

# Ghost in the Machine

(author unknown)

The PCs receive a mysterious email video from beyond the grave asking them to find a hacker's killer. Walking in the steps of a dead man isn't the best way to stay safe, but it's the only way to catch the murderers and claim the prize.

GM's notes: This scenario was written for the Miami, Florida area but can be easily dropped into any locale of a campaign. Heavily used skills include Computer Use (Networks, Security), Police Science, and, at the end, firearm skills.

## The Assignment

On Monday, the PCs are on-call cell for the day, and relaxing in the Day Room when Raleigh Tykes emerges from his office and corrals them.

"I just got a bizarre email from someone who claims they want to hire the best investigative team we've got. Unfortunately, they're busy so I'll have to pawn it off on you limpicks and hope for the best. Assemble in your cell cubicle in 10 mikes while I check out a few details."

Once the cell is assembled in the cell cubicle, Tykes turns a laptop so they can all see the screen.

"I received this video file via email just before I grabbed your sorry asses. I've run a quick check on the source, but it's anonymous. The rest is self-explanatory."

He opens the video file and plays it for the team.

Have a player read Handout #1 (The Video) and give the players Handout #2 (The Attached File).

When the video is complete, Raleigh continues:

"I talked to one of the ambulance-chasers at the Internet Freedom Foundation that they verified that they are the trustees of the Mr. Kulakian's estate. They have instructions to pay us on completion of the assignment, so at least that part's kosher. This assignment is worth \$53,100, so I figure about a week before it becomes more expensive than it's worth, so that's your deadline. Have fun, ladies."

## The Real Scoop

Charles "Chuck" Kulakian wasn't kidding when he said he was a good hacker. At 27, he regularly freelanced employ for various business and underworld clients (Hacker PCs may have known CrimsonTide by reputation [Computer Science: Security @ +20]). Kulakian enjoyed a six-figure income, tax-free thanks to his constant laundering of his money through other people's accounts (he'd deposit the money and then withdraw it without touching the real money in the account before anyone

would notice). However, it was that laundering that caused his death.

While preparing to launder some money, he recorded the transactions of five accounts. One of those transactions (38-421694: \$50,000 transfer from 86-850963) was a payment between a Russian mafia organization and a group of FBI agents who moonlight as assassins. The Ruskies were tipped off by one of Kulakian's hacker associates, CleoMoMoney, who then decided that although Kulakian didn't know about the nature of the transaction, it would better if he were taken care of. The Russians contacted the FBI agents/assassins and told of them of their mutual problem.

On Friday, the FBI agents, in disguise and led by Special Agent in Charge Kyle Monahan, attacked Kulakian's home. They ransacked the house and destroyed as much evidence as possible, but quickly discovered a laptop computer was missing. They also found the blood trail out the back door but were forced to leave without following it when the local Police Department got too close for comfort. After leaving, they returned in official mode, claiming Kulakian was a suspect in several Internet crimes, and took over the investigation. Once in charge of the affair, Monahan planted evidence and made Kulakian a wanted criminal, considered armed and dangerous.

On Sunday morning, CleoMoMoney communicated with Kulakian via video. Unfortunately for Kulakian, a label on the television was visible and, after talking to him, CleoMoMoney enhanced the picture and it read 'Property of the Ambassador Arms Hotel.' She contacted her Russian mafia friends and sold out Kulakian a second time.

Sunday night, Monahan and company raided the hotel room where Kulakian was staying. Monahan killed Kulakian, planted a weapon on him, and declared the case closed.

Monahan believes the case is tied up and his extracurricular activities remain safe. He's wrong. Unbeknownst to Monahan, when the FBI agents burst through the door and killed Kulakian in cold blood, he was recording another message to go along with the one sent to BlackEagle/BlackEagle. The event is clearly captured on a video file now stored in the backup file on Kulakian's laptop (see Handout #4, Kulakian's Last Stand.) The laptop is now sitting on a shelf in the evidence room of the FBI's Miami office. The laptop monitor took a bullet, but the hard drive is all right and the file is safe in a backup folder.

