

Operation: Ravenheart

A Mission for GURPS Black Ops

by C. A. Johnson

Art by Dan Smith

A group of people takes their seats around the desk of the mission coordinator at Whitehall. Looking briefly at each of them, the grim-faced man behind the desk reaches into a drawer, pulls out a set of colored, unmarked file folders, and hands them out to each person. "I don't need to tell you that this information doesn't leave this facility," he says matter-of-factly. "You'll check those folders at the door before you leave." The acknowledgment is universal and automatic as the group opens the files and scans the summary page.

"We may have a problem with an ongoing mission," the nameless coordinator states. "A number of bodies have turned up in an Ohio suburb. There is no known link between the victims. Cause of death has been murder, but the method has varied in each case. You have summaries of the police reports in your files. There are two things that really concern us here. First, there's the frequency of the attacks. Statistically, the murder rate in that area has trebled in the last month. Secondly, in each case, the attack has been quick, brutal, professional, and had a near total absence of evidence left behind. Remind you of something?"

One of the listeners speaks. "Sounds like a clean-up."

"Exactly. However, in no case can the Company trace any leaks to these individuals, even in our most paranoid projections." That raises a few eyebrows in the room. The personnel at Whitehall make paranoia their stock and trade. They, as are all departments of the Company, are obscenely good at their jobs. "Ordinarily, we'd chalk this up to a fluke, or some clever serial killer, and leave it to the authorities to handle . . ."

"Except for that ongoing mission you mentioned," the same listener fills in.



"Correct. The Company has a long-term surveillance in progress in that area. You have the mission briefing, all relevant reports, and the squad portfolios in your mission packets. Department specific information has been provided where appropriate. Our worst case scenario is that one of our operatives has cracked. Best case is that serial killer I mentioned earlier.

"I'm not going to lie to you, people. This is the most dangerous type of Security mission there is. You're going undercover against our own. If there is a secret here to be found, there is no one on this planet better trained to keep it and eliminate the individuals trying to ferret it out. If our worst fears are realized, your orders are to neutralize the threat without jeopardizing the existing mission or the conspiracy. You have the authority to abort that mission should you see a need. Speaking as the man who set it up, you better have a damned good reason if you do abort. The reports were just starting to show progress. If we had to back out now, it would take months to get back into the position we're in now. Given our position in this war, it may be months we can't spare.

"I want a mission synopsis on my desk in seventy-two hours. You have ninety-six hours after that to requisition your equipment. From that point on, I expect nothing other than results. Is that clear?"

Everyone else in the room nods silently.

"Are there any questions?"

"Sir?" the only other person to speak so far says, "Why the codename? Why Ravenheart?"

The mission coordinator locks eyes with the speaker. "Because one way or another, there's a black-hearted bastard behind this. Your job is to find out if he's ours or not. Anything else?"

Silence answers.

"Excellent. Dismissed."

Briefing File

Operation: Ravenheart

Mission Synopsis: Imagitech Surveillance.

Mission statement: Investigate the possibility of Grey involvement with the technical aspects of Imagitech Inc. Determine the extent of any such involvement. Report back to the Company on any findings.

Corporate Profile: Imagitech Engineering

Imagitech Engineering is a relatively new company entering the lucrative video game market. Herman Gander incorporated it a mere four years ago. They specialize in easily portable personal entertainment units, similar to the popular "Gamebuddy" line in size. Company growth started slowly, as they attempted to get product recognition. Two years ago, the main product of the company took a radical upswing in quality and presentation, utilizing graphics of near photographic quality in a unit the size of a sophisticated market available graphic calculator.

Less than a year after that, Imagitech began to enter bids on government contracts; specifically, contracts for training simulators utilizing VR technology. This is what earned them the scrutiny of the Company.

