

THE FRINGE

sanity is a one trick pony



written
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INTRODUCTION

Tired of playing well-adjusted, good-natured heroes who never lose their cool? Would you rather throw off the shackles of sanity and give reality the finger? I can't blame you. Lunatics are more fun than heroes.

This book is written to support a very specific kind of game, one where reality-bending, paranoid schizophrenics fight the good fight against whatever baddies they *think* are lurking in the shadows. No two players should see the game world in exactly the same way. One might see their enemies as bloodsucking vampires, while another sees Men In Black, and yet another sees the demonic minions of Satan. Their disagreements should be a source of tension in the game: Are any of them seeing the world as it truly is? What if they really *are* insane and the people they're fighting are just innocent, normal human beings?

Though this premise can certainly be played for laughs, making light of a debilitating psychological disorder is missing the point. Real paranoid schizophrenics can't really fend for themselves (it's part of the diagnostic criteria). The Lunatics of the Fringe are, of necessity, only mild cases. Their delusions provide an excuse to stuff aliens, magic, and bizarre conspiracies into the modern world while keeping Joe Average citizen clueless. They see impossible things and possess incredible abilities. Their disorganized speech patterns make it difficult to recruit the sane to their cause, so they must fight

alone. They are perfect player-characters.

The first half of this book is devoted to helping you define your characters' delusions. The advice is completely rules-free and thus equally applicable to any game system. "Delusions of Persecution" is a crash course in conspiracy theories, from the New World Order to the End Times. "Delusions of Grandeur" shows you how to draw various kewl powerz out of those delusions, whether your veins carry alien nanotech or the blood of Christ. In "Delusions of Reference," we'll explore the sources of Lunatics' special knowledge and provide GMs with handy excuses for gratuitous clue-dropping.

After that, two GMs Only sections provide the plot seeds and mechanics you need to run games on the Fringe. "Delusions of Control" details a half dozen paranormal phenomena, from HAARP to the Godmachine, and provides a variety of explanations for each. "Method & Madness" is the rules section; it adapts the Wushu system for on-the-fly character creation and reality-bending magic. The book rounds out with a few "Insane Examples of Play" that simultaneously demonstrate the game mechanics and illustrate the deranged style you can only find on The Fringe.

Finally, you can check the Fringe website for even more villains and plot hooks drawn from the real world...

<http://www.Bayn.org/fringe>

DELUSIONS OF PERSECUTION

Lunatics are defined by their delusions. These "insane" beliefs influence everything from where they live to what toothpaste they buy to how they fold their tinfoil hats. Such behavior may seem chaotic and irrational from outside, but they always make sense to the lunatic at the time. No one thinks of themselves as crazy. They just know things other people don't.

Players should strive to build coherent world views for their characters, even if they are based on a few faulty assumptions or Herculean leaps of logic. The examples below cover most of the common ground, but great delusions can come from mixing them together: vampires hunting the blood of Christ, Deep Ones in black helicopters, aliens immanentizing the eschaton... there's no such thing as *too* strange!

NEW WORLD ORDER

Free markets, democracy, the fourth estate... that's all lies, man. They want you to think the modern world is the way it is because of our choices as voters, consumers, and rational people, but that's all bullshit. Did you know that 90% of the world's wealth is controlled by 10% of its population? If money is power, and we all know it is, then that's pretty fuckin' far from a democratic distribution!

Who are these 10%, you ask? Mostly, they're celebrities, professional athletes, and ignorant bastards who inherited a

fortune. But among that 10%, the top 1% eclipses them all. These are people who never appear on camera, never run for office. They don't have to. They already control the world from behind the scenes, jerking the rest of us around on puppet strings of gold and green.

They got their start in the 1770's, as a secret society called the Ancient Illuminated Seers of Bavaria. These "Illuminati" drafted plans to topple the European monarchies one by one and install secular governments in their place, governments under their covert control. Though outlawed in 1785, the Illuminati had already infiltrated so many other organizations (the Freemasons, the Rosicrucians, the American revolutionaries) that exterminating them would have been impossible. Since then, the vast majority of their plans have come to fruition, including the French Revolution, WWI, and the rise of the United Nations!

In the modern day, the Illuminati work through a dizzying array of front organizations and semi-secret cabals including the CIA, Trilateral Commission, Council for Foreign Relations, Royal Institute of Internal Affairs, and the World Trade Organization. The U.N., however, is the core of their "New World Order:" the Illuminati's plan to place the entire planet under the authority of a single, central government. Big Brother, Echelon, the cashless society, the human genome project... they're all parts of a vast, fascist conspiracy to control the world!

Not only are they in control of the government, they also have access to technology far more advanced than anything the average person will ever see. They have microchips for

controlling your thoughts, black helicopters that fly without making a sound, nanites and bio-weapons that can target specific individuals by their DNA. Their agents are men and women with no official existence who nevertheless have total authority over police and other officials. Their eyes and ears are everywhere, built into the telecommunication systems that bring you the internet and satellite T.V. Anyone who threatens them instantly becomes a fugitive; their assets are frozen, fake criminal records are created, and their families are told they've gone insane...

THE END TIMES

Forget Y2K! The quiet passing of New Years 2000 did nothing to stop the millennial apocalypse! The Faithful know that God and Satan are still amassing their armies and marching steadily towards Armageddon. The real question is: Who's side are you on?

The requisite floods and earthquakes have already come to pass. An Arab-Israeli peace accord may be the next step, and many Apocalyptic Christians work to support the peace process for this reason alone. The depletion of the environment is also foretold in Revelations, and many of those same Christians oppose conservationists because of it. Other prophesied events include the rise of the Anti-Christ and a One World Government, of which he may be the leader. At some point in all this, God will pluck His faithful from the Earth in an event called The Rapture. Finally, the armies of God and Satan shall meet at Armageddon.

Afterward, God shall restore the forests, renew the oceans, and otherwise return the Earth to pristine condition. Every person who has ever lived will stand before God and be judged; He will either grant them everlasting life or cast them into the lake of fire. Jesus shall then rule the Earth in peace for a thousand years.

