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2230 hours

A slight figure checks its watch in the darkened room. It peers past the edge of the door and sees a middle aged man neatly piling clothes in the hall, then whispers in a female voice: 'Damn... He should be asleep by now.'

She checks her pack again and nervously looks at her watch: 2235. Forty-five minutes to get to the docks. The lights finally go out and she stuffs some gum in her mouth. She slides the door open and creeps out, avoiding the creaky floorboards. Tiptoeing past the master bedroom, she hears kissing and quiet giggling. 'Gross...' she whispers, poking her tongue out in disgust.

Downstairs she climbs through Polly's dog flap, shrugs on her backpack and collects her bike. She runs with it until she's clear of the house and standing on the sidewalk. 'Parentals,' she mumbles, smiling. 'Soooo gullible.' She peddles toward the dock, hoping her handler is still waiting for her.

Introduction

Kids have always enjoyed prominent roles in fiction, from plucky assistants to ass-kicking main characters. This is especially true in the espionage genre, with the likes of Cody Banks, Alex Rider, Kim Possible and the Spy Kids but there are countless examples in other genres as well, including the Hardy Boys, the Goonies and the Famous Five. They have the same potential in roleplaying games, providing a fun diversion from traditional fare.

First up: tone. A kid-centric game can be light-hearted, which can be a lot of fun for players new and experienced but there's a lot more to playing kids than goofing around. Your game can be just as tense and challenging as any adult outing, if not more so.

Assuming an age gap spanning 8 to 18 years of age, you can cover a lot of ground. Younger characters are less likely to engage in fisticuffs but they are much more likely to have to dodge the grownups while

thwarting the bad guys. The action can get rougher as the characters creep into their teens and adult supervision tends to be somewhat less intense as well.

So, Why Play a Kid?

At some point we have all mused about that savvy kid outthinking his peers and one-upping the bad guy. There are a lot of advantages to playing a kid and it's funny that so many people think it sucks being young. It's only when we reach adulthood that we realise just how good we had it.

For instance, how many people at a party notice the kid in the room? Sure, spies scour rooms looking for potential threats amongst the adults but even they don't look twice at the kids. They write them off as harmless innocents at best and risky obstacles at worst. No one notices when kids sneak off to snoop around and even if they did, they'd chalk it up to the curiosity of youth.

Most kids have a small frame, letting them slip into areas that adults can't reach. This makes them great infiltrators but their perks don't stop there. They can make excellent martial artists too. Remember that strength often has little to do with unarmed mastery; speed, technique and keen observation of your opponent are just as valuable. Those 10 year old Shaolin monks in the movies aren't entirely fictional. Feel like picking a fight with one of them? No, me either.

Even better, kids don't scare easily, letting them attempt harebrained stunts and face obstacles most adults would consider dangerous, perhaps suicidal. Daring duels across city skyscrapers, high-speed chases in tricked out cars (or bikes, or rollerblades, or skateboards); even tense games of cat-and-mouse through a deranged mastermind's trap-laden lair... It's all just fun and games to them – until somebody gets hurt, of course, which brings us to one of the most important decisions you have to make when playing as kids.

Invincibility: It's a State of Mind

Despite the scrapes and bruises of childhood, few kids realise they can be seriously hurt – most blithely barrel through life, assuming they're impervious. For reasons practical and political, fiction reinforces this, rarely portraying children suffering anything more than a superficial injury, except to further the story. Unless you'd prefer to break from the norm, you can model this with two new campaign qualities (which can work equally well in any Spycraft 2.0 game).

Bang, You're Dead! (Seasons Only: +0 XP): Heroes never die but they sometimes retire. A character doesn't die when his wounds drop below 0 but rather becomes an NPC. The GM may 'write him out' of the season in any way he wishes (even making him a villain or dependant), though any player may make suggestions to enhance the mission or season. If the GM uses these suggestions, or plans to, the suggesting player earns 1 bonus action die per idea used or reserved. If the player whose character retired earns any bonus action dice through this option, his next character starts with them.