Imagitech's financial footing is relatively firm for a company of its age. Sales of their flagship product have secured a solid base in the marketplace, and show no signs of slowing down. With the additional revenues from the contracts mentioned above, Imagitech stands to turn a thirty million dollar profit next quarter. Projections for the following quarter almost double.

Analysis of Imagitech's PlayPal yielded some unexpected results. The central processing chip is extremely complex, capable of running hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions more operations per second than required by the games themselves. Considering the quality of the graphics, this is a very impressive number indeed. The chip seems to have a self-limiting structure, in that it appears to be hardwired to run much slower than it is capable of.

Most impressive of all, even the Tech department has so far been unable to replicate or reprogram these chips.

Personnel Briefs:

- **Bill:** Intelligence department.
Specific expertise: Covert entry and surveillance techniques. First mission.
Pre-Academy history: Art thief involved in several high profile thefts.
Academy history: Swimmer, excelled in chess, drafted early by his department of choice. Excelled in intrusion and social training. Struggled with combat.
Profile: Early thirties, 5'7" tall, Caucasian. Hair usually blonde, eyes naturally green. Suave and smooth, even for a spook. Prefers hands-on work, but highly expert in long range surveillance techniques.
- **Larry:** Intelligence department.
Specific expertise: Corporate espionage techniques. Veteran of nine missions. Designated mission commander.
Pre-Academy history: Freelance corporate espionage operative.
Academy history: Rugby player, moderately good at chess. Placed about a third of the way through the draft by second choice. First was Security. Displayed general competence, but excelled in corporate infiltration. Weak in the science fields, from a Company viewpoint.
Profile: Mid thirties, 6'1" tall, Caucasian. Prefers brown or auburn hair, eyes are naturally brown. Quietly competent and self-assured, he volunteers nothing, ever.
Mission summaries: Two Cover-ups, both successful. Three Discovery missions, with one aborted by Secop, and one partial failure. One Bug Hunt, successful. Three Recon missions against corporate targets, all successful.
- **John:** Security department.
Specific expertise: None. Veteran of seven missions.
Pre-Academy history: Graduated MIT with Electronic Engineering and History degrees. Leftist politics led him to life as political activist, then low profile terrorist. Contacted after first international job.
Academy history: Struggled a bit with some of the academic work. Excelled in survival and weeding drills. Rugby player, not an exceptional chess player. Good at Go. Drafted late by third choice. First two were Tech and Combat. John is known to have exceptional sensory abilities, notably scent and hearing.
Profile: Amerindian, 5' 11" tall. Dark hair. Eyes naturally black.

Mission Summaries: Two Recon missions, one successful, one aborted. Two Clean-ups, both successful. One Containment mission, aborted. Two Cover-ups, both successful.

- **Gina:** Tech department.

Specific expertise: Entertainment systems. Veteran of three missions.

Pre-Academy history: Self educated hacker and gamer. An Op squad caught her when she found and attempted to enter a Blacknet node. Seeing her potential, they let her go with a cover story and kept her under surveillance. She was recruited two years later.

Academy History: Swimmer, with a keen mind for academic work. She was widely skilled as a side effect of her gaming days. Excelled in chess. Drafted at once by her department of choice.

Profile: Caucasian, 5'4", naturally blonde, eyes naturally blue.

Mission summaries: One Containment mission, successful. One Cover-up mission, successful. One Discovery mission, failed.

- **Sarah:** Tech department.

Specific expertise: Electronics engineering and manufacturing techniques. Veteran of five missions.

Pre-Academy history: A brilliant engineering student out of Cal-Tech with looks to match her mind, Sarah was contacted indirectly almost at once after her graduation. Her job at Dynatronics convinced the Company she was worth having.

Academy history: Brilliant academic work, but struggled a bit in the field as her expectations caught up with her natural talent. Swimmer, top of her class at chess. Top pick of her class for her department of choice.

Profile: African American, 5'6", prefers golden or lightened hair, eyes naturally dark brown.

