



# DRAGONLAIRD GAMING

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## Bonus Content: Gaming the Movies: Burn Notice

Sometimes I'll complete an article for my Gaming the Movies column but later come up with additional information or have material that wouldn't fit in the original column. For Burn Notice, a column published in Knights of the Dinner Table issue 160, I collected a lot more information that you might find useful in setting up a Burn Notice game.

### The Intro

This would be excellent to start each gaming session with, or at least the first one.

"My name is Michael Westen. I used to be a spy until..."

"We got a burn notice on you. You're blacklisted."

When you're burned, you've got nothing: no cash, no credit, no job history. You're stuck in whatever city they decide to dump you in.

"Where am I?" - Michael

"Miami." - Fiona

You do whatever work comes your way. You rely on anyone who is still talking to you: a trigger-happy ex-girlfriend, an old friend who is informing on you to the FBI...

"You know spies. A bunch of bitchy little girls." - Sam.

Family too.

"Hey, is that your Mom again" - Sam

If you're desperate

"Someone needs your help, Michael." - Madeline (Mom)

Bottom Line? Until you figure out who burned you, you're not going anywhere.

### More Quotes

"I work plenty hard, lady. I just make it look easy." - Sam Axe

"I'll take my chances." - Michael Westen

"Barry, you're gonna have to start bringing the second man to this two-man job." - Sam Axe

"Well in my experience if something seems too good to be true it's best to shoot it just in case."  
- Fiona

"Good thing my liver is flexible because a lesser man would be dead." - Sam after taking a contact out for drinks yet another time.

"And if you don't do what I want I will rain hell down upon you until one of us is dead and I'm really really good at raining down hell." - Michael Weston

“A spy is just a criminal with a government paycheck.” – Fiona

“Is your stuff handy? Because it’s time for an emergency trip to Disneyworld.” – Sam, sent to take Michael’s Mom somewhere safe.

“Why in God’s name would I want to go to Disneyworld?” – Madeline

“Why? Because it’s a magical kingdom with lots of witnesses and great security.” – Sam

“There’s a place between life and death. Amazing how long a man can linger there...” – Sam

“Truth is, identity theft isn’t hard. A number and an ID is all you need to drain a bank account and return some money to some very surprised retirees. But why stop there? As long as you’re stealing someone’s identity, why not use it to contact some known terrorist organizations on unsecured phone lines? Why not use it to threaten federal judges and insult the local drug cartel? Most fun I’ve had in Miami.”

### **More Spy Tips**

*There are a lot of great techniques in here that a creative player can utilize. They’re also good for a GM in thinking of situations to throw at the characters.*

“The fact is torture is for sadists and for thugs. It’s like getting groceries with a flame-thrower. It doesn’t work and it makes a mess.”

“Getting away means doing stuff the pursuit isn’t willing to do.”

“When you go on the run, the first thing you do is lay down tracks in the opposite direction, but that only works if the bad guys find the trail and believe it’s for real, which means selling it. You need to put on a little show, make them feel clever. When you make somebody work to get a piece of information they’ll believe it that much more because it’s hard to get.”

“International conferences attract spies for the same reason hotel bars attract hookers: you can do business and drink for free.”

“Spies go to bars for the same reason people go to libraries: full of information if you know where to ask.”

“Anyone who has handled large amounts of cash can tell you it’s one of the toughest things in the world to move. It’s heavy and dense; dead weight. If it’s on fire, of course, that complicates things further.”

“You can tie up a lot of resources by keeping a bugged phone line open. As long as it’s open they’re supposed to keep listening. Say a few cryptic things now and then and they’ll be stuck in their little van trying to figure out what the hell you’re doing.”

“As a rule, spies don’t like dealing with cops. Covert ops are illegal by definition. If they were legal they wouldn’t need to be covert.”