We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. There's still a whole heap of prophesies that need fulfillin' in the mean time! Most will work themselves out, the Faithful just have to watch for the signs, but others will need a little help. Those who are called to service will know what to do and when. The agents of Satan may try to thwart them, but God will show His Chosen the path. They need only the courage and conviction to follow it... no matter how crazy it may seem.

ALIENS!

With the sheer number of stars and planets in the great vastness of the universe, it seems impossible that life would develop nowhere but on Earth. It seems far more likely that the universe is teeming with life, at least some of it technologically advanced. Given a few billion years, how much could such a species accomplish? Gravity manipulation? Interstellar travel? Time travel?

Millions of people claim to have been abducted and experimented on by aliens capable of exactly these feats and many more. They appear in flying saucers, triangular ships, and gigantic metal cylinders. No one knows their ultimate intentions

for our species, but speculation has ranged from a Noah's Ark plan to preserve our dying ecosphere to malign schemes to exterminate humans and colonize the planet.

The famous "Greys" are short with large heads and gracile bodies, tiny mouths and huge black eyes. They are telepathic and have bred a race of hybrids who look human but share their telepathic gifts. (These may be the infamous Men In Black.) They are also in league with various world governments, selling them advanced technology in return for helping to cover up their activities.

The "Reptiloids" are definitely on the hostile end of the spectrum; they've infiltrated world governments (the President of the United States and his family are Reptiloids in disguise) and taken over at least one underground military base. They claim to have originated on Earth millennia ago and may intend to reclaim it from humanity.

"Ultraterrestrials" are entities that originate not in other star systems, but in other dimensions or future times. They seem to have a vested interest in our welfare and generally oppose the activities of the extraterrestrials. They make contact with humans only when they need to pass along information vital to thwarting some nefarious alien plot. Those they choose to contact have the weight of the world on their shoulders, and no one will ever call them heroes... just lunatics.

VAMPIRES!

Humans like to think they're at the top of the food chain, a real apex predator. Nothing could be further from the truth. Vampires prowl the night, feeding on everything from blood to fear to sin. Though many kill with claw and fang, most employ more subtle means. They can twist our emotions, manipulate our perceptions, and edit our memories. They can assume other forms, even bestial ones, and vanish right in front of you. They are as far beyond us as we are beyond cattle.

The comparison doesn't end there. For centuries, vampires have worked to domesticate us. They've encouraged urbanization, gun control, and pacifism. They own blood banks, hospitals, funeral homes, and asylums. Their human servants, witless and otherwise, have infiltrated every layer of society from Wall Street to law enforcement to organized crime. They control the men who control the world.

However, no predator stays at the top forever. Every year, more and more humans wake up to the vampire menace, develop a resistance to their powers. They either take up the fight or face extermination. The trick is, you never know what will work against any given vamp. Some fear sunlight and stakes, others not so much. You can turn some away with crosses and holy water, others just laugh their asses off. Some don't give off body heat, others appear perfectly human. It's a crap shoot that doesn't help vamp-hunters look any *less* insane!

THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

According to certain heretical texts, Jesus Christ did not die on the cross. Instead, he faked his death and fled the holy land. In a remote region of the Roman Empire, now called France, he wed Mary Magdalene and fathered at least one child. When he died of old age, he was laid to rest in a hidden tomb.

His descendants, the Merovingians, are protected by a secret society called the Priory of Zion, whose agents have included the Knights Templar and the Cathar heretics. Both groups, not coincidentally, were persecuted to extinction by the Roman Catholic Church. The Papacy sees the divine bloodline as a rival church with a more direct and legitimate claim to Christ's legacy than theirs. The Pope's agents hunt them still.

The hearts and minds of millions of Christians aren't the only things at stake. The Priory of Zion may or may not have inherited a vast treasure stolen from the holy land during the Crusades. There is evidence that this treasure is buried in the French Pyrennes, somewhere under the tiny village of Rennes-le-Chateau. This may also be Jesus Christ's final resting place. Thousands of treasure-seekers have failed to turn up so much as a gilded cross, but that may have more to do with the Priory's intervention than any lack of treasure.

As for the Merovingians themselves, no one knows what they're up to these days. Perhaps guarding their treasure and staying off the Church's radar keep them plenty busy. Or maybe they're hiding in plain sight, performing bogus-looking miracles for credulous Christians at old fashioned revivals. Some believe

they're taking an active hand in the End Times, guiding humanity towards salvation, but that's just plain crazy.

THE STARS ARE RIGHT

H.P. Lovecraft was a visionary horror writer and an avowed atheist. His works, known as The Cthulhu Mythos, describe a host of immensely powerful, incomprehensibly alien entities called the Great Old Ones. Many are worshipped as gods by isolated cults in remote corners of the globe. These misguided fanatics await a day when "the stars are right" for their monstrous deities to awaken and ravage this world.

The remarkable detail and consistency of these stories have made some people wonder if Lovecraft didn't have *real* occult knowledge that formed the core of his writing. Maybe pretending it was all fiction was the only way he could retain his sanity. Or maybe he was trying to fly under the radar of those who want their loathsome gods to remain unknown. Maybe, just maybe, Lovecraft was trying to warn us.

If eldritch horrors do lurk in the unknowable vastness of space, and slumber in dark tombs deep beneath the sea, humanity's only hope is to strike while the iron is hot! Those who have heard Lovecraft's warnings must hunt down and destroy the cults who seek to call alien gods down on a defenseless humanity. They must venture into the lairs of sleeping horrors and ensure that they never awaken. They must confront truths so terrible that they would drive lesser men insane...

DELUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

Unlike your garden variety paranoid schizophrenic, Lunatics on the Fringe can bend reality to their will... or at least they think they can. Few believe their kewl powerz are truly supernatural, it's just that they understand how the world *really* works. Other people could do the same things, if they knew what the Lunatic knows.