Mission summaries: One Discovery, successful. One Containment, successful. Two cover-ups, successful. One Clean-up, successful.

Preliminary scenario: After due consideration of personnel and the situation, the consensus of the squad is to insert Gina as a testing engineer. Offering one of the existing Imagitech personnel a position at Dynatronics can easily create the necessary opening. Once in, Gina can plant evidence of corporate espionage on one of the senior engineers. Larry will provide the necessary evidence and coordinate placement of it. This will allow placement of Sarah in the upper echelon of the engineering staff. John will insure that other applicants do not take or are not eligible for the position. Bill will maintain active surveillance on squad members and on any other people deemed necessary by the situation and the squad. From this point in the operation on, Gina is superfluous in her cover, and can pursue a more aggressive intelligence gathering agenda with minimal risk. Reports indicate that Gina meets the profile of women the president of Imagitech tends to be attracted to. This may create a window for advanced surveillance.

Summary to date: It has been four months since this scenario was implemented. Reports to date indicate that it has played out well. Gina was able to work Sarah into place. No notable hitches were reported. The opportunity for advanced surveillance the squad hoped for has not yet materialized, but has not been discounted. We have no reason to believe that the mission's security has been compromised at this time.

The first murder took place two months into the mission. Since that time, a new murder has occurred at a frequency of not less than one per week, with five reported in the third week. The precise whereabouts of every squad member cannot be ascertained during the times of the killings.

Argus Eyes Only

The Company has sent the squad out because something about these murders has raised the suspicions of the retired Ops that interpret mission data. While the Committee does its best to weed out potential problems before they are even approached by the Company, extreme situations can have extreme results. In this case, the Company's instincts are correct. One of the members of the squad is performing these killings. It is the Secop, John. The problem is his motive.

Imagitech Engineering has indeed made contact with the Greys. In fact, the Greys have been in on the company since its inception. This connection has been extremely hard to track because not even the CEO and founder of the firm is truly aware of it. The Greys have worked almost entirely through his dreams. While specific communication between our races is difficult, the transmission of images is much simpler. Ever since he first conceived the company, Herman Gander has been fed images of his manufacturing process. His highly analytical mind was able to seize these images, break them down, and turn them into practical applications.

As the surveillance progressed, John began to realize what was happening. With his remarkable sensory abilities, he was able to find a pheromone trace left by the Grey responsible. When he attempted to track the offender that night, he was taken . . . but only for a few minutes. The Greys had prepared for the possibility of Company interference, and had a strategic experiment prepared to implement on a moment's notice. John was captured, injected with a more sophisticated and selective version of the Cocktail, and turned loose, but with one minor addition. He now has a chip similar to the Imagitech CPU in his head. It monitors him as do the standard Grey chips, but it also absolutely destroys his ability to keep a secret. Not only can he no longer lie, he feels compelled now and then to blurt out awkward truths and damning statements. Each individual murder has been a cover-up. The only link between them is John.

The Secop knows what the problem is, and has connected the missing several minutes of his life with the embarrassing slips. However, two things keep him from coming forward. First, his survival instincts have been reset at "Extraordinarily Paranoid." He is convinced the squad will kill him on the spot and call it a clean up.

Second, John is completely dedicated to the Company. This dedication keeps him on the job because he knows he has abilities that others don't. He is convinced he can control, and eventually beat this problem on his own. He believes it is a matter of concentration and focus, rather than surgery and recovery. So far, his slips have been minor, and his skill in conversation and half-truths has allowed him to indulge his compulsion without revealing enough to be a real threat. On those occasions when he has slipped something truly important, he has taken his own steps. He refuses to resort to the Cocktail. That would cause the Company to ask dangerous questions that he can't cover for. He has actually had to kill several more people than the Company knows about, but has been able to do it by means of convenient accidents. The more people he kills, the more he strains his creativity. He knows that any sort of pattern will set off Company alarms. So far, he believes he has avoided detection.

