

THE HIDDEN

An Adventure for **GURPS Black Ops**

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This *GURPS Black Ops* adventure is for a team of black ops, about four to six. They should have a good range of Science skills. However, *none* of the members can be psi-ops, as this would ruin a good portion of the adventure's plot and feasibility.

Heading To the Bottom of the World

The team is literally taken from whatever they're doing and shoved onto a tilt-rotor transport run by the Company. As they're flown into wherever they're going, the players should note that there is a CD player and CD on the deck. If they play the CD, a message is there for them from the Company.

Greetings. Sorry about the short notice, but you're the only team we could get for this job and you're up for a big one. A research team in Antarctica has discovered what could be brainsucker worms in the ice. From what we know, the worms they have found so far are dead, but we can't take any chances of them finding live worms or dissecting the dead ones and revealing that they didn't come from this planet. Your job is very simple -- get down there, find out what they found, and deal with it, using extreme measures if necessary. As far as the team knows, you're coming down from UCLA to help analyze the discovery.

There are two major problems. The first is that there is a big storm coming through the area. As of noon tomorrow, local time, nothing can fly in or out. Trying to go overland to any facility would be a slow form of suicide, so you're stuck there for the next few days. The second is that the clock is ticking; if they have found brainsuckers, they have to be Cocktailed and the evidence destroyed in six days; otherwise the only way to keep a lid on this is to kill everyone there. You now have dossiers on the people there, as well as your equipment. Good luck.

The CD destroys itself as it plays (mostly due to an overpowered laser in the CD player), and the team can sort through their equipment. What they have is the following:

- TL8 Cold weather survival gear, enough for every member of the team. It resembles the commercial, TL7 gear but allows for unaffected survival at -90 degrees F (TL7 gear will only protect up to -50 degrees F). The suits are also armored; treat as a full-body suit of heavy monocryst.
- Enough pistols (Glock 17 w/laser sight and barrel mods for silencers), clips of both subsonic and standard ammo to give each player four clips of each, and silencers for the whole team.
- Enough flame-throwers to give the team one flame-thrower per two members, plus one extra.
- Enough HAFLAs to give each team member two packs.
- TL8 biology science equipment; this gives a Science Op a +2 to any medical or biology rolls. As well, it allows for a link-up via Cistron to the Blacknet for access to more information.
- Assorted equipment of the player's preference, up to 50 kg per player.
- Enough survival rations and stored food to last two weeks.
- Enough doses of the Cocktail to handle 30 people.

By the time the team arrives at site (in six hours, after two mid-air refuelings), they should have a good idea of what their cover identities are and the four person team of scientists and the three-man caretaker staff of the camp are like.

The camp is called (with some odd optimism) Camp Sunny Days. Billed as one of the new "clean Antarctica" facilities, it resembles a cross with domes at each end of the cross's short arms, and a central dome. One of the arms is the living quarters for the camp members; these are set up dormitory-style, with each person having a room and a shower, with access to a central living and eating area. In an emergency, the rooms can be converted into makeshift cells by locking the door with a lock that can't be opened from the inside (needed if one of the people on the staff snaps during the long winter -- it has happened a few times before at other camps).

The central dome is a combination medical facility/research lab/maintenance section. Behind a locked and reinforced door (PD 4, DR 30) is access to an elevator which goes down about 90 feet to the camp's main power plant -- a Russian-designed and French-improved fission power pack. The power pack has more power than the camp will ever need (it's a two megawatt facility, intended to allow for growth of the base), and the package is entirely sealed. For ops that are sufficiently grim about it, there is enough nuclear material here to build two 1-kiloton devices. A backup diesel generator and enough fuel to last three weeks is also stored in a second shaft on the other side of the dome.

The remaining three arms are: a storage facility with supplies to last five months (six with rationing), a vehicle pool with four snowmobiles and two snowcats and the tools to fix them, and a combination refrigerator/cold lab for handling ice core samples. All of the dome walls are heavy cinder block bricks with reinforced concrete cores, covered in a layer of thermal-resistant material both inside and outside (about PD 5, DR 60 per hexside), and each dome has a backup diesel generator that can keep heat and power for a week.