Of course, some do think they are different from regular folks, either born different or made different by aliens, the government, microwave radiation, or whatever the hell. Even so, these Lunatics don't think they're *defying* reality. They just hold a special place in it. Thus, players should strive to keep their kewl powerz grounded in their characters' world views.

PHREAKS & HACKERS

Big Brother isn't some government think tank on Capitol Hill, or a bunch of shifty-eyed military men in an underground bunker. No, Big Brother is all around you. He's in your house, in your water, in your TV and your newspaper. He's in your computer, your credit cards, your cash. He's even in your brain, carried there by mind control chips and MK-ULTRA drugs and subliminal messages.

Most of us who break free just get lucky: our mind control chips malfunction or we develop a natural immunity to the drugs. To stay free, there are certain skills you must develop.

First, you gotta learn how to stay off the Grid. If you don't have the cyberskills to create false identities and steal credit card numbers, then that means no civilization for you. (Better move out to the sticks with the friggin' militias!) Get yourself a copy of the Anarchist's Cookbook and memorize it. Find a phone phreaker and learn how to hack the telecom system, 'cuz sometimes one phone call is all you get!

Free long distance and computer fraud is only the beginning. To survive in Big Brother's world, you're gonna need the big guns. Learn how to make phones produce that CIA tone that melts people's brains. Find the back doors into every city's civil infrastructure, from power & water to traffic lights and cell phone surveillance. Learn how to hack into other people's brain chips and exploit the post-hypnotic suggestions buried in their minds. When you know enough secrets, you can play the system like a fine violin!

ASCENDED MASTERS

We are the Great White Brotherhood, men and women who have achieved enlightenment and returned from Nirvana to guide humanity towards salvation. Most of us reside in the Akasha, a kind of astral light that few mortals can perceive. Those with open eyes become our acolytes and receive instruction in everything from ritual magic to the art of war. We show them humanity's ultimate potential and give them glimpses of fates best avoided. We help them to help themselves.

We can inhabit mortal bodies by one of three methods. The first is to share a spirit medium's body, switching control back and forth as the mortal desires. The second method is to possess a body at the moment of death, replacing the departed spirit for as long as we wish. Finally, if we enter a body in the womb, our spirits become so entwined with the native soul that it is like being born again. As the mortal ages, it uncovers past life memories and enlightened wisdom far beyond its years. By this method, the Ascended Master only returns to the Akasha upon the mortal's death or ascension.

In whatever form, our enlightenment gives us certain advantages. Some of us are Zen or Taoist masters who still retain their phenomenal kung-fu skills. A few are alchemists whose study of the material elements resulted in divine revelations. Most of us, however, are monks or holy men whose only "power" is always knowing where to step and what to say. We can move mountains by lifting a finger. However, we must take care not to overuse our gifts, lest humanity become dependent upon our intervention. People can be lead to enlightenment, but they cannot be carried there.

ALIEN ABDUCTEES

What? Did you think they came all this way just for the anal probes? Far from it. They don't just study us, they improve us. They alter our genes, reprogram our brains, pump us full of nanites, and do god only knows what else! I, personally, can see outside the visible spectrum, mostly infrared and

microwaves. If I concentrate, I eavesdrop on people's cellular phone calls. (It doesn't work all the time. I'm only human.)

Anyway, I know another guy who they made invulnerable to germs. He used to be as sickly as they come: asthma, hemophilia, sensitive skin, you name it. After his fifth abduction, he noticed he didn't need his inhaler anymore. After the seventh, his skin cleared up. He went to the doctor and they said his blood platelets had normalized! They didn't know what to tell him. (What do doctors know, eh?) Who knows how resilient they've made him? I'd bet money he could survive a bullet to the chest, but he's not crazy enough to try.

Some of us don't just take what the aliens feel like giving us. We use hypnosis and stuff to unlock memories of our abductions and try to work out some of the alien technology we've seen. I've got a sleep ray at home that's just about ready for field tests. I know this one chick who can turn small objects invisible. She thinks it's some kind of self-propagating force field, but she drew the blueprints under hypnosis, so she doesn't really understand how it works. "Mainstream" scientists will never talk to us, of course, but it's their loss!

Besides, we've got much more important work to do. The Reptiloids are getting ready to colonize this dust ball we call a planet and conventional weapons aren't gonna make them bat an eyelid! (If they have eyelids. I'll have to check on that.) A bunch of us are working on a bio-weapon that will target their alien DNA, leaving local flora and fauna untouched. Care to make a donation?

GOD'S CHOSEN

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Truer words were never spoken. The End Times are upon us and God calls His Chosen to service. Should we not answer that call, Satan's armies will march across the globe and the world will be bathed in eternal Hellfire!

Our enemies are many, but the Devil's Mark is always upon them. One must only have eyes with which to see. Demons lurk in the shadows, possessing the weak and tempting men to sin. Vampires defy God and Nature by extending their unives with the blood of the innocent. Satanic cults infiltrate our government, our churches, our neighborhoods, even our schools. They subvert our children and spit in the face of God.

The Lord provideth for our war against The Adversary. He sends us allies when we need help, food when we are hungry, and shelter when we must rest. Ask, and ye shall receive. By invoking His name and wielding His symbols (crosses, holy water, bibles, etc.), we can turn away vampires, cast out demons, and redeem sinners. Some of us practice Enochian, the secret language of the angels, and call upon them for guidance, protection, and aid in times of trouble. The truly devout can perform such miracles as flight, prophesy, invisibility, and speaking in tongues.

These are unmistakable signs of His divine favor, proof that He forgives us for the sins we must commit in His service. We keep His commandments as best we can, but make no

mistake... this is a war. The armies of darkness will stop at nothing to escape the fate prophesied for them in Revelations. If we are to defeat them at Armageddon, we must fight to the brink of our own damnation!