The Ointment Coated Fly

Every cover-up has a hole in it. John has been trained specifically to find and eliminate such holes, and has put all of his skills to good use in the past weeks. Nonetheless, there are still some details that will tip the players off if they pay attention.

While Bill is responsible for maintaining surveillance on those members of his squad actively engaged in intelligence gathering, John is the one responsible for keeping track of the movements of the squad as a whole. The reason the precise locations of each squad member cannot be accounted for is because John is fudging his data. At no point is he actually lying (remember, he can't do that). Rather, he is exaggerating uncertainties, and planning his clean-ups accordingly. If

two members usually go offline at similar, predictable times, John extends those intervals so that they overlap, and makes whatever move he needs to at that time.

If his moves are scrutinized, there is enough data in his reports to place him in the vicinity of each killing. However, he has used his exaggerations to good effect here, too. If there is the slightest room for uncertainty, John made sure to give himself the greatest benefit of each doubt. The problem here for the investigating squad is the sheer amount of data gathered. John has been tracking everyone's moves for four months! The files are in Blacknet.

John will avoid answering questions about these discrepancies if at all possible, going so far as to change the subject. As long as they are merely questions, he will take no overt action. Erasing the data would be too suspicious, and modifying it would be lying.

Another piece of evidence is John's increasing independence from the group. The Secop has deduced that the Grays are responsible for his predicament. While he has no illusions about getting them to reverse the procedure, he does hope to catch one of them. He figures this will buy his life from the Company for his indiscretions and let him do his important work. John's absences are during low priority mission times, and are carefully placed nowhere near any of the killings. They are getting longer as John devotes more time to his growing obsession. He is working on a near-Academy level schedule, sleeping perhaps two to three hours a night, performing his regular duties, then engaging in his hunt during his down times. With the stresses of both the mission and his predicament weighing on him, this workload could very easily cause the psychotic break the Company feels may have already happened.

Catching the Fly

The Ops have several choices as to how to proceed. They can try to place the target squad under long term surveillance. This has advantages and disadvantages. The heroes have all the data they need to find their targets at almost any time. They know where and when to look, and who to look for. They also have a pretty good idea how their opposite numbers will react under given circumstances. (What Academy graduate hasn't taken Advanced Avoidance 706 with the dreaded Dr. Hildebrandt?)

The problem is that the on-site team will be looking for surveillance as part of their standard mission protocols. While they won't be at the top of their form, they won't be easy to tail either. If the pursuers are discovered, they could very easily find themselves on the wrong end of the hunt.

Alternately, the characters could simply insert themselves into the mission. They have the authority to do so from Whitehall. This would get them right up close to the team, but would heighten their alert status. Whitehall doesn't send reserves on a whim. Unless a very good cover story is provided, the on-site team will become suspicious that something is up . . . John in particular.

The characters could simply become active near the team, hoping to draw out whatever is happening. This is similar to the surveillance option. The main difference is the field of engagement. Active surveillance engages them as Ops. If the characters meet them socially, they will instead be dealing with the cover identities. This has the chance of getting John to make one of his embarrassing "confessions" to the characters. It wouldn't be long before the Secop was forced to make his move.

Revealing their identity as an Op would not save the characters. Rather, it would send John into a near berserk panic as he tried to escape. Should he get away, not only would he become a threat to the Conspiracy, he would probably remain active in his own way. Cut loose from Company policies and restrictions, John could become a deadly adversary as he stalks the globe hunting his redemption.

Into the Web

Whatever the team decides to do, at some point John will become aware of their nature and activities. After all, he's a Secop. It's his job to be aware of things like that, and he's very, very good at his job. If the character forces his hand early, he will do his best to make a quick getaway and pursue his revenge. Given his dedication to the Company, John will only do this if his cover is well and truly blown, and his problem is exposed. If there is any doubt in his mind at all, he will try to bluff it out a little while longer.