By the time the team arrives, most of the people there are too busy helping the ops to unload and move their gear inside to notice how they got there -- and even if they do ask, the increasingly bad weather can cover just about anything. The three man caretaker staff (Peter Williams, Nboru Musafi, and Tom Kilroy) will help the players to get settled in. They will let them know that the research team was coming back with core samples that they had just acquired. An astute Science op can get to the samples already gathered (especially if the other ops run interference). The sample room is locked, but the lock is old and easily picked (give anybody that tries to pick it a +3 to the roll). Inside are the core ice samples and two of the "worms" they found. If the Science op makes their Biology or Xenology roll, they'll know that the worms are . . . well, kind of like brainsuckers. A critical success will tell the player that the worms have a lot of different structures than a normal brainsucker worm. Mutation or ice damage, the op isn't sure, but this isn't a normal

brainsucker.

The Return of the Prize

About three hours after the team arrives, the science team gets back in, beating the early edge of the storm. By the time the science team gets the samples into the cold lab and gets out of their cold-weather clothes, the storm is fully upon them. The storm is worse than predicted, and even radio transmissions are fully jammed up -- for the next week they are literally on their own (even Ops gear like the Cistron can't get through the storm). Dr. Hunt will insist upon doing an examination of the newest core sample they found -- the one with four oddest worms in it -- and to get to them, the core sample has to be slowly heated as to prevent heat damage to the frozen tissue. This is a long and laborious process that will take several hours.

While the ice sample is being thawed, the team should get to know the members of the science team, especially Dr. Hunt. He will *immediately* be suspicious of the team, thinking that they might be here to steal his research after years of skepticism by the scientific community. As the sample is just about thawed, the whole science team and the ops are there to start examining the newly de-thawed worms when the heater explodes.

The explosion of the heater, due to a faulty heating element, should do no more than stun and give everyone ringing ears and a bad headache for the next few hours; unless they have their hands physically on the box, nobody should take any damage. (If they are touching or are near the heater, take 3D in electrical damage.) As people get patched up and things get cleaned up, they notice there's a problem:

The worms are missing. And there isn't a pile of splattered worm goo anywhere to be seen.

A New Kind of Future

Immediately, the ops should assume the first and biggest problem: that there are four brainsuckers loose. Yet nobody has any injuries to that effect or are showing "zombie" signs (information on brainsuckers should be available to the ops via their databases). Assuming the ops don't overreact and pull out guns and start doing crazy things, the hunt for the core samples should proceed slowly with no appearance of the worms. And if the ops go to guns? The three-man support staff regularly watch the scientists at work, and if they see the ops "go nuts," they'll break out their guns (.45 automatics and Kilroy has a 12 gauge Remington), and they'll try to talk the ops down, and if necessary shoot them.

As long as the ops don't go nuts, the hunt for what the players should be convinced are brainsuckers will probably end without results. They won't find anything except ice shards, and with some luck, the worms in storage can be explained away as any sort of primitive lifeform; in short, an easy job for the ops.

If only they had it so easy.

About a day after the explosion (and assuming the ops are looking for signs of brainsucker infestation), they should notice that certain people, perhaps even the ops themselves, are acting a little odd. This is not like a brainsucker infestation, but odd nevertheless. Dr. Hunt might forget his glasses (which he's blind without, as anyone can see just by looking at them) and is reading like he's got perfect 20/20 vision. Or maybe Emily seems a bit more cheerful. And maybe they'll notice that one of Peter's lost fingers is starting to grow back, slowly but surely.

The GM should choose four people (perhaps even one of the ops) and start having them be changed by the brainsymbiote (see description at the end). If the op(s) are being changed, pass paranoia notes the first two days of the change. After the first two days, the change itself is almost

impossible *not* to notice. Whole physiques are being altered and people seem to be growing more intelligent and more agile, as if they were being improved from the inside out. Needless to say, the ops have to figure out why.