TRUE PATRIOTS

Any day now, the U.N. black helicopters are gonna swarm over our borders like locusts. FEMA will declare a state of martial law, probably using some terrorist attack or epidemic as an excuse, and then we'll all be serfs of the New World Order. Our Illuminati masters will take our guns, declare our cash invalid, and stick radio ID chips in our necks. That's the future, whether you want to face it or not.

Those of us who aren't afraid have been building fortresses and stockpiling weapons for years. Our compounds are totally self-sufficient. We grow our own food, make our own medicine, even generate our own electricity (what little we need). Their spy satellites can't see through the forest canopy, and we have plenty of underground facilities even if they could! We've got low-tech means of communication already in place, so we'll be able to coordinate our guerilla attacks for maximum effect.

Standard training includes firearms, hand-to-hand combat, stealth, sabotage, and wilderness survival. We learn from the best: Navy SEALs, Green Berets, Israeli spies, and CIA assassins. Some of us have even trained with Ghurkas and ninjas! The Illuminati's gonna have its hands full when it gets to America, that's for damn sure! We're ready for anything!

MEROVINGIANS

Christ did not cheat death, as his misguided apostles claimed, but he was the son of God. Divinity flowed through his veins and now it flows through ours. Hunted by the Pope and his false prophets, we have kept to the shadows. Those who tried to protect us always suffered, so now we protect ourselves. Our followers are the Priory of Zion. We are the Merovingians.

Even after all these centuries, Christ's blood is a potent elixir. It makes us far stronger and faster than the offspring of Adam and Eve. Our divine spark also allows us to perform many miracles, from parlor tricks like stigmata and speaking in tongues to such feats as healing the sick and raising the dead. We have authority over demons and their ilk; we can cast them out with but a word. Even those who merely worship Satan shrink at our approach.

Yet, the Papacy does not permit us to use our gifts to fullest extent, for we must remain hidden. To stay alive, we must present ourselves as mere mortals or hokey miracle men. Some of us operate out of traveling revivals, healing those who need it the most and letting the rest just believe they've been healed. Others work as soldiers or law officers, relying on our physical gifts to defeat the Fallen. We all do what we can, for the End is Nigh.

XENOMANCERS

Lovecraft didn't just warn us about the Great Old Ones, he gave us the weapons to fight back. Those of us who study non-Euclidean geometry, soul travel, and the lore of the Outer Gods call ourselves Xenomancers, for our goal is complete mastery of the otherworldly threat. We have the Elder Sign, sure protection against most eldritch entities. We can use curved surfaces to confound the Hounds of Tindalos. We know the names, powers, and weaknesses of every vile creature in the Mythos.

But that's not all. I once knew a guy who was abducted by the Great Race of Yith. He spent years in their vast libraries, researching everything from stellar cartography to shoggoth physiology. Even after they returned him to his body and blocked his memories, he retained invaluable bits of knowledge. I've even heard of xenomancers with alien ancestry, like the rebel Deep One hybrids of New England. After a certain age, they can breath underwater!

We prepare for the day when the gates open, bringing the Outer Gods back to Earth. We hunt down the cultists and servitors of the Great Old Ones. We wait for R'lyeh to rise and Cthulhu to summon his minions, so we may keep him locked in his tomb. When the stars are right, we'll be ready.

DELUSIONS OF REFERENCE

So, Lunatics know things that others don't know, but *how* do they come by their secret knowledge? Paranoid schizophrenics find personal meaning in everything, and I mean *everything*. Depending on the nature of their delusions, this could mean codes hidden in the newspaper, subliminal messages on TV, traditional omens and prophecies, or alien transmissions picked up on their fillings. There couldn't be more convenient excuses for gratuitous GM clue-dropping, so drop away!

VISIONS & PROPHECIES

Visions are second only to mission briefs when it comes to dragging your players into a plot. The standard method is to give them a glimpse of some future calamity that only *they* can prevent. If you need to be even more explicit, the vision can feature a messenger (angel, alien, Elvis, whatever) who clearly tells the Lunatic where to go and what to do.

If you don't mind putting in a little more effort, you can use real world prophecies to build your plots. Nostradamus and the bible are the usual favorites, but you should also consider checking out the ramblings of Edgar Cayce, the Norse myth of Ragnarok, or one of the apocalypse cults described below. Then, the only question is whether your players want to avert the future that's been foretold, or make sure it comes to pass!

SIGNS & OMENS

Lunatics who are partial to visions and prophecies should be particularly interested in signs. They may believe that their unholy enemies receive the Devil's Mark, a scar or sulfurous odor or hairy mole that clearly identifies them as Satan's property. They may see floods and earthquakes as signs of prophesy. The Virgin Mary herself seems willing to appear in anything from dirty windows to slices of cheese! When you look hard enough, the signs are all around you.

A great way to drive home that paranoid feeling that "everything's connected" is to create a set of symbols or motifs that represent various characters, plots, and other elements of your game. Whenever one is about to occur, have its symbol cross the Lunatics' path. They can even interact with each other in ways that foreshadow upcoming events. For instance, you could associate the player-characters with tiny prey animals like rats or flies, and associate one of their enemies with something that eats them, like a snake. Right before a big confrontation, have the Omen-sensitive Lunatic witness a rat get eaten by a snake. Simple, yet effective.

TELEPATHY

It's quite common for schizophrenics to believe that other people can read their thoughts, but that's not particularly useful for clue-dropping. Allowing the player to read other people's thoughts is much more productive. Maybe it only works on

certain kinds of people, or maybe they have an alien hive mind tapped, or maybe it's all in their heads, but you should never allow a true telepath in your game. Give them just enough "power" to justify the occasional clue. After all, conspiracy games are all about secrets and it's hard to keep those from a true telepath!

You can also turn this trick around and make the Lunatic immune to someone else's telepathic powers. This way, their special knowledge just comes from seeing and hearing the things that get erased from everyone else's memories. Aliens show up and make off with some evidence, then wipe everyone's memory? The player knows what they took and which way they went! Demons hiding behind illusions of humanity? The player can see them for what they really are! Of course, if their enemies ever find out about this immunity, the Lunatic's days will be numbered.

