter of Voronezh to call for registry of all mutants globally, and the SVR and GRU use it to get massive funding and the first pick of ESHE tech. Russia's defense industries have geared up for anamorphological war in a big way, and if they're not as advanced as Germany, Japan, or the US – well, quantity has a quality all its own, as Stalin used to say.

UNITED KINGDOM

SIS (Secret Intelligence Service, a.k.a. MI6; foreign intelligence)

MI6's institutional devotion to human intelligence means that it employs more mutants and uses less ESHE tech than most European agencies. Its gadgets tend to be concealable rather than bulky or injectable; its missions tend to be "find out where the death ray is and ideally how it works" rather than "blow it up." That latter is why one keeps Americans around, after all.

UNITED STATES

CIA (Central Intelligence Agency; foreign intelligence)

NSA (National Security Agency; signals and cyber-intelligence)

The seventeen major component agencies of America's intelligence community each have their own heightened units, ranging from the cubicle of Precision Memory and Cognition nerds in the National Reconnaissance Office to the Defense Intelligence Agency's meta-commandos in S.P.E.A.R. (Special Program for Enhanced Armed Response). The actual special forces recruit heightened soldiers, but subject them to the exact same training as regular applicants, meaning most of them wash out and join one of those alphabet soup agencies. Fortunately, the immense US black budget buys lots and lots of blasters to even everything up again.

VIETNAM

TC2 (Second General Department; overall intelligence and security)

Vietnam, like Korea, has plenty of young, patriotic recruits, and unlike Korea, has few compunctions



THE PARETO THREAT

20% of the employees make 80% of the sales; 20% of the players score 80% of the points. It's so common that it has a name: the Pareto Principle. And the intelligence community is very worried that it might apply to superpowers.

Most supers have either negligible powers (2 or 3 points' worth) or "threat level" powers (the equivalent of 40 Power points). And indeed, 20% of the known mutants are threat-level. But Pareto doesn't stop there: what about the 20% of those mutants? A Pareto mutant, in theory, has 16 times the power of a threat-level mutant – 640 points in *MCB* terms! It might have been a Pareto mutant who destroyed Voronezh, although he probably died in the explosion.

Use a Pareto mutant as a major threat – maybe not Galactus, but definitely big enough to be worth a team-up and a crossover.

If you need more rules guidance, a Pareto mutant must put at least half his points into one power, and his cost to skip a power or follow a dotted line *quadruples*.

about breaking them into perfect super-soldiers. Mutant TC2 and Commando units tend to be all-heightened for ideological and morale reasons. Hanoi's major geopolitical concern is China, which leads TC2 to increased cooperation with ASIS, NIS, DIH, and even the American DIA.

GIMA

The Groupe Internationale des Menaces Augmentées (International Heightened Threats Group) is the closest thing there is to a global superpowers monitoring agency. Patterned deliberately on Interpol, the French National Police created it in July of PY+1 to coordinate police work on heightened crime. Unlike Interpol, national security agencies are also encouraged to join alongside national police bureaus; over 180 nations are represented at GIMA headquarters in Marseille, often with a heightened representative. The "flu brotherhood" means that heightened agents on GIMA-accredited missions can generally operate on the q.t. in member countries as long as they don't upset too many local apple carts.

MUTANT CITY SPIES

OPFOR

In addition to weasels and gunsels working for all those spookshows in the previous section, your agents may well punch metas who haven't even the thin sanction of legitimate government employment to defend their actions. Or their government may be so odious as to delegitimize itself even in the eyes of Pakistan or Communist China.

TERRORISTS

Terrorist and criminal groups change faster than nations do, even in a decade without superpowers. GMs can probably assume that the Russian Mafiya and the Mexican cartels will still exist in PY+10, but whether they will retain the dominance they currently hold is another question. (The Mafiya, for instance, shows real signs of aging out as its supply of ex-KGB leg-breakers turns gray.) Al-Qaeda has been eclipsed in recent years by ISIS; Hezbollah may wind up as the government of Lebanon in ten more. Thus, this section provides three new terror groups suitable for the recognizable future; GMs who prefer to stick with the familiar should go ahead and do so.

BEM

Its name varies by its user: Bloc for Extreme Measures, Bolster the Exploited Masses, Basic Equality Movement, Burning Ecological Manifesto, Banks Everywhere Massacred. (One FBI profiler believes it began as a reference to the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.) Whatever the anagram, the BEM is a "leaderless action" of extreme-left (usually self-described as "anarchist") radicals grown out of the "black bloc" and similar groups in the anti-globalist movement. Similar to the Baader-Meinhof or Weather Underground, BEM attacks corporate and military targets with the occasional nod to warning innocents first. Its recruits are unstable adolescent metas, especially those from small North American towns with strong anti-mutant cultural or political stances. Although it began in North America, it has spread via the Internet to Europe, Japan, and India, where it is combining with the Naxalite Maoist resistance in India's east.