“Military firebombs are typically white phosphorus or chlorine trifluoride. These are remarkably effective, but they are also unstable, lethally toxic, and hard to find at the grocery store. The main ingredient in a homemade firebomb, on the other hand, is Styrofoam. A military demolition expert can put something together in a few hours. An IRA trained guerrilla can do it in twenty minutes... give or take.”

“In any new job there’s always friction with your co-workers. They are wondering if the boss likes the new guy better, if he’s going to make them look bad... In some jobs that can get you a dark look in the break room; in other jobs that can get you a bullet in the back of the head.”

“In intelligence work, surveillance is called coverage. It’s like basketball; you can run zone defense or man-to-man. Man-to-man is risky; follow someone too long and they’re going to get suspicious. Zone is usually the way to go. Stay put and let targets come to you. Less obvious, easier on the feet... and you can catch up on your celebrity gossip.”

“Clandestine meetings are never fun to arrange. It’s a big part of the job for a covert operative but it’s never pleasant. It’s not so much the fear of death that bothers you, it’s driving to the meeting with a bag over your head... Sometimes they wash the bag, sometimes they don’t.”

“The thing about security is that the very things that protect you can be turned against you by someone who knows what he’s doing. It’s tough to compromise a well thought-out security system, but making someone think you can compromise it, well, that’s much easier. Take surveillance cameras, for example: you can disable one by shooting a laser at it and overloading the light sensitive chip. Cheap, easy, and exactly the sort of thing a sophisticated criminal gang with lots of resources would do. Leave around some tell-tale signs of surveillance like cigarette butts, a forgotten camera lens cap and the more security there is, the more likely they are to think they’ve got a very serious problem. Even the security team itself can be an opportunity. The more employees you have, the more you have to worry about them. Deliver some vague threats and a few hundred bucks to a security guard. If he’s honest he’ll tell his boss, who then wonders who wasn’t so honest. For the cost of a nice dinner you can get a whole security team canned.”

“Rescuing a hostage isn’t about battering rams and guns. Charge through a door with a gun and chances are the person you’re trying to save will be the first one lying on the floor dying of acute lead poisoning. So you come up with alternatives: ingredients from the local pharmacy, mixed with aluminum foil, powdered in a coffee grinder will make a serviceable flash grenade that would stun anyone for a good 20 feet. Thermite is another handy tool: with a surface temperature of a thousand degrees, it’s used to weld together railroad ties. It would make pretty short works of most locks too.”

“Facts are the hallmark of a good false identity. It is harder to create history than it is to alter it. Plus, the more truth to your lie, the easier it is to remember.”

“A basic rule of covert ops is let someone else do your dirty work. Let someone else find the guy you want to kill. It’s a great technique... as long as you’re not the someone else.”

“Just because there are no windows or doors doesn’t mean there are no exits. The thing to look for is an air conditioner unit, that’s where the wall is weakest. Also, people watch doors; they don’t watch air conditioners.”

“The truly paranoid don’t go to meetings themselves. They use a cut out, someone unrelated to them hired to show a pre-arranged sign and deliver a message. The sign is something innocuous but hard to miss. My favorite is a tourist guide for Madison, Wisconsin. No one will look at it twice, but unless I’m in the Midwest, I know they are waiting for Michael.”

“When you work in intelligence, you get used to the idea that some information is worth risking everything for. You sign up for the lifestyle, or the chance to serve your country, or the millions of frequent-flier miles. But finally, it all comes down to putting your ass on the line to learn something.”

“There are some fights you just can’t win. A force can be so overwhelming that no tactical approach in a fight is going to lead to a victory worth having. When you can’t win in a fight, sometimes you have to settle for making sure that if you lose, everyone loses. It works for nuclear weapons; it works for me.”

“For any operative, stashing weapons is second nature after a while. Spies hide guns like squirrels hide acorns. You never know when you’ll need some firepower, or where you’ll be when you need it.”

“A great way to get people talking about their security is to put them on the defensive. Accuse a guy of having bad locks and before you know it he’s telling you where his motion detectors are.”