## The Action

The action will take place in two phases; the PCs investigate Kulakian's death and the FBI/assassin team's response.

### Phase 1 – The investigation

The cell can begin with the assumption that Kulakian is dead. A quick Journalism (Research) roll will verify it (see Handout 3: The News Article) as well as give the PCs an idea of who the players involved are.

Physically, the cell can begin the investigation at one of two sites: Kulakian's home or the Ambassador Arms Hotel. In both locations, FBI agents involved in the murder are present, and PCs will most likely tip off the agents that they are up to something.

The House- Kulakian's home in Calle Ocho is a three-bedroom bungalow common to the area. It is in a pleasant residential neighbourhood popular with young professionals and small families.

The front of the house is surrounded with yellow police tape and an unmarked but obviously official car is parked out front. Parked in the driveway is a green Mazda Miata. Tire marks are visible in the driveway and they do not match the Miata.

Inside the house, the walls are strewn with bullet holes. The place is trashed – cushions ripped open, glass shattered, etc. The bedroom facing the street is obviously a home office and has been even more thoroughly trashed. The wooden desk is broken and the contents of the drawers have been distributed liberally around the room. Several computer systems are there, all in pieces.

In the kitchen, at the back of the house, a blood trail exiting out the back door is visible.

Inside the house, FBI Agent Tamara Skokovitch, one of Monahan's assassins, is searching for any physical evidence regarding the transfer. She will be friendly, but suspicious, and not offer any help. If the PCs identify themselves as associates of Kulakian in any way, she will attempt to find out as much as she can about what the PCs know and then contact Monahan. Skokovitch will attempt to follow the PCs when they leave.

A search of the house reveals:

Someone shot at the door frame that the attackers came through, weapon, probably with a .38 special. (The police have removed the bullets for examination.) Note that Kulakian did say that he shot back at his attackers.

The computers were completely destroyed but the hard drives are missing.

Kulakian's personal paper files have been searched.

A thorough search of the house, requiring a good success on either Perception or Police Science (Forensics) reveals:

A bullet hole missed by the police is found beneath a bed. The bullet is still in the hole and is intact. B/E's L&P Dept. can analyse the bullet.

A shell casing from a 9mm has fallen down a heating grate. If retrieved it has a partial fingerprint and a serial number that can be linked to the FBI.

The Ambassador Arms Hotel – This low-class semi-residential hotel, surrounded by abandoned and burned out shops, is located in one of Opa-Locka's poorer neighbourhoods. The manager, Lila Delgado, a moon-faced Columbian woman who speaks passable English, is at the front desk. She claims to know nothing, a skill she has practice at.

Finding Kulakian's room isn't hard. It's the one covered in yellow police tape. The exterior doorframe has been shattered and is bent toward the room (Monahan kicked it in). The PCs will recognize the room from the video, albeit this one has a few more bullet holes. The bed is unmade and the sheets and blankets are on the floor. Beneath the basement, Pizza and Chinese food cartons hide. Several bullet holes are behind the bed, along with a rust-brown stain of dried blood on the wall. In the bathroom, several dried bandages and surgical tape are in the garbage.

A search of the hotel room reveals:

Above the doorframe, a bullet hole has cracked the plaster. It is from a medium-calibre weapon, probably a .38 special.

Fragments of black plastic and circuitry are in the carpet on the floor.

A power cable for a laptop is still plugged into the wall (Monahan was in such a hurry to gather up incriminating evidence, he forgot it).

A thorough search of the house, requiring a good success on either Perception or Police Science (Forensics) reveals:

A shell casing from a 9mm has become enmeshed in the bed sheets. The serial number on the shell-casing matches the one found at Kulakian's house.

FBI agent, Cameron Marcus, is outside the hotel in his car and will observe the PCs as they enter the hotel if they go in through the front door. Once inside the hotel, he will observe the PCs, but won't intervene in their efforts. He will gather as much information as possible and then call Monahan.