ESPIONAGE

A Lunatic's inside information doesn't *have* to come by supernatural means. To the paranoid, the world is already crawling with spies and littered with covert communications. To someone who knows their codes, anything from the first words in each section of the newspaper to the sequence of traffic lights on a particular street can hold secret meaning. Even if these messages aren't mean for the Lunatic specifically, they still keep her in the loop.

For the personal touch, dispense with the serious

cryptography and have the Lunatic's mysterious benefactor (a CIA handler, a Deep Throat-style informant, the leader of their rebel cell) contact them directly via phone, post, or email. Of course, any evidence of such communication should erase itself immediately after the message is received. It's just common sense.

DIVINATION

Sometimes, the old ways are still the best ways. Lunatics may believe they can discern information about the past, present, and future by any number of arcane means. Tarot cards, rune stones, palm reading, and tea leaves are always popular. If you don't mind the mess, reading the entrails of an eviscerated animal (aka. "haruspicy") makes a nice change of pace. Trances can be induced by staring into a crystal ball or an open flame (pyromancy), as well as by the newfangled technique of hypnotism. Finally, psychedelic drugs are a sure fire way to see strange things; peyote has that old school charm, but LSD is much more reliable.

SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES

When secret messages are embedded in movies, TV, and other mass media *without* the use of a cipher, you're in the realm of subliminal messages. Maybe Big Brother uses them to activate sleeper assassins, or maybe the aliens use them to keep normal people under control. In any case, the Lunatic

perceives them consciously while everyone else remains blissfully unaware.

Subliminal messages may be meant for the player-character in particular, the public in general, or the millions of black ops agents who lurk in every shadow. Traditionally, they're still images that flash across the screen too fast for most people to see. However, schizophrenics are famous for thinking that TV personalities (like news anchors or commercial actors) are speaking directly to them. When they're not speaking in code, but other folks claim to hear and see things other than what the Lunatic perceives, it's a subliminal message.

The next two sections have been designated...

GMS ONLY

Players should skip straight to the Insane Examples of Play.

DELUSIONS OF CONTROL

Running games on the Fringe is all about toying with subjective reality. The players will take care of their end (the Wushu mechanics will make sure of that), but GMs need to maintain a solid grasp of what's *really* going on at all times. This section begins by suggesting a few possible Truths, for when you want to throw your players a real curveball, but there should always be a rational explanation for game events. After all, that's what most of the sane characters will insist on believing!

The bulk of this section, however, is a grab bag of strange phenomena that you can use in your games. Each is given a Rational Explanation, but only after it's twisted to fit a Delusion or three. References are given because sending your players to *real* websites to get their crazy exposition is just plain cool!

General References:

Fortean Times (<http://www.forteanimes.com>)

Unexplained Mysteries (<http://www.unexplained-mysteries.com>)

Seize the Night (<http://carpenoctem.tv/cons>)

Occultopedia (<http://www.occultopedia.com>)

Cult Information Database (<http://www.rickross.com>)

THE TRUTH

So, you've got paranoid schizophrenics seeing everything from angels to Men in Black, the End Times to Big Brother. What common thread could possibly connect them? Here are a few possibilities...

The PCs are hallucinating sleeper assassins!

In this version, the player-characters' powers may be real, but their perceptions are not. Their secret masters (probably the government or some megacorporation) trained them in kung-fu, hacking, occultism, or whatever their schtick happens to be. They also implanted devices in their brains that hijack their physical senses and trick them into thinking that the agency/company/whatever's enemies are demons, aliens, or otherwise inhuman monsters who need to be eliminated. The point of all this is to create a team of covert assassins who can't be traced back to the real masterminds. If captured, they'll just come off as a bunch of crazy loners! It's brilliant!

Reality is an illusion & the PCs are breaking free.

Under the gnostic model, human souls are trapped in an illusion by powerful spirits called Archons. Most people are powerless to see reality any way accept how the Archons want them to see it. The PCs, by virtue of their madness or strength of will, rebel against the Archons' illusions and interpret reality in ways reflective of their personal obsessions. That includes the Archons themselves, who the PCs perceive as government

spooks, Reptiloids, vampires, etc. Eventually, they will either reach enlightenment and transcend reality completely... or be crushed under the Archons' boot heel!

The PCs are insane.

This explanation could underlie any of the others and should be considered the default in Fringe games. All their insights, their prophesies, and their powers are figments of their twisted imaginations. The vampires they've dusted, the aliens they've encountered, the demons they've sent back to Hell... none of them really existed. Or, if they did, they were just innocent people who got a stake through the heart for no good reason. The truth hurts.

H.A.A.R.P.

Two hundred miles east of Anchorage, Alaska, the U.S. Navy and Air Force are building a high-frequency phased array transmitter capable of beaming 3 gigawatts of radiation into the ionosphere. Why the hell would they wanna do that? The official reasons include academic research, submarine communication, and earth-penetrating tomography (detecting things below the ground). The suspected plans for this 23-acre field of high-power antennae are far more impressive.

The clue trail starts with U.S. Patent 4,686,605. Filed by Bernard Eastlund in 1987, and owned by the company originally contracted to build the array, this patent describes precisely the techniques HAARP employs to excite the ionosphere... but it

describes a host of other applications. The most benign is a way to jam an enemy's communications, aircraft navigation, and missile guidance systems, all while piggy-backing your own communiques on the jamming signal. Using frequencies smack in the middle of the tomography range, the device could also disrupt neural activity, creating confusion and disorientation in large populations. By altering atmospheric currents, HAARP could even control the weather! It's enough to make a Bond villain drool.

Illuminati Super-Weapon

The first sign of the U.N. invasion will be the complete disruption of civilian communications, all thanks to HAARP. Cell phones, radios, even your kid's walkie talkies will be useless. You know that little label that says those devices "must accept interference" from outside sources? This is why. If we're going to mount an effective resistance, either we'll have to find ways of penetrating HAARP's jamming signal or HAARP itself will have to be destroyed!

