



Ginger Wig & Strolling Man

# Operation Black Antler by Hydrocracker and Blast Theory at Brighton Festival

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What is it like to try and infiltrate a far-right group in the name of public security? Police forces up and down the country have been doing it for years. The far-right has always been present in the UK reinventing itself over the years. 'Operation Black Antler' was a chance for us to experience exactly what it feels like to become a 'shallow swimmer' in the murky world of surveillance, in this brilliant immersive piece of theatre.

Meeting on London Road in Brighton we were texted by our 'contact' and directed to a grotty flat, to receive tea and a briefing of the group we were to be infiltrating and how exactly we were to go about this. Paired with Irish couple, Declan and Lasy, residents of Brighton for over 10 years, we felt confident that we were going to give this a good go. We were to be 'COMM's' and would receive communication from the HQ throughout the mission.

Our target was Mickey, a former soldier. It was our job to find out why he left the military. The location was a pub round the corner where a local family were fundraising to get their daughter Rachel into the army. Declan and Lasy knew the pub, so that was covered, but we couldn't enter as ourselves. Instead we had to come up with full background, different identities, and most importantly a reason to try and get into this party. The Ginger Wig was now godson to the Murphy's...

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We walked to the pub and after smooth talking the bouncer we were in. We knew Mickey liked football and therefore approached the only guy in the pub in a football shirt. He was not Mickey. Then we encountered Rachel and found out that Mickey knew her dad. We tried to find her dad – "stripy shirt" – but he was nowhere to be found. And then we alighted on a quiet looking chap in a cap. This was Mickey. We then spent the next thirty minutes trying to first get close to him before eventually engaging him in conversation. With three of us undercover and all trying to find out the same thing, Mickey skilfully avoided our probing whilst remaining friendly as his views slowly started to seep out. Naturally we played along with them pretending to be the aggressive far right yooof we had embodied. Declan's views on Brexit also helped to win Mickey round.

We thought we had lost him, but some last minute questioning finally got the facts out. We had achieved our objective. But now he wanted to introduce us to someone new. We couldn't say no or our cover would be blown. And so we were led into the back of the pub. Here we really started to feel the heat. Luckily this came across as a steely determination to act and keep those pesky foreigners out of the UK. We almost cracked, and certainly a situation with our mobile that would of blown out entire cover was fortuitously avoided thanks to Mickey's bad eyesight and eventually the three of us got out with more than enough information on the group.

We were met by another contact, although it was not who we thought we would be meeting, so as a group we interrogated him. Once satisfied he was to be trusted, we and the other two teams gave all the information we had on this far right group. But now the main question. From everything we had heard, should we now send a deep swimmer in to infiltrate this group. Were they a threat? Did it require such drastic action? Collectively we decided no, although I can't pretend I felt confident, that the following weekends activities would remain peaceful. None the less, we left the experience chatting animatedly with Declan and Lasy about our night of deep immersion.

This was a truly remarkable piece of theatre. There was a feeling of tension and excitement throughout this piece, generated by the very real world that we entered. Every element of this piece was meticulously planned, from the people briefing us, to the world we entered in the Rose Hill Tavern to the performance of the characters we met within. Without doubt this was the best 'theatre game' we have ever had the chance to be part of.

Highlight of the piece – The whole thing from start to finish was a masterpiece – more of this please!