No I'm Not! (Seasons Only: +0 XP): Heroes never die – their lives just get more complicated. A character doesn't die when his wounds drop below 0 but rather falls unconscious or is otherwise removed from the action for a short period, per the GM's discretion. He also suffers a significant setback of the GM's creation, which should pose a clear and immediate danger, or present a tangible obstacle for the whole team and should raise the stakes of the mission or season. For example, the character may fall unconscious and wake hours or days later, leading the team to investigate what happened, all the while dealing with problems arising from events that occurred in the intervening time. Alternately, the 'killing blow' might actually harvest the character's DNA, letting the



villains clone him (if the science is available) or use it to bypass home office biometrics.

The Burdens of Youth

The main problem facing kid agents is being taken seriously. Children have to work harder to be accepted as equals by most adults and sometimes it's just impossible. No one likes being told what to do by a kid – even other kids – and then there are all the challenges with seduction and dealing with foils. Most kids also have a curfew and even those with 'cool' (or uncaring) parents still stick out like a sore thumb in late night operations.

Gear can also present issues, especially for Young (and therefore Small) agents with restricted carrying limits. Likewise with motor vehicles, which are designed for adults with full-length limbs and grown-up body weight. An expensive mountain bike is nice but it's never going to be as fast as an Aston Martin Vanquish. And really, how much training would a kid have with firearms? Even the smallest caliber weapons can provide recoil problems when you only have a Strength score of 6.

In a (semi-)realistic game, which we don't recommend, the rigors of espionage can be hard on kids. Few are prepared to grapple with life-and-death decisions (especially when loved ones are involved) and roleplaying the emotional fallout of a

superspy's life on an undeveloped agent can be extremely taxing. One need only glance at the stories of child soldiers in war-torn Africa to see how heart-wrenching a true depiction could be.

Probably the strongest approach, while unrealistic, is to embrace the practical limits of childhood adventure and maintain a light enough tone throughout the game that the mental impact never enters the equation. Keep the action and excitement high, incorporate the physical and social limitations into your game (or not, as you prefer) and indulge in the wild, unsullied enthusiasm of early life.

Rules of the Playground

Kids play by their own rules, including the following Talents, Specialties and feats, though these options are of course equally useful for grown-up characters.

Talents

For more on Talents, see the *Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook*, page 18.

Young: You are a child and that makes you the sneakiest, wiliest opponent in the world.

- **Child:** You're 7 to 11 years old and your attributes are adjusted for your age (see *Table 1.17: Aging Effects*, on page 61 of the *Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook*).
- Your Size becomes Small (1×1).
- You gain an extra Interest at Career Levels 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 and 20.
- Blend is always a class skill for you and your result cap with it increases by 5 (maximum 60).
- Each teammate who can see or hear you benefits from your Interests as if they possess them.
- While you're in a group of 5 or more characters with your Talent who are within 15 ft. of each other, you gain the *swarm* NPC quality.

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- You begin play with 3 fewer weapon proficiencies.
- Harmless: The Disposition toward you of non-villain NPCs improves by 1 grade.

Teen: It's hard being a teenager – but it also has its advantages...

- +2 Charisma, -2 Wisdom
- Teenager: You're 12 to 15 years old and your attributes are adjusted for your age (see Table 1.17: Aging Effects, on page 61 of the Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook).
- You gain a +1 bonus with Initiative checks. This bonus increases by an additional +1 at Career Levels 4, 8, 12, 16 and 20.
- Bluff is always a class skill for you and your result cap with it increases by 5 (maximum 60).
- You gain a +1 insight bonus with action die results. This bonus increases by an additional +1 at Career Levels 4, 8, 12, 16 and 20.
- Mistrusted: The Disposition toward you of characters who don't share your native culture and are aware of your Origin worsens by 2 grades.

Specialities

For more on Specialities, see the Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook, page 21.

Troublemaker: You didn't do it, they can't prove it and it totally isn't your fault. No, really!

