

PLAINLABEL: THE HIDDEN WAR

Perpetrated by Bob Portnell

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Men In Black is the property of several nice publishers and film-makers, the specifics of whom I couldn't hunt down past several over-blown websites. You know who you are, and you know I'm not one of you. The reader knows that, too.

You've seen the movies, you've played the other games. Now it's time for my twisted take on action-conspiracy.

As usual, I'm only approaching this from the perspective of character creation. You will need to seek out your own sources for campaign backgrounds and material.

Let's start with the *GURPS Black Ops* model: as the cover of the book states, "Find the Truth -- Then Kill It." In this campaign, the players are incredibly competent supremely trained persons who fight off aliens, monsters, vampires, psionic rogues and etc. while still keeping the existence of same (and of their organization) secret.

The Company is divided into five directorates: Combat, Intelligence, Science, Security and Technology.

(being a rip-off, er, conversion and tribute to *GURPS Black Ops*, with some Men In Black thrown in for good measure.)

1) Age Group

Active operatives should all be Young Adult or Adult. (Support personnel, usually retired from field work, can be from older categories.)

2) Stat Pool

Divide 30 points between the four Stats. You're still only human, tho' -- no less than 2, no more than 10 in any single Stat.

3) Abilities & Disabilities.

This VERY larger-than-life campaign requires a player be considered "balanced" when he has 4 more Abilities than Disabilities. Ditto major villains. Minor villains and important NPCs can balance at +2.

New Ability: Academy Trained (4)

The Company requires its operatives to attend (and survive) a five year training program of a rigor beyond imagining. When this is completed, the character will have access to the Omni Skills rules. The character also receives Observing at Pro level and Ear For Language ability (as if for a racial package.)

Being a member of the Company also means you have no official existence to the outside world: your original identity has been wiped. Bonuses: the Company provides you with everything you'd want, from food and shelter to big-ass guns and armor. Drawback: you have to keep the Company's Secrets and you get lots of interesting new Enemies. All part of the package. Congratulations.

5) Purchasing Skills

The standard "Superior Training" rules and the regular skill list won't quite cut it for the over-the-top protectors of *GURPS Black Ops*. So, some new skill rules: The Omni Skills.

Omni Skills are like General Skills but bigger -- an Omni skill incorporates many diverse tasks, while a General Skill labels a category of related skills. The Omni Skills reflect the five years of intense studying and practicing of *everything* at the Academy.

Omni Skills are purchased with Skill Purchase Points just like regular skills. Each Omni Skill can stand in for any relevantly related regular skill or sub-skill at no penalty.

All operatives must buy these Skills at the Familiar level or better:

Guns Omni (*it shoots, you can shoot it... or fix it*),

Hand-to-Hand Omni (based on C) (*combines Brawling, Wrestling, Martial Arts and Melee Weapons*),

Vehicles Omni (based on C) (*combines Vehicle Op skills for most ground vehicles and light aircraft*)

Athletics Omni (based on C) (*running, jumping, lifting, climbing, swimming, throwing, dodging...*),

Military Omni (based on I) (*Demolitions, Scuba, Parachuting, Combat Awareness, Military History, Military Engineering*),

General Omni (based on I) (*Comp Op, Convincing, Researching, First Aid, Social Grace, Streetwise, Teaching, etc.*),

and two Languages at Cap Level (*these are treated as though Personal Skills thanks to the Ear for Language ability*).

Each directorate has its own Omni skill requirements as well, at Capable or better:

COMBAT

The combat directorate trains to do direct battle with the opposition.

Hand-To-Hand Omni
Guns Omni
Military Omni

INTELL

The intelligence directorate collects information, usually by on-site investigation or interviews.

General Omni
Investigation Omni (based on I) (*Stealth, Disguise, Acting, Escape, Lockpicking, Pickpocket, Sleight of Hand*)
Social Science Omni (based on I) (*Psychology, Criminal Investigation, Alien Psychology, Parapsychology*)

SCIENCE OMNI SKILLS

The science directorate evaluates science data and conducts relevant research.