DHU-L-FIQR

Also called "Sword of the Prophet" after the legendary blade of Muhammad, although the name Dhu-l-Fiqar is usually translated "master of the spine" or "master of the divisions." After the SME, the various Sunni ideologists split on the question of whether mutants were sacrilegious monsters or divinely inspired jihadis. Al-Qaeda came down on "monsters" and Dhu-l-Fiqar



ruled the other way, leading to its rapid ascension in the Islamic radical terror ranks, just as ISIS had put al-Qaeda in the shade in the 2010s. Its lurid videos of infidels and apostates being executed with mutant powers have likewise boosted recruitment. Dhu-l-Fiqar is active in the Sahel, Yemen, Iraq, and Central Asia, as well as carrying out one-off actions in Europe and the West. Western experts differ on whether Dhu-l-Fiqar is Iran-backed or Iran-opposed, noting that this Sunni group named itself after the sword Muhammad gave to the first Shia imam.

TOZHDESTVO A.K.A. IDENTITÄT A.K.A. IDENTITY

This "Eurasianist" right-wing movement came out of the witches' brew of neo-fascist groups stirred up by Putin in the late 2000s and early 2010s. The New Right defeated at the polls (or by other parties' parliamentary maneuvers), a radical fringe turned to violent terrorism after the SME gave them a video-friendly way to argue for the "New Man" or national purity or whatever variant of Nietzsche appeals to their audience. (Identity actually venerate the obscure Russian-German philosopher Afrikan Spir, and "spear" puns are common in their posts and communiqués.) Tozhdestvo practice bank robberies and targeted

KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

assassinations of minority “non-European” politicians: Roma, Jews, Muslims, blacks, and so forth. At least one neo-Confederate heightened crime group in the U.S. has identified itself as “Southron Identity,” although the FBI and NSA alternately minimize and exaggerate the true extent of Identity’s presence in America.

ROGUE STATES

While the term can be tendentiously employed, if it means anything it means these bad international apples.

NORTH KOREA

SSD (State Security Department; overall intelligence and security)

Did you know that Kim Jong-Un only had the ghost flu for three days, and then developed every known power? North Korean citizens do. Every aspect of this totalitarian society turns to harnessing metahumans for the good of the State. SSD operatives kidnap heightened tourists and even citizens from South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, to brainwash and break them (with Possession and other powers) into willing super-slaves. North Korea also steals ESHE technology from overseas, and gets very dangerous and powerful prototypes from Chinese military officials eager to outsource the testing process.

This “totalitarians looking for supers” model can also apply to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Algeria, or Zimbabwe, if you’d like.

SYRIA

Mukhabarat (Security and Intelligence Directorate; overall intelligence and security)

The chaos of the Syrian Civil War acted like a forcing-house (or a petri dish) for sociopathies of all sorts. A group of heightened soldiers in the Mukhabarat launched a coup that overthrew Bashar Assad in PY+2 and a grateful world recognized the new “Hizb al-Sa’iqa” (“Party of the Storm”) regime as the legitimate government of Syria. Coming out of the fascist-socialist Ba’ath Party, al-Sa’iqa embraced the SME as ideological justification for the new leadership. New, sloppy Arabic translations of Nietzsche appeared in Damascus bookstores, shelved next to old standards like *Mein Kampf*. The world had its first super-fascist state, and shortly thereafter its first superpowered genocide, against the Druze population of Syria. The Kurds fight back, but without foreign aid and with ISIS at their back, they can’t last. Then Syria turns to Israel ... and beyond?

If the GM doesn’t want to pick on Syria, the Hizb al-Sa’iqa Party may have taken over Libya, Sudan (adding a lovely racist apartheid component), Somalia, Central African Republic, or Algeria; or a similar super-fascist movement come to power in Thailand, Turkmenistan, or Belarus.

OSINT

Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. The TV show sniffs around the core conceit of a spy agency in a superpowered world, but please for the love of God read the brilliant Steranko *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* comics run (1966-1969) that established the agency.

Checkmate was DC’s global spy agency, revived by spy comics master Greg Rucka for a run in 2006-2008.

Secret Avengers takes A-list supers and puts them into mostly cosmic (but still cleverly covert) action; written variously by Ed Brubaker, Warren Ellis, and Rick Remender. Began its run in 2010.

Suicide Squad is the greatest super-special ops comic ever, thanks to the conceit of expendable supervillains recruited for Reagan-era clandestine wars. John Ostrander created the concept and helmed it brilliantly from 1987 to 1992. Soon to be a disappointing feature film!

Global Frequency (2002-2004) is a more borderline comic; its private-sector ops aren’t quite spies, and aren’t quite supers (being merely the best in the world at something), and the “Frequency” has a vague sort of UN justification. But oh man that Warren Ellis writing. Definitely a model for *Mutant City Spies* stories and feel.

The Violent Century by Lavie Tidhar is a bravura 2013 novel about superpowered spies in World War II and their regrets in the later decades.