Kulakian's Hacking – A review of Kulakian's hacking efforts will allow the PCs to quickly discount all suspicious items except two: Kulakian's hacking into the IMBOA and the GenNet port site Flesh Dreams.

Flesh Dreams is indeed connected to the mafia, specifically an Italian mob family in Brooklyn, NY. However, if a PC hacks into FD's system, it becomes obvious that their system security is not on alert. Had FD known about the hacking, it would be.

The IMBOA is quite a different story. The system is most definitely on alert, and the accounts that Kulakian accessed are being watched in particular. Of those, two are notable:

The \$9,794 deposit into account #95-710781 is immediately suspicious for anyone with Police Science. All financial transactions over \$10,000 trigger notification to government watchdogs on the lookout for drug money. Consequently, smart dealers have taken to making more, smaller deposits under the \$10,000 limit in multiple accounts. The account is under the name Miami Claims & Recovery, a known front for drug laundering. However, this is a red herring and not what got Kulakian killed.

The \$50,000 transfer into account #38-421694 from account #86-850963 may not trigger an automatic response from the PCs, but if they investigate further, they will find a nugget of truth. Account #86-850963 is listed as Simonev Import & Export Ltd., a small Russian company that moved trade goods from the Black Sea to the south-eastern U.S. It is also a known front for money laundering, albeit for the Russian mafia. Account #38-421694 is for a Greater Florida Ventures, a real estate company used as a front by Monahan to launder money. When the PCs check out GFV, they will find its CEO and President is Kyle Monahan, and Cameron Marcus and Tamara Skokovitch are listed as VPs.

If the PCs do a little journalism research, they will realize that the \$50,000 was transferred to GFV the day after a witness who was to be due to testify against a number of Russian mafia figures was killed while in FBI custody.

Internet contacts – These will be difficult for the PCs to track down, particularly CleoMoMoney, but it can be done. Interviewing them online will not be especially helpful, but may offer some clues. Reaching them in person would be much more productive.

Fiery\_Weasel@dag.org – This guy is a dud. Interviewing him reveals nothing other than a frustrated bureaucrat with cyberpunk-ish leanings.

CleoMoMoney@universalaccess.net – CleoMoMoney is actually Cleo Dawson, a mid-level manager at IMBOA. She knows about what happened to Kulakian (she sold him out, twice) but doesn't really care. She's been siphoning funds off of IMBOA and selling security secrets for years to support her growing heroin addiction. She will be uncooperative with the PCs but will fold if threatened.

CuriousJorge@directaccessnow.com – A 16-year old hacker living in government housing, Jorge Chavez is suspicious of the PCs but wants to bring his killers to justice. He's also a little scared that the same thing could happen to him. His older brother is leader of a small, local gang that would provide muscle for the operatives, for a price.

## **Phase 2 – The assassins react**

Once Monahan, Marcus, and Skokovitch realize that someone is investigating (from contact with the PCs at the house or the hotel), they immediately turn their attention to the PCs. How the PCs react will be determined by their knowledge, or at least suspicions, regarding the agents.

The FBI agents will make the initial move of this phase. Monahan and his crew will attempt to casually meet with the PCs while they are conducting the investigation. He will ask for assistance from the PCs, hoping to sniff out how much they know, suggesting that he could be of assistance in future investigations if they help him out now.

If the PCs go along with him, Monahan will do his best to throw the PCs off track, suggesting that Kulakian was involved with money laundering for Latin American drug traffickers. Given 24 hours, he can produce falsified evidence of bank transfers and dummy accounts in Kulakian's name.

If the PCs refuse to cooperate, he will threaten them with arrest "as part of a hacker conspiracy." He and his crew will harass the PCs as much as possible, going so far as to actually arrest them for whatever charges he can.

If at any point Monahan realizes that the PCs know about him and his scheme, or if they are getting close to knowing, he backs off immediately. He panics, gathers his forces and attacks the PCs as quickly as possible.