“When you’re claiming to be someone you’re not, the key is commitment. You’ve got to sell it like your life depends on it, because sometimes it does. One reason to work with the same people is you know each other’s moves, so if you shoot at your team in the middle of an operation, they know to go with it.”

“Private military companies are best known for their bodyguard work. It’s a big part of their business, but it’s not the only part. For a big enough check, they’ll rain hot lead down wherever you want. It’s not work that attracts service-with-a-smile types.”

“If you wanna make a friend, solve a problem for them. No problem to solve? Create one.”

“Most people think distracting a group of guys is best done by a beautiful woman. The problem with beautiful women is people want them to stick around, which can cause a lot of problems. Obnoxious guys, they just want to get rid of.”

“To win a negotiation you have to show you’re willing to walk away. And the best way to show you’re willing to walk away... is to walk away.”

“Get your hands on any classified document worth having, chances are it’s going to be redacted, which makes reading it a lot like watching a movie on an airplane: all the juicy parts are missing but you still get the basic idea.”

“One of the hardest things to do in a fight is to make it look like you’re trying to kill someone without doing any permanent damage. They don’t teach any half-moves in combat training. There are moves designed to kill and maim as efficiently as possible. If those are off limits, one option is open your fist right before a punch lands. Painful, but the force is distributed. Another showy option is a kick to the shoulder. You might break a rib or two; but if you aim right, nobody is going to the morgue.”

“A fight is one of the quickest ways to tell if someone isn’t who they say they are. If you say you are Russian but fight like an American, consider your cover blown, which means you better know Sambo, the mixed martial art of Russia. Of course, you also have to win the fight; a great cover ID doesn’t help much if you’re dead.”

“A criminal cover ID isn’t just about a new name and phone number; it’s about fitting into a culture with its own rules and hierarchies. It’s a world where bank robbers are the rock stars, con artists are the snobs, car thieves are the blue-collar guys, and safecrackers are the artists.”

“Safe-cracking skills are a basic part of espionage training. Spies steal secrets and people keep their secrets in safes. But staying current with safe cracking is a little like staying current with computers: a new model every year. Bottom line: if you want to breach a safe, you have to practice.”

“Making yourself invisible when you need to is a crucial skill for a covert operative; it sounds exotic but it’s not like there’s a super-secret move they teach you at spy school that allows you to vanish into thin air. Often it’s just a matter of quick thinking, fast feet, and strong fingers.”  
(Hanging by a ledge outside a window)

“Tailing a trained operative requires a number of time consuming preparations: everything from acquiring a vehicle they can’t recognize or trace to familiarizing yourself with all the local traffic patterns. Of course, since you can never be sure who’s a trained op, there’s always the chance you’ll take all those precautions just to follow a secretary back to her cubicle.”

“The interior locks in an office suite are usually low-end; just there to keep white-collar workers from stealing coffee cups. File cabinet locking bars, on the other hand, are a more serious security measure. Their main vulnerability is that they depend on people’s faith in padlocks. People have too much faith in padlocks.”

“Sometimes, when you meet a new operative, it’s a good idea to open with an aggressive move. You learn about people when you make them play defense: their reflexes, weaknesses, how they handle themselves under pressure. And even if they are able to counter, it never hurts to know how far they’re willing to go.”

“When meeting a covert operative for the first time, the arrangements can tell you a lot: if they give you a map and a photo, they trust you; a place and a time, they want to check you out before they make contact; a cryptic clue like “tidy pelican”, they’ve just got an irritating sense of humor.”

“Dealing with a trained operative is like playing chess with a master. Dealing with criminals, on the other hand, is like playing checkers with a three-year-old: they like to change the rules.”

“Spend a career in covert ops and you’re going to know some bad people. You’ll work with them, you’ll live with them, you might even trust your life with them. But none of that makes them your friend. It can’t. Because one day, you might have to end them.”