If the people infested by the brainsymbiote notice the ops attention (especially if one of them *is* an op; a good option is to tell the infested player what's happening after the game, or discuss it over the phone or e-mail), they will do their best to first avoid notice. This can include doing a lot of work alone or spending time by themselves in their own quarters. The second is to try and arrange for the ops to either have "accidents" or to keep the ops busy with other things. A third option is, if one or more ops is female, is to seduce the op and, even if they use birth control, to infest the op with a symbiote. Their goal is simple -- escape to keep themselves and the symbiotes alive, and have them expand and breed. While this goal and what the symbiotes may do is noble, the ops can't let it happen because of what else could result from their talents.

By the time the fourth day rolls around, even the normal people in the base have to notice that those infested aren't acting "right" anymore. While they might put this down to possibly stress, nearing a snapping point from working in such confined quarters, the ops have to realize that something is going horribly wrong and that the infested have to either be contained or destroyed. The moment the ops start to plan a cleanup of the infested (especially if some of the ops are infested), the infested will strike back. The primary efforts will be to stage lethal "accidents" of all sorts (poisonings in the science area, getting stuck outside with minimal protective gear, and such). If that fails, direct violence becomes the option, made especially more lethal by the nature of the brainsymbiote itself. If one or more ops is a member of the infested, the team will have to face down their own, heavily armed and knowing all sorts of tricks and techniques to pull.

Assuming the players survive, the survivors among the base staff can be Cocktailed; a story about a burst of group paranoia would cover what exactly happened. While the Company would prefer that one of the infested is captured and brought home safe, their destruction would do just as well. The problem is that where the symbiotes were discovered is now covered in a huge landslide, making access to it impossible short of a nuclear strike -- and perhaps safeguarding its secrets for the ages.

Cast of Characters

Dr. Peter Hunt

A heavy-set, balding man in his middle 60's, utterly humorless.

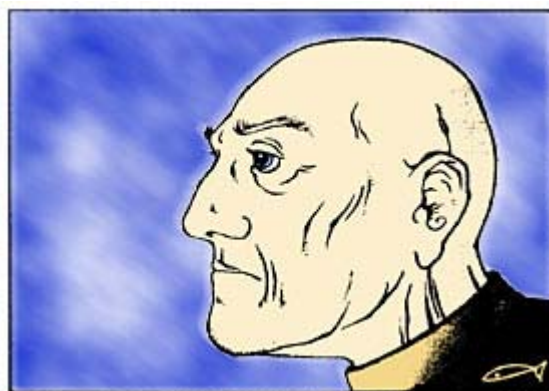
ST: 11 **DX:** 9 **IQ:** 18 **HT:** 9

Advantages: Academic Status 4 (Professor), Status 2, Absolute Timing, Strong Will +2, Ally Group (Grad Students, 100 point allies, Appear fairly often).

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (farsighted), Overweight, Bad Temper, No Sense of Humor, Rivalry (Toshiro Sanjibe).

Quirks: Hates jokes made about his name (especially Mission: Impossible ones), has a dislike for undergraduate students, thinks that everyone in his field is a bunch of idiots, doesn't like computers.

Skills: Survival (Antarctica) 11-, Biochemistry 21-, Genetics 21-, Zoology 21-, First Aid 12-, Research 19-, Computer Operation 11-.



To say that Peter Hunt is annoying but good is like saying the sea is a little salty. Utterly irritating to be around, able to annoy anyone without even trying, he is involved in several feuds with fellow biologists on the origins of life. Well known for the horn-rimmed glasses he wears, as well as his

hatred of teaching anyone below the graduate student level, the assignment to Antarctica was intended to get him out of the way. He saw it as a change to prove the idiots wrong.

Emily Orr

Nervously thin woman, mid 20's, brown hair and gray eyes, always either too cheerful or too morose.

ST: 8 **DX:** 12 **IQ:** 20 **HT:** 10

Advantages: Alertness, Intuition, Academic Rank 0 (Graduate Student), Disease Resistant.

Disadvantages: Manic-Depressive, Workaholic, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Always wear something red, can't concentrate without something to squeeze, loves gummy bears (has a huge stash of them in her quarters).

Skills: Survival (Antarctica)12-, Biochemistry 14-, Genetics 11-, Zoology 12-, Research 20-, Computer Operation 14-, Karate Art 12-, Karate 14-, Savoir-Faire (Dojo) 11-.

Martial Arts Maneuvers: Back Kick 12-, Elbow Strike 14-, Kicking 15-, Knee Strike 11-.