## **Phase 3 - Ambush**

Monahan is scared. He knows the PCs know about him, or are about to know, and so he decides to act first. He calls his Russian mafia buddies, gaining a handful of low-rent goons (use Low End Thugs from ME 2.0, or Mob Enforcers from the GMs Companion). He also has access to FBI weaponry and an armoured van (Armour Value 25).

The action takes place on a local road, preferably a one-way, two-lane road in a business or industrial section of town. Monahan will tail the PCs as they travel, hoping to catch them all together. His van will tail the PCs to an acceptable location and the chase cars will attempt to cut them off and box them in.

When the PCs are surrounded, Monahan will have the Russians open fire, letting them draw the initial hail of bullets from the PCs. Once he has determined the location of the PCs and their firepower, he will use the van as cover, firing on each PC from the half-open van door.

As a backup, Skokovich will set up away from the firelight with a rifle, picking off any PCs who show themselves.

Once the PCs have been dealt with, Monahan plans to plant drugs and cash on the PCs and use his influence

within the FBI to have the incident swept under the rug. However, if the PCs prevail and Monahan is captured or killed, the drugs and cash will be found on him.

## Resolution

Once the PCs have discovered who assassinated Kulakian and seen that they are brought to justice (arrested or dead), The Internet Freedom Foundation will release the funds promised. More importantly, the PCs will gain a reputation, or an enhanced reputation, as righteous avengers among hackers.

## Cast of Characters

Special Agent in Charge Kyle Monahan  
Agent Tamara Skokovitch  
Agent Cameron Marcus

## Handouts

### Handout #1—The Video

The video file opens showing a pale, thin young man in a black t-shirt with an anarchist symbol in red across the chest. His dark hair is long and unkempt and a bloody bandage is wrapped around his head. His brown eyes are sharp but bloodshot. Behind him is a poorly lit room with anonymous eggshell-white walls and a mass-produced print hanging in a cheap frame. An inexpensive television is mounted on the wall behind him.

“Hey. My name is Chuck, um, Charles Kulakian, and if you’re getting this, then I’m already dead. Kind of a bummer, huh?”

“The situation is this, I’m a hacker – I go by the name ‘CrimsonTide’– and I’ve gotten myself into something way over my head. On Friday of last week, I was sitting at home when all of the sudden I hear tires squealing in front of my house. I look out the window and there’s this big, blue and grey van that’s blocking my driveway. Three goons in black masks and carrying pistols and sub-machineguns spill out and stomp their way to the front door.

“I beat feet outta’ there. I grab my laptop out of the port and bail for the back door. Just as I’m almost out, this big-ass son of a bitch bashes down the door and starts spraying the house with bullets. I was in the kitchen so they didn’t see me, but the bullets went through the wall like it wasn’t even there. I caught one up side the head, and another down lower before I managed to crawl out of there.”

Kulakian stands and lifts his blood-encrusted t-shirt. Another bloody bandage is taped over his right side.

“It went right through, but I’m starting to piss blood, so I think it nicked something. The head thing was just a graze, but it hurts like a mother.

“Anyway, I got out of the neighbourhood and holed up in a crummy roach-motel. I’ve done some snooping around the ‘net, trying to find out who wants me whacked, and

I’ve narrowed it down to the last three jobs I pulled, all within the last week. The only people I’ve spoken to since the raid has been the hotel manager, a couple of ‘net buddies, a pizza delivery joint, and a Chinese food place. I’ve given as much info as I can about the jobs and the people I’ve talked to in a file attached to this message. I’m going to do some more digging and see what I can find.

“I’m going to put this message on a server I hacked into and it will automatically be delivered unless I send it a delaying command every twelve hours. Since those guys didn’t seem too interested in taking me alive, I figure you can assume that they found me and I’m dead. Like I said, bummer.