UFO Lighthouse

Why else would the Air Force want to shoot radiation into the upper atmosphere? It's obviously either a signal to alien spacecraft or a weapon to use against them. Maybe both. Ever since HAARP began, there have been UFO and MiB sightings all over the area. In fact, one alien faction is probably helping build the damn thing, assuming it'll be used against the others!

Gabriel's Trumpet

As the Last Battle begins, the archangel Gabriel shall sound his trumpet and call forth the dead from their graves. Medieval artists depicted this in literal terms, but perhaps its meaning is figurative. What if the activation of HAARP will cause an ecological catastrophe that ushers in the Armageddon? Could it literally cause the dead to rise? If any of this is true, should we even try to stop it?

The Sleeper Angle

HAARP is currently being run by Raytheon, one of the largest espionage contractors in the United States. The PCs are under the control of a rival company whose executives need a fast way to send Raytheon's stock into the gutter. Insert a bunch of crazed crusaders against the supernatural... and BOOM!!!

The Rational Explanation

A few dozen, unarmed scientists from the University of Alaska are using a large transmitter array to study the Earth's ionosphere. The technology they're using is similar to that in Eastlund's patent, but not nearly powerful enough to produce any of the grandiose effects described therein.

References:

<http://carpenoctem.tv/cons/haarp.html>

<http://www.haarp.alaska.edu/haarp/photos.html>

U.S. Patent 4,686,605 (Google it for a cool hand-out!)

THE ELTANIN ANTENNA

In 1964, the polar research vessel "Eltanin" discovered something strange on the ocean floor. About 1,000 miles south of Cape Horn, almost 13,000 feet below the frigid South Atlantic, it photographed a perfectly vertical pole with a dozen, evenly spaced spokes along its length. (Check the "larryhatch.net" reference for some excellent pictures.)

The "Eltanin Antenna," so named due to its eerie resemblance to a microwave antenna, subsequently gained a lot of attention from UFOlogists. Using methods from geometry to numerology, they used the antenna to create elaborate grid maps of the Earth... maps that supposedly correspond to UFO flight paths, magnetic field lines, and the locations of nuclear weapons tests!

Alien GPS

The grid maps prove it: the Eltanin Antenna is the lynch pin in the aliens' navigation system! It's like a GPS satellite for UFOs! They put it underwater because they thought we could never get to it. How wrong they were! With the right equipment, we could hack into the antenna and, by extension, the entire alien grid! We could track their movements, jam their sensors, maybe even bring them crashing down like falling stars!

Antenna of Madness

It's in Antarctica. What more does a Lovecraftian have to say? The antenna is obviously an outpost of the Elder Things'

lost empire! Maybe its part of their communication system, or maybe it was used to control the shoggoths. In either case, it could be turned into a powerful weapon for humanity's survival! Getting to it will be the easy part. The hard part will be fighting the deep ones for it!

The Rational Explanation

Eltanin photographed a two-foot tall, deep sea sponge called a Cladorhiza. It's probably dead and gone by now.

References:

<http://www.larryhatch.net/ELTANIN.html>

http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/183_eltanin1.shtml

(Make sure to read page 3. Now *that's* good crazy!)

ATLANTIS

Plato described Atlantis as merely an island civilization that was destroyed by an earthquake. In the last two centuries, subsequent writers have elevated it to the birthplace of civilization, the ancestral home of the master race, and a technologically advanced utopia. Its remains have been "found" everywhere from the Mediterranean and Cuba to Indonesia and the South China sea.

Possibly the most famous source of Atlantean lore was the American "sleeping prophet" Edgar Cayce. Among other things, he claimed that the souls of many Atlanteans were reincarnating in the modern age, that they had discarded atomic

power in favor of a crystalline energy source, and that the discovery of an Atlantean library beneath the Sphinx would coincide with catastrophic wars and natural disasters around the millennium. So far, his prediction have not panned out, but his devotees hold out hope. They believe that the library *will* be found and, when it is, those who are not ready to accept it will see nothing but an empty room.

Undersea Cover-Up

The sunken city has already been found, but the Illuminati are covering it up! They've got the entire area under military quarantine while they search for the Atlanteans' great crystal. However, they don't think it's a source of free energy. They believe it's the super-weapon that destroyed Atlantis!

Astral Exodus

It's true: Atlantis was the home of many Ascended Masters. For thousands of years, they've been trying to make mankind ready for its enlightened knowledge... the knowledge that ultimately spelled their doom. If the Invisible Library beneath the Sphinx were to fall into the hands of those not ready to hold its secrets, a similar fate could befall the entire world!

Lost City of R'lyeh

Atlantis is real, all right, but it's a misinterpretation of sunken R'lyeh, where Great Cthulhu sleeps the sleep of ages! Fortunately, most investigators are looking in the wrong place: R'lyeh lies beneath the Pacific Ocean, not the Atlantic,

Mediterranean, or Indian. This is fortunate, because anyone who stumbled across Cthulhu's tomb could accidentally wake him, and then he would surely destroy us all!

The Gnostic Version

Like the Holy Grail or the Philosopher's Stone, Atlantis is not so much a literal truth as a metaphor for enlightenment. Plato described it as having three concentric rings because those who rebel against the Archons go through three stages: initial break from "reality," realization that all reality is subjective, and full comprehension of the true nature of reality. In searching for Atlantis, it is possible to reach enlightenment.

The Rational Explanation

Plato made it up.

References:

http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/165_cayce.shtml

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlantis>

CRYPTIDS

Who doesn't love a good monster hunt? Luckily, the damn things seem to be everywhere! From Sasquatch to Nessie to Chupacabras, you can find cryptids in every corner of the globe... if you look hard enough. Oh, and remember: even if something turns out to be a hoax, maybe that's just to distract the public from something else that's going on nearby!