Emily Orr is one of the few graduate students to survive (and this is an accurate term) her advisor, Dr. Hunt. The years that she has worked with him have most certainly taken their toll on her body, leaving her depressed with bouts of massive energy (Dr. Hunt ignores her depression and only sees her enthusiasm). Her Karate training was at the insistence of her parents, so she could defend herself if she was attacked, and she kept it up because it got her away from Dr. Hunt.

Toshiro Sanjibe

An ethnic Japanese man, early '30s, very pale skin with black hair and gray eyes.

ST: 9 **DX:** 10 **IQ:** 20 **HT:** 11

Advantages: Intuitive Mathematician, Academic Rank 0 (Graduate Student), Attractive appearance, Absolute Timing, One level of Wealth, Gadgeteer (15-point).

Disadvantages: Shy (minor), Skinny, Lecherousness, Rivalry (Dr. Hunt).

Quirks: Tells bad jokes, hates to be around smokers, works his best to try and beat the computer at calculations.

Skills: Survival (Antarctica)11-, Biochemistry 19-, Genetics 19-, Computer Operations 19-, Electronics Operation (Genetic Analyzer) 19-, Research 19-, Engineer (Genetic Testing)21-.

Toshiro Sanjibe is there only because he holds three different patents on genetic testing equipment. Dr. Hunt and he have a rivalry, apparently due to the money he made in creating several pieces of technology. This dislike keeps them cool during work in the lab, and avoiding each other otherwise. He likes Emily, but is nervous about saying it or even thinking it.

Richard Tomalin

Punk man, of late '20s, dyed blonde hair, green eyes, wears leather clothing whenever possible.

ST: 11 **DX:** 15 **IQ:** 14 **HT:** 12

Advantages: Disease Resistant, one level Strong Will, one level Fearlessness, Single-Minded.

Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Major Delusion (you have to wear leather or the dimensional creatures from World 4 will take over your mind), Odious Personal Habit (always hums off-key), Vow (always wear leather), On The Edge.

Quirks: Never eats beans, plays with anything that has a cutting edge on it.

Skills: Sports (Baseball)11-, Knife 14-, Brawling 16-, Language (Spanish) 19-, Survival

(Antarctica)11-, Survival (City)14-, Computer Operation/TL7 14-. Zoology 19-, Research 18-, Genetics 18-, Drive Snowmobile 14-.

Richard Tomalin came from probably the worst part of Chicago, and somehow managed to survive the worst public schools to make it to the best in universities studying zoology. Eccentric, he always wears something made of leather near him (due to a bad reaction when younger to LSD) and keeps to himself when not working. With the exception of his dyed blonde hair (it's normally brown), the only real heritage of his punk days is several sharp knives he keeps nearby.

Peter Williams

A balding man in his late '40s, salt-and-pepper hair, with massive forearms covered in scars and tattoos.

ST: 16 **DX:** 11 **IQ:** 15 **HT:** 18

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Ambidexterity, High Pain Threshold, Immunity to Disease, Composed.

Disadvantages: Bully, Gluttony, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Perfectionist, Likes to harass the "new guys," doesn't admit to his sculptures.

Skills: Sculpting 12-, Breath Control 14-, Scuba 11-, Guns/TL7 14-, Judo 14-, Brawling 11-, Computer Operation 11-, Electronics 15-, Physics/TL7 16-, Mechanics (Snowmobiles) 14-, Mathematics 16-, Nuclear Physics TL7 17-, Gambling 11-. Survival (Antarctica)14-.

Formerly a nuclear reactor engineer on an American submarine, Peter Williams is here because he doesn't like the world. This, for him, is the best place for him to be. Any time he's in any other place, he usually tries to either drink people under the table or start a barroom brawl. He's the camp's power technician and main handy man, and is able to fix just about anything that breaks.

Nboru Musafi

A very dark-skinned man in his '30s, shaved head, with a very long and lanky body.

ST: 10 **DX:** 18 **IQ:** 14 **HT:** 14

Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Composed, Toughness, three levels of Strong Will, Intuition.

Disadvantages: Bad Temper, Impulsiveness, Paranoia, Secret (Major, Committed a Murder and doesn't want to admit to it).