General Omni Skill
Two of: Life Science Omni, Physical Science Omni or Social Science Omni.

TECHNOLOGY OMNI SKILLS

The technology directorate evaluates and applies new technologies.

Computer Omni (based on I) (*Comp Op, Tech, Programming, Hacking, Repair, Mathematics, Logic*)
Mechanical Omni (based on I) (*Any vehicle repair, incl alien ships!*)
Electronics Omni (based on I) (most any circuit)

SECURITY OMNI SKILLS

The security directorate protects the Company and keeps an eye on all the other directorates.

General Omni
Hand-To-Hand Omni
Any other Omni Skill

You might get the idea that these skills are awfully broad, and you'd be right. The Black Ops character is *very* good at *many* things -- he needs to be. However, we've provided some clear distinctions so the character role is still clearly defined.

Normal skills can still be bought for their regular SPP cost. And yes, Normal skills still have value for defining a character with Omni Skills. How? Glad you asked...

6) Calculating Skill Levels

Skill Defaults for Omni Skills are 2x Stat less Adjustments. So, an Operative with Coord 9 wearing powered battle armor (C Mod -3) has a default Military Omni skill value of $2 \times 9 - 3 = 15$.

Skill values for Omni Skills extend from that formula in a manner analogous to Personal Skills: $2 \times \text{Stat} - \text{Adjusts} + \text{Skill Bonus}$. So the same person above would have Guns Omni (Cap)/19.

If one purchases a regular skill/sub-skill that covers the same territory as an Omni skill, the bonuses stack. So,

a character with Guns Omni-19 who also bought Missile Wpns: Handgun at Cap would add the Capable bonus to the Guns Omni rating and have Handgun-23.

Gamemaster Notes

The point of a campaign *like GURPS Black Ops* offers is to kick butt and takes names. To that end, the Omni Skill let characters do almost anything in their directorate routinely, and we recall that routine actions DON'T require rolls! Save the rolls (and the task modifiers) for the really important challenges or foes.

A word about foes. These come in three typical classes: Arch-villains (the real powers -- the aliens, the major monsters, etc.), the henchmen (flunkies, minor monsters, etc.) and the fodder. Also called "mooks," "scrubs," etc., the fodder (as in "cannon fodder") are the faceless masses, the grunts, the seemingly endless hordes of trivial minions to plow through. If these are rolled for at all, it should be a single roll for the mob. (In fact, creating them as *Budget Battlefield* units might be worthwhile.) But most of the time the fodder is there for the heroes to show off against. Let the players exhibit their imaginations with wild firearm tricks or martial arts stunts... and don't apply task modifiers. After all, the targets are only fodder.

Stats for monsters, psychic rogues, and aliens... along with weapons and other interesting gear... are left as an exercise for the creative gamemaster.

The "Men In Black" Campaign

An entirely different tone of campaign is found in the world of the "Men In Black" comic book, animated series and films. In this setting, the player characters are members of a secret organization which monitors the activity of extraterrestrials on Earth. The MiB Organization functions as a combination of diplomatic embassy, immigration center and police force charged with protecting the aliens from each other and from the native population.

While the Black Ops rely heavily on self-sufficiency, the MiB depend on the advantage of high technology obtained from the starfaring races they serve. Details of these are left for the gamemaster's discretion.

This campaign should be more grounded in reality but still larger-than-life; the tension of the campaign is in the contrast between the "real" world and the aliens hidden among us, not in the powers arrayed against humanity. Players should be allowed two Abilities more than Disabilities. The Omni Skills should not be used.

MiB is a two-point Ability, granting 6 extra SPP (and the expanded skill list available to the extraterrestrially aware), an identity wipe and access to the MiB technology. MiB looks for its own in the same way as The Company, so the characters will not need to worry about expenses or income. In other ways, the campaign uses the regular rules from **SIMPLY ROLEPLAYING!**.

Enjoy.

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