Aliens Among Us

The Sasquatch and the Yeti are intelligent hominids from a parallel universe; the reason they're so hard to find is that they can "step sideways" between realities at will. Mothman's an alien, or possibly from the future, or possibly an alien from the future. Chupacabras are failed experiments at human/alien hybridization that escaped during a cattle mutilation.

Military Experiments

Modern sightings of sea monsters from Loch Ness to giant squids are really semi-automatous military submarines being developed for the New World Order. Some day very soon, they'll prowl the oceans openly, preventing unauthorized travel between continents.

If Vampires Exist...

Is a 7-foot tall hominid so hard to imagine? Or a Kraken? Or a flying biped with no head and glowing eyes in its chest? The ones that leave humanity alone can live in peace, but any that encroach upon civilized land, whether to kill cattle or steal children, must be exterminated!

The Sleeper Angle

When smart people find out that Big Brother or some megacorp wants them dead, they get as far off the Grid as possible! That's when mind-controlled assassins get a hankerin' to hunt reclusive "monsters" like Bigfoot or Mothman.

The Gnostic Version

Sometimes, those on the verge of enlightenment choose to see Archons as something monstrous: hulking pre-humans, headless angels, lake monsters, even goat-suckers.

The Rational Explanation

They're all mundane animals that have somehow escaped scientific study. That, or they don't exist.

References:

<http://www.americanmonsters.com/monsters.html>

<http://www.newanimal.org/index.htm>

<http://www.bfro.net>

CULTS

To a Lunatic, cults can be both friend and foe. On the one hand, they are far more likely than most folks to accept the Lunatics' crazy claims about aliens or the End Times. On the other, their leaders rarely tolerate deviation or disobedience, two things at which Lunatics excel. At best, players should approach cultists as fair weather friends: useful when their goals coincide, but best left behind when the goin' gets rough.

Pana Wave

This Japanese cult is characterized by its white lab suits, face masks, and paranoid fear of microwaves. They believe that communist guerrillas have scattered across the globe since the

fall of the Soviet Union and, among other things, they're using microwave weapons to slowly poison their leader (Yuko Chino). To shield her from harmful radiation, they cover things with lots of white sheets. Though they've committed few violent acts to date, they have threatened media outlets with sabotage and been the subject of multiple homicide investigations.

The Raelian Movement

Based on the UFO encounters of their leader, Raelians believe that homo sapiens were genetically engineered by an alien race called the Elohim. At the behest of these aliens, they are attempting to build an interstellar embassy in Israel. They also believe that the human consciousness can be transferred into a cloned body after death, by harvesting and transplanting the pituitary gland. They even offer commercial cloning equipment via Clonaid, their corporate wing.

Concerned Christians

Kim Miller believes he is the "Prophet of the Last Days," a key figure in the End Times. He predicted that his own death on the streets of Jerusalem in 1999 would start a sequence of events leading up to Armageddon. That didn't pan out. Now, he says that "forecasting times and dates" isn't his role at all. Convenient.

Snack Packs

Not all vampires think the whole human race has to be domesticated at once. Some like to keep herds of docile

humans whose minds are open to the supernatural. They're a convenient source of food, eyes and ears in daylight, and a legion of fanatical soldiers willing to die at their master's whim.

The Gnostic Version

Members of cults are rarely on the path towards enlightenment, as they have simply embraced the reality of their leader(s). However, Archons have created cults of their own in order to trap those who might otherwise break free of the great illusion. Though such Archons are less powerful than those who control mainstream society, they are more dangerous to Lunatics who mistake them for kindred spirits.

The Rational Explanation

Cult leaders are delusional egomaniacs with above average charisma a knack for brainwashing. They are dangerous if challenged, as most would rather see themselves and all their followers dead before suffering the humiliation of being proved fallible.

References:

http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/173_panawave.shtml

http://www.rickross.com/groups/pana_wave.html

<http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/rael.html>

<http://www.clonaid.com>

<http://www.rael.org>

<http://www.rickross.com/groups/cc.html>

<http://www.kimmillerconcernedchristians.com>

THE GODMACHINE

In the summer of 1854, after nine months of labor, John Murray Spear and his followers gave birth to the New Messiah. This miraculous device (alternatively described as the Physical Savior, the Philosopher's Stone, and Heaven's Last Gift to Man) was supposed to usher in a golden age of technological and scientific enlightenment, elevate mankind to Godhood. Instead, it was soon disassembled and moved to a shed in Randolph, New York, where it sat until an angry mob broken in, tore the machine apart, and scattered the pieces.

John Murray Spear was one of the first Spiritualists, a Universalist priest who channeled the spirits of the dead. The design of the New Messiah was revealed to him by a group of spirits called the Band of Electricizers, whose leader was none other than the ghost of Benjamin Franklin. Its mother was a woman known only as "Mary of the New Dispensation." During the construction, she endured a phantom pregnancy that culminated in the miraculous animation of the device. Her identity remains a mystery.

What did the Physical Savior really do? Perhaps it was a perpetual motion machine, a source of free energy. Or perhaps it was intelligent, infused with life so that it could bring the Electricizers' full wisdom to mankind. What was its true fate? There is no physical evidence of the machine ever being in Randolph and no record of any riots at that time. Whose possession is it in and to what ends have they twisted it?

Ascended Master Franklin

There can be no doubt that the Godmachine was the work of Ascended Masters. Enlightened spirits who want to elevate the human race? Come on! John Murray Spear called it the "Philosopher's Stone," which implies that its function is the transmutation of substances. Not turning lead into gold (though who's to say it couldn't also do that?), but transforming crude matter into pure spirit! It's probably hidden away in some alien base or Illuminati vault, just waiting for someone to set it free!

Eldritch Radio

Spear and his followers were dupes, manipulated by alien beings into building a doomsday device of unspeakable power. Their "New Messiah" is a radio for communicating with things that dwell beyond the earthly sphere, things that lie in wait to tear our world asunder! That mob that supposedly destroyed it? They were the real cult and they kept the Godmachine for themselves! Who knows what perverse rituals they've performed at its behest? Unless someone stops them, they'll eventually find a way to summon their dark masters into this realm and doom us all!

