Sample Insect Agents

These are just some of the possibilities for gengineered insects.

Smart Mosquito (TL10)

Among the most common insects to be modified are female (bloodsucking) mosquitoes. A mosquito's ability to fly, its small size, its excellent sense of smell, and, most of all, its ability to be modified to deliver chemicals into the blood make it a highly useful organic platform for covert operations.

A smart mosquito has the usual mental and physical modifications common to insect agents. It also has a pheromone gland that allows it to mark objects with a distinctive scent so that it can find them later. It will always mark its owner.

The insect can fly at about 2 mph (Move 1). It has an effective Tracking skill 10, which can be used to find objects or people it has been programmed to recognize. It can be programmed to scent-mark an object it has found. Provided that target is not behind a sealed barrier or more than a mile or so distant, this gives the mosquito +3 on any Tracking rolls to find it later on.

The mosquito can be programmed to perform one of several tasks if it finds its target:

Payload: The mosquito cannot carry anything heavier than a few grains of sand, but sometimes that can be enough! Useful payloads include pinhead-sized listening devices and messages that are coded as microdots ($1 each). These can also be deposited somewhere – or on some*one* – and scent-marked for later retrieval.

Sampler: The mosquito can draw blood from a subject and retain it without consuming it for up to six hours. This can provide a blood sample for analysis.

Target Marking: Mark the object with a pheromone marker. This can be combined with any other task.

Vector Attack: The insect can carry and transmit a dose of a germ-warfare agent or proteus virus (designed not to affect the mosquito). It may also carry a drug or poison, but as it can only carry a small dose, HT rolls to resist are at +4. Delivery is by biting. This won't penetrate armor, but many people won't even notice a mosquito bite (make a Perception roll at -2 to do so).

A target being stalked by a smart mosquito should get a Hearing roll to notice it. A mosquito-sized insect has SM-16, but any hit will kill it.

A smart mosquito costs $8,000; it can be carried in a matchbox-sized carrying case. They live only two months. Drugs that extend the mosquito's life span by one month per dose cost $100 per dose. They are effective on a roll of 15 or less; roll each month. Mosquitoes can also be bought as dried eggs, which remain viable for 20 years and hatch after a day in water. Smart mosquitoes are LC3.

Smart Bug (TL10)

A smart ant or small spider uses the same rules as a smart mosquito, except that it is limited to moving on the ground at Move 1, cannot act as a blood sampler, has Tracking-7, and can carry a little more (gives only +2 to resist any drug or poison). While it can't fly, it can walk up walls, and is silent so it's hard to notice; a Per-4 roll is required to spot an ant or spider sneaking up on you. On the other hand, it's easy to kill – just step on it.

Smart ants or spiders are slightly easier to construct than mosquitoes, and cost $5,000. They can be equipped with two additional biological modifications:

Hardened Mandibles (TL10): These bioceramic jaws allow the bug to perform sabotage, chewing tiny holes in ducts, slicing wires, or biting for 1 point of damage per minute. A swarm of at least 100 is needed to do 1 HP of injury per second and will be dispersed after losing 6 HP; see p. B461. Add $1,000.

Vacuum Adaptation (TL11): The insect's body has been surgically adapted to survive for a short time (up to an hour) in space, or other high- or low-pressure environments. Add $10,000.

Gengineered Animals

Larger animals – such as fish, dogs, or cows – can be bioengineered, often by adding genes from other species. Just like humans, animals can be modified with germline gengineering or a biomod operation. The former has the potential to create a race of modified animals (if a breeding pair is modified). The latter only modifies a single individual, but can usually be performed at an earlier TL.

So why would someone want to gengineer animals? Some possible objectives are described below.

Companions and Working Beasts

Pet owners already enjoy exotic breeds. If laws don't get in the way, we may see dogs with pink fur or strange hybrids like a cat-rabbit. Even if they are illegal, there may still be a black market for radically altered pets. While society may frown on giving rabbit ears and a semi-intelligent brain to a cat, genemods designed to enhance the intelligence of working beasts like sheep dogs, police dogs, or horses may be acceptable. At high TLs or in cyberpunk worlds, customized "super pets" could be created by finding a freelance genehacker and having him make a pet to order.

Some societies may even permit the design of "guardbeasts" or "warbeasts" with enhanced combat abilities, derived from deadly animals. These might also be used in ecological warfare. Most such beasts are LC2-3; those that can breed rapidly might be LC1.