- Bonus Feat: Dash.
- Your base Defense increases by 1.
- You may Taunt 1 additional opponent. You roll only once for the Taunt action while each opponent rolls to resist separately. The number of opponents you may Taunt increases by 1 more at Career Levels 4, 8, 12, 16 and 20.
- Once per session, you may make a minimum value Bribe without committing money (see the Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook, pages 121 and 163).

Style Feats

For more on Style feats, see the Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook, page 201.

Brat

You're hell on wheels when you want something.

Prerequisites: Up to 15 years old, Manipulate 3+ ranks.

Benefits: Once per day as a full action, you may target a character who can see and hear you and one object they're carrying. Unless the character immediately gives you the object, he must make a Will save (DC 15) or suffer 1d4 stress damage. The character continues to suffer this effect for a number of rounds equal to your Charisma modifier, until he gives you the object, or until he moves out of sight and hearing from you, whichever comes first.

Special: If you outgrow this feat (i.e. you live to your 16th birthday), you immediately lose it and may replace it with another Style feat of your choice (you must still meet the new feat's prerequisites).

Wail

Most adults panic when confronted with a crying child. It's something you use to your advantage.

Prerequisites: Up to 12 years old, Bluff 3+ ranks.

Benefits: Once per mission as a full action, you may target a character who can see and hear you, crying hysterically and throw baseless accusations at them. He suffers stress damage equal to your Charisma modifier (minimum 1) and the Disposition toward him of each other character who can see and hear both of you, including the target's allies, worsens by 1 grade for the rest of the mission.

Special: If you outgrow this feat (i.e. you live to your 13th birthday), you immediately





kidnapping one or more of the orphans and leading the team to protect the rest. Only by turning the tables on the strangers does the team stand a chance of finding out what's really going on – that the orphans are all that remains of a long-abandoned super soldier program, their memories (and their erratic but superior genes) wiped by benevolent researchers to give them a shot at normal lives. The team also learns that the shadowy masterminds behind the program have a more... permanent solution in mind.

Social Enemy: Nasty rumours have recently circulated that a local terrorist cell is training kids as suicide bombers. Happily, the Agency has its own junior operatives – trained to penetrate the cell and bring it down from the inside.

lose it and may replace it with another Style feat of your choice (you must still meet the new feat's prerequisites).

Story Seeds

Buried Alive: A teammate is celebrating his 15th birthday and all is going well – until a stranger arrives and IDs himself with a Agency code phrase. He explains that the team's handler has been kidnapped and offers a note saying he's been buried alive. The kidnapper will deal only with the birthday boy or girl and time is running out. The team must negotiate with or distract the kidnapper and race against time to find their missing man.

The Insiders: A young espionage team is covertly recruited to guard their parents, who are all important government figures. Alerted that a villainous organisation plans to attack a gala the parents are attending, the kids must find and thwart enemy operatives without cluing anyone – including their parents – into their special status.

Into the Cold: For reasons the characters will never understand (they're kids – they don't watch CNN), the Russians are massing troops to invade Alaska, disguising the build-up as a 'training exercise'. The team is sent on an undercover mission to the Volen Sports Park, 60 kilometres outside of Moscow, with covers as rising stars in the snowboarding scene. They must infiltrate the local KGB headquarters and the office of the military action's commander, learn what's really going on and potentially neutralise the situation before things escalate out of control.

Made to Measure: A band of kids from a local orphanage befriend the characters, seemingly as a benign way to cope with their sad circumstances but as the agents get to know the newcomers they learn that none of them can remember anything before their 8th birthdays. The orphans are also prone to bouts of freakish strength and speed, which leads to a few unfortunate accidents and draws the attention of adults and eventually local reporters. Soon, strangers appear,

Running a Kids

Season

Incorporating kids into your game, or running an all-kid season, can start with just a few choices from the *Spycraft 2.0 Rulebook*.