Quirks: Loves old movies, acts very pro-African American.

Skills: A/V Operation 12-, Computer Operation 14-, Brawling 11-, Guns/TL7 14-, Cooking 12-, Electronics/TL7 14-, Mechanic (Cars and Engines) 14-, First Aid/TL7 14-, Diagnosis/TL7 14-, Physician/ TL7 15-, Surgery/TL7 11-, Survival (Antarctica)12-, Driving (Snowmobile) 12-.

"Nboru Musafi" is actually Kevin Coolidge from the Bronx -- but he won't ever admit to it because he killed someone when he was about 16 in a hold-up and has been running ever since. Whenever he's out of Antarctica, his trips are *very* quick, usually to get more video tapes and DVDs for the four-channel "TV" network the camp has, running nearly continuously movies and videos that he picks up on his trips.

Tom Kilroy

A short man in his early '30s, dark hair and blue eyes, very well built.

ST: 18 **DX:** 14 **IQ:** 14 **HT:** 15

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Luck (regular), two levels Strong Will **Disadvantages:** Code of Honor (Pirate's Code), Compulsive Behavior (can't help but read anything he can get his hands on). **Quirks:** Plays mumbly-peg with knives, will stop to read just about anything that he can read, will never let a problem lie down. **Skills:** Judo Art 14-, Judo 14-, Staff 11-, Computer Operation 11-, Guns/TL7 15-, Cooking 16-, Mechanics (Cars and Engines)/TL7 14-, First Aid 11-, Survival (Antarctica)11-, Driving (Snowmobile) 11-, Staff 11-. **Martial Arts Maneuvers:** Arm Lock 11-, Breakfall 14-, Finger Lock 14-, Ground Fighting (Judo) 15-, Push 11-.

A grumbly sort of man, Tom Kilroy is mostly someone whom just like to read and be left along more than anything else -- and Antarctica is the perfect place for that. Anyone trying to get into his quarters would find mountains of books laying all over the place, and just as many burned CD-Rs (he's recently purchased a computer at home with a scanner and an OCR -- he'll dismember a book and scan it in). The Aikido training was to provide him with a good exercise, yet it's made him popular with Emily as a sparring partner.

Brainsymbiote

ST: -- **DX:** 11 **IQ:** -- **HT:** 12/2

Move/Dodge: 2/6

PD/DR: 7/7#

Damage: 1d-2 cutting

Reach: C

Size: <1

Weight: About an ounce

Habitat: Just about anywhere

To anybody familiar with the brainsucker, this brainsymbiote looks an awful lot like a bigger version of the brainsucker, except that it, well, isn't.

The symbiote will enter the body at any possible point, working to anchor itself along the spine of the person, healing the entry wound instantly. After the first few hours, it can't be removed short of surgery or very powerful poisons (and this will kill the infested person). Once in, it starts to make changes in the person, readjusting their metabolism, fixing damage, and rebuilding the body into something more survivable.

Essentially, the symbiote will "buy off" 40 points of physical disadvantages and *some* mental disadvantages per day; as a rule of thumb, if it can be due to a chemical imbalance such as Manic-Depressive, it can be fixed. At the same time, the symbiote will start to develop in ways that are very much survival oriented. Every day, the infested person will spend ten points plus any extra from the "buy off" pool to develop the following sets of Racial Advantages:

- No Brain
- No Cutting/Impaling Bonus
- No Vitals
- Immunity To Poison
- Immunity To Disease
- Enhanced Time Sense
- Unaging
- Faz Sense
- Fast Regeneration
- Regrowth
- Secret Communications w/other Brainsymbiotes (only general concepts, undetectable).

However, with all of these advantages come a massive host of disadvantages, starting with Extremely Hazardous Duty (Involuntary) to spread the species, Enemy (The Company -- once they discover it), Secret (Brainsymbiote host), Chummy, Obsession (spread brainsymbiotes), Infectious Attack, and one level Vulnerability to Fire. The GM is allowed to add any he or she wants, with the exception of any psi-vulnerabilities or any crippling ones; the purpose of the symbiote is to protect the bearer, not to make them more vulnerable.

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