If John has enough time, though, a desperate plan will take shape in his mind. He knows his squad's orders. He knows what his people will and won't do, and has planned all his contingencies around these facts. Another squad, though, offers him a new way out. Shortly after John realizes what is going on, clues will begin to appear near the investigating squad. Snatches of Grey clothing, acid burns near their homes, lingering traces of cinnamon scent in the air. The squad's response to these clues will tell John a lot about what they are doing there. If they aggressively pursue these leads, then he will use the squad to help him on his hunt. In doing this, John is not lying. He *knows* there are Greys around. He just doesn't know where they are. He is reasonably sure they are dealing with Gander, but can't discover how. Therefore, he will aim the investigating squad at Gander.

If the squad does not follow up, then John will assume the worst. He knows the Company will catch up with him eventually. He is desperate, not stupid. If the team doesn't follow up on the Grey evidence, he will assume they are after him, and his time is up. He will abandon his cover and move on Gander himself.

In either case, things will start moving very rapidly at this point. The on site team will not take kindly to interference in their mission objectives. If the characters move on Gander, the team will move on the characters, if for no other reason than to find out exactly what is going on. If John moves on Gander alone, the on site team will move on John. When this happens, the characters will also have to move also.

During that fracas, the Greys will strike.

Imagitech is considerably more important to the Greys than the Company imagined. The chip in the PayPal is not hardwired to operate at slower speeds, as the Company first thought. It is working at capacity already. Using science not even vaguely understood by the boys in Tech, the PayPal is slowly attuning the minds of countless teenagers and children to the telepathic wavelength of the Greys. It's a slow project, but then, the Greys still have well over a decade left before the next ship arrives. If they can successfully implement this plan, they will have thousands, perhaps even millions of humans susceptible to their powerful telepathic abilities. With an asset like that at their disposal, humanity will be theirs to do with as they pleased. Even the Company would be unable to stop them.

So far, only Gander has been able to translate the psionic projections of the aliens into practical applications. He is, therefore, a vital cog in the plan, and cannot be easily sacrificed. The present form of the chip is only the first stage of the process. He has been under close but cautious surveillance since the Greys first established contact. When the Company moves on him, the Greys will counterattack with everything they have available. When this happens, John will have fulfilled the ultimate purpose of the chip in his head. The Greys knew they couldn't break Ravenheart quickly enough to avoid alerting his squad. They also couldn't get enough out of him to ID the squad. They installed the chip to force the Company's hand. If John were caught, the Company would have to back out to avoid suspicion. If he weren't, eventually his paranoia would have forced him to take out his own team, and set him loose. If the Company took any other action, John would lead them directly to Gander. In doing so, he would play them right into the Greys hand.

You see, Gander's house is a gauntlet.

Gander's security system is much more advanced then he realizes. When John was captured, it was by a squad of Greys making modifications to that network. Until the Greys activate it, it acts exactly like Gander intended it to. It alerts the authorities and the household to attack or intrusion. Once activated fully, however, it becomes much more deadly, and tells no one but the Greys anything. The system will do its best to kill the characters, but will most likely only slow the Ops down. The Greys, who have a small ship nearby for just such an emergency, will handle mop up. The GM may tailor the Grey's numbers and equipment to the players. Gander's estate is large and private, so they will be able to fight freely so long as the Greys operate the system. The on site squad will have the layout down, but the intensity of the security will surprise them.

In the battle, John's chip will appear to burn out, as it was programmed to. If he survives, he will be free of its effects. The Greys know this, and will try very hard to make sure he does not survive. Whether the "burnout" is permanent or not is up to the GM.

The Greys will also try to preserve Gander. If they can get him out, the experience he remembers (totally different from what actually happened) will cause him to go underground and submit designs to his company by proxy and courier. He has already prepared for this eventuality, convinced by his own chip. What the Company chooses to do about that is another story.

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