Campaign Qualities: The following campaign qualities may apply in games containing kids. The GC may alter this list if he desires a less traditional version of the genre.

- *Black and White:* Kids rarely sell each other out. It's a luxury most adults don't enjoy. Also, most kids can usually spot a bad guy a mile off.
- *Bulletproof:* If you don't apply *bang! you're dead or no I'm not!* (see page XX), this is a decent substitute. It still allows for serious bloodshed, though far less often.
- *Revolving Door:* Kids have an uncanny way of bouncing back from accidents that would spell certain death for adults.

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- *Soap*: Elementary and high school are social minefields. Between hormones and sugar rushes, even casual games of dodge ball can get dicey, so it's no surprise that Young and Teen agents endure more than their fair share of drama.
- *Spirited*: Children are lucky. They tumble down stairs (or if they're agents, through mastermind mazes) and somehow escape without a scratch. They always seem to be at the right place at the right (or very wrong) time and even when they get caught doing something they're not supposed to they can often talk their way out of it.

Common Classes: The following class options are especially well suited for a game involving young agents.

- *Explorer*: Kids instinctively seek out adventure. They're new to the world and always wondering what is over the next hill.
- *Hacker*: Children now have better access to computers than any generation in history and with the internet available in schools the digital world is second nature for them.
- *Intruder*: Slipping into and out of tight spots is another strength of the little ones and more than a few make decent thieves as well.
- *Sleuth*: A child's innate curiosity leads him to many discoveries – including some he might wish he'd never made.

Common Objectives: Kid-centric games can be focused on specific objectives or free-flowing but there must be a strong plot. Let the players guide the action, introduce lots of Subplots and don't skip on the overarching story. Missions can be highly structured but expect the characters to tackle them in their own way and at their own pace. They certainly won't be listening to what the adults tell them!

- *Distract*: Kids are naturally talented at talking in circles, causing big (sometimes *really* big) commotions

and commanding attention. These traits come in extremely handy when keeping the eyes off sensitive action elsewhere.

- *Evade*: Kids are also slippery and fast, able to shrink out of sight without warning. Enemy agents are likely to find nothing in their prey's wake apart from a trail of shed backpacks and clothing.
- *Infiltrate*: It rarely occurs to adults – especially those arrogant enough to assume they can threaten the world – that someone a kid's size might actually return the favour. Oh, how wrong they are.
- *Investigate*: Children love rifling through desks and piles of paper for interesting stuff. The home office frequently turns this inquisitive behaviour toward finding and stopping the bad guys.

Recommended Inspirations: *Agent Cody Banks* (M), *the Alex Rider series* (B, M), *Battle Royale* (B, M), *Bully* (VG), *Cherub the Recruit* (B), *Cross My Heart and Hope to Spy* (B), *Dark Angel* (TV), *The Famous Five* (B), *the Gaia Moore series* (B), *The Goonies*

(M), *Hackers* (M), *The Hardy Boys* (B), *I'd Tell You I Love You, But Then I'd Have to Kill You* (B), *James Bond Junior* (A, B), *Joe 90* (TV), *M.I. High* (TV), *The Karate Kid* (M), *Kim Possible* (A), *Recess* (TV), *Scooby Doo* (A, M), *Spriggan* (A, CB), *Spy Kids* (M), *Specialist Model Spy* (B), *Spy X* (B), *The Squad* (B), *Stand by Me* (M), *Tin Tin* (A, CB), *Undercover Girl* (B), *Wargames* (M)

The Last Word

Playing a kid can be a wonderful departure but it's also quite a challenge. Keep in mind that much of the everyday knowledge you take for granted as an adult probably wasn't part of your skill set at age 15, let alone 10. Also, while many people have a soft spot for kids, don't assume it'll be a cake walk. The black hats may just assume you're a scamper with nothing but mayhem in mind – which in all fairness probably isn't so far from what you and your team have planned. Keep a bright outlook, don't forget to have fun and try not to worry too much about the consequences of your actions.

After all, most kids don't...