“Spies make great neighbors; they’re polite, they keep the lawn trim, and they never crank up the music at night. They don’t stand out, because they don’t want to be found. So if you’re hunting for a covert operative and all you’ve got to go on are the names of a few dozens suspects, you’re out of luck... unless you know where to look.”

“To tail someone, you need both skill and instinct. You need skill because the driving is tough; you can’t get too close and you can’t drift too far away. You can’t go too fast or too slow. You need instinct because every turn, every lane change, every bridge raises the risk of being seen. Anyone can be trained to follow a car, but it takes good instincts to know when it’s time to stop following.”

“When you’re being followed by the police, it’s important to remember that having cops around is a problem for criminals, but it’s an even bigger problem for a detective trying to remain inconspicuous on a stakeout.”

“Finding a way into a criminal organization is about observing social dynamics. You start with a target. You’re looking for just the right person to approach. People in the inner circle are usually too tough to go after. Anyone with real power is bound to be cautious. Drivers and bodyguards are easier, but they usually don’t have real access. You want someone with enough juice to be hungry for more; someone desperate to make a move. In short, you’re looking for a frustrated middle manager.”

“To the educated eye, a prison tat tells a story: where you did time, why you did time, and who you did it with. It’s a little like a job resumé for criminals.”

“When you work as a covert operative, there’s no line between who you are and what you do. You are who you need to be for the operation. It makes you effective, it keeps things simple. But when you spend so much time living with someone else, sometimes the people you care about most begin to wonder who you really are.”

“When you realize that an operation is compromised, that your enemies are on the move, you’re on the clock. You have to move as fast as you can to contain the damage and harden your defenses before it’s too late. Sometimes you make it in time, and sometimes you don’t. When you work in intelligence, the worst feeling in the world is knowing nothing. Being caught in

something you don't begin to understand, because it's not the enemy you see that gets you. It's the one you don't."

"The day that the cell phone call log was invented should be celebrated as a national holiday for spies. Even a cautious cell phone user who uses dialback systems or switches phones often, leaves behind a lot of information you can use."

### **More on Miami**

The soundtrack of Miami is a mixture of its ethnic influences (Cuban, Central American, world beat) with its vibrant club scene (rave and rap). Add some pulse-quickening spy music for sneaking around or fire-fights and you've captured the mood.

In many ways, Miami is a crossroads. Its Brickell district contains the largest concentration of international banks inside the U.S. Hundreds of thousands of tourists from around the world come to the city for the beaches or to board the hundreds of cruise ships which call Miami home. Many U.S. corporations have their headquarters in Miami so a tremendous amount of business domestic and international gets done in the city. The seaport and airport are major cargo hubs in and out of the U.S.

The look of the city is dominated by its downtown full of skyscrapers, the Art Deco district in South Beach, marinas and the sea, sun and sand of Miami Beach, the Miracle Mile in the Coral Gables district, as well as more utilitarian areas of the docks, warehouses, and suburbs. There are several ethnic enclaves in the town including Little Havana and Little Moscow. Sports are big in Miami which boasts NFL, NBA, MLB, and NHL teams as well as major collegiate programs like University of Miami and Florida International University.

All these elements can be mined to reinforce the flavor of Miami or just provide convenient details. If a major sports star comes to them for help because he's being blackmailed, you can make him Dwayne Wade if you want name impact, or perhaps Michael Beasley, a less well-known player who is more likely to be cut if there is a problem. Military secrets or technology might have been stolen from the U.S. Southern Command which oversees all operations in Central and South America.

The regions of the city provide different places for the plots to traverse, different challenges to fitting in or creating a convincing cover persona. The flavor of the heart of Little Havana will be quite different from the gated estates of Coral Gables. A car chase across the 2.5 mile Julia Tuttle Causeway will feel different than a normal highway with regular exits. Meeting a client at a charity event full of celebrities is more interesting than walking up to them in a mall somewhere.

Feel free to pick and choose what details you take from the real Miami and what you create from whole cloth.