“Here’s where you come in. I’ve saved a fair chunk of change, about \$59,000. I’ve willed it to a friend in the Internet Freedom Foundation, with the stipulation that 90% of it go to you if you can find out who whacked me and see to it that justice is done. Get a hold of the IFF and they can verify your work and cut you a check.

“Thanks for helping me out, even if it is a little late. Bye.”

The video file ends.

### Handout #2—Attached File

Attached to the video file is a text file containing the following information:

I live at 578 S. Vista View Dr. in Calle Ocho.

I’m staying at the Ambassador Arms Hotel in Opa-Locka.

The only person I talked to here is the manager, Mrs. Delgado. I paid with cash.

I’ve had food delivered by Rita’s Pizza (555-555-3065) and China Paradise Café (555-555-1269). I’ve paid with cash and just slipped it under the door, so nobody saw me.

On Monday, I hacked into the Space Lab at Utah State University and liberated the specs on a bandwidth-expanding device that may go up in an Iridium satellite sometime in 2002.

On Thursday, I accessed the International Merchant Bank of Antigua and recorded account transfer data for later use. I launder money I earn through these accounts, but I didn’t touch any of them. I recorded five accounts:

63-757861: \$2,300,500 deposit  
16-875470: \$24,450 withdrawal  
19-616472: \$81,079,936 transfer from 25-00903  
95-710781: \$9,794 deposit  
38-421694: \$50,000 transfer from 86-850963

On Friday, I liberated and distributed credit card data from a porno Web site, Flesh Dreams. I think FD’s

corporate HQ is in Miami, but I'm not sure. I think FD has a mafia connection.

I've had email and video correspondence with the following people:

Fiery\_Weasel@dag.org - He's a government wage-slave in the Dept. of Agriculture and a good hacker. He turned me on to the FD site.

CleoMoMoney@universalaccess.net - I don't know much about her, but she seems to be really wired into the IMBOA. She sold me a couple of passwords for IMBOA.

CuriousJorge@directaccessnow.com - I've actually met this guy. He lives in Opa-Locka with his family. He's about sixteen and is a lightweight hacker with ambition. He pointed out the Ambassador Arms as a safe house and said his friends in the "import/export pharmacology business" use it sometimes.

### **Handout #3—The News Article**

On Sunday evening, a joint FBI and Miami-Dade County task force raided the Ambassador Arms Hotel in Opa-Locka, killing one suspect. The task force, under direction of FBI Special Agent in Charge Kyle Monahan, assaulted the room where Charles Kulakian, a suspect in an earlier gunfight, was believed to be staying. According to Monahan, Kulakian fired on the agents as they entered the room and the agents returned fire. Kulakian was taken to St. Jude Memorial Hospital and pronounced dead. No police or FBI agents were injured.

Kulakian was a suspect in a gunfight that occurred on Friday at his residence in Calle Ocho and had been on the FBI watch list as a suspected cyber terrorist.

No further details are available at this time.

### **Handout #4—Kulakian's Last Stand**

The video file begins. Kulakian is sitting on the same bed as before although his colour is healthier.

"This is an update for BlackEagle/BlackEagle. After doing some work I've been able to narrow the list of suspects down a little. I guess when I was surfing the files at the IMBOA, I ran across some information that somebody didn't like. I've still got some digging to do but..."

A loud THUMP startles Kulakian. He jumps backward onto the bed. Behind him, the door cracks and then bursts open. A man in grey slacks and a tactical vest leaps into the room. He is holding a S&W .40.

Kulakian, outside the camera, screams "No! Don't shoot!"

The man in the tactical vest fires seven rounds. On the fourth round, the video image is disrupted, but the audio continues.

After a moment of silence, a voice asks, "He dead?"

Another voice replies. "Oh, yeah. He's taken care of. Here, gimme the drop piece."

Moments later a single, smaller shot is heard.

The second voice says, "Okay. Lets get the local yokels in here. Grab that computer. It might have something we need to take care of on it."

Another ten seconds of muffled bumps and thumps and then the file ends.