Jesus Christ 2.0

John Murray Spear was a deluded fool, but Mary of the New Dispensation was not. She was a Merovingian. The device was her invention, but Spear cloaked that fact with bullshit stories about the ghost of Ben Franklin. (19th century America was not kind to women, even when they carried the blood of

Christ.) The machine was a vessel for the Holy Spirit, a new manifestation of God on Earth... and it worked! If it wasn't destroyed in Randolph, it's definitely locked away in a Vatican cellar, so the Church can maintain its monopoly on the divine.

The Sleeper Angle

The PCs' corporate masters want a competitor's prize R&D project, some kind of prototype device. They send their sleeper pawns a hot tip about the location of the "Godmachine," sit back, and wait for their stolen merchandise to roll in.

The Rational Explanation

Spear was a crackpot and his "New Messiah" was a moderately expensive pile of junk. It was destroyed by paranoid puritans in Randolph, New York, in 1854.

References:

http://www.forteantimes.com/articles/158_godmachine.shtml

METHOD & MADNESS

So, you've got a cast of crazies who think they can do the impossible, and a bunch of weird shit to throw in their path. It seems like there's something missing... maybe *the rules*? They've been left for (almost) last because Fringe games should be all about the characters and their bizarre beliefs. The only rules you really need are those that get your players to elaborate those beliefs and do insane things as a result.

Wushu fits like a straightjacket because it rewards players for describing their actions in lurid detail, no matter what form those actions take. It easily accommodates anything from ritual exorcisms to alien technology with one, intuitive mechanic. I won't waste space on the particulars here; they're available for free on the Wushu website...

<http://www.Bayn.org/wushu/wushu-open.html>

Here's the short version: Wushu uses a dice pool mechanic where the size of a player's pool is determined by the number of Details they add to their description. These can be anything from multiple actions to spell components to witty one-liners, anything that's appropriate to your game. Dice that roll under or equal to the character's most relevant Trait rating contribute to the action's success. This section shows you how to use that system to create Lunatics, drive them even more insane, and bend reality with the force of their Delusions.

GOING INSANE

As should be readily apparent by now, the first step in creating a Lunatic is choosin' your Delusion. You'll get a Core Trait related to it, something like "Grandson of God" or "Non-Euclidean Mathemagician." Like all Wushu Traits, it starts at a rating of 2 and you can bump it up to 5 with Trait Points. You'll get 5-8 of these points and what you don't spend on your Core Trait, you get to keep for later. You should also create a Symptom related to your Core Trait, something like "Never Lets His Picture Be Taken" or "Can't Cross Running Water." (Write it down as a Trait with a rating of 1.) That's it! You're ready to start playing on the Fringe!

Whenever a player wants to do something risky or challenging, they'll have to roll some 6-sided dice as described above. If you don't have a relevant Trait, the default target number is 2. Creating a Trait requires spending a Trait Point or three, just like you did for your Core Trait. The new Trait's rating becomes your new target number. Once a Trait has been created, it's permanent and can be invoked any time.

To add some extra flare, you can require players to provide an explanatory Detail with each point they spend, just as if they were earning dice. For instance, someone who's creating a "Kung-Fu" Trait at level 4 would spend 2 points and provide 2 Details: "As luck would have it, I spent a summer studying martial arts at a Shaolin temple. I had to swear an oath to only use it as a last resort." Those two Details explain how the character learned kung-fu and why he hasn't used it until now.

Finally, all Lunatics have one Symptom in common: Disorganized Speech. You can write it down as a Trait with a rating of 1. Schizophrenics are notorious for changing topics in the middle of a sentence, using completely made-up words, and being otherwise incoherent to normal people. When a Lunatic tries to talk to the sane, usually to ask for help or explain their behavior, they have to roll against a target number of 1. It rarely ends well.

Players choose when their characters develop new Symptoms. Anytime they're pushed into negative Chi (see the Wushu rules), they can buy their way back up to zero by creating another Symptom. Ideally, this will be related to their current situation, but anything that sounds appropriate to the character will do. Oh, and this can only be done once per scene, otherwise it gets silly.

BENDING REALITY

When you play Wushu, your actions are limited only by the group's sense of what's appropriate (i.e.. the Veto rule). When you play Wushu on the Fringe, the players are *expected* to disagree on what's appropriate! They're supposed to see things differently in the most literal sense. Maybe it's possible to leap tall buildings in my world view, but not yours. Maybe you think the power of faith can cure the sick, while I rely on good old homeopathy. On the Fringe, we're both right!

Fortunately, these conflicts are nothing Wushu's core mechanic can't handle. Any time a player describes something

supernatural, from psychic powers to nanotech to subliminal mind control, they have to "convince" the rest of the group that their actions make sense *in light of their Delusion*. Each Detail they add in the course of their explanation earns them a die. (See below for copious examples.)

Of course, the group can still veto anything that strays too far from the desired tone of the game. Most of the time, that means a player's getting too silly or too vulgar. If the group feels a player is stretching their Delusion too far, they can also use a Veto. (This is Wushu's only real defense against powergaming.) However, Vetoes should be used sparingly. In a game about subjective reality, chaos and confusion are your friends.

Players can also earn dice by interpreting the reality-bending actions of their fellows in terms of their own Delusions. (Consider this a Pass.) For instance, an alien abductee who sees a Merovingian walk on water could explain this as a gravity-manipulation trick and mention their pet theory that Jesus was an alien-human hybrid. Even if it's unrelated to their next action, it earns them a die.

As far as the players are concerned, everything happens exactly as their characters think it happened. It's up to the GM to keep track of what's *really* going on. This includes the true nature of any antagonists (cops, security guards, psychiatrists, random people who wandered down the wrong alley, etc.) and how the Lunatics' actions look to sane observers. If you ever get backed into a corner, you can always claim that certain events never happened at all... the Lunatics hallucinated or imagined the whole damn thing!

INSANE EXAMPLES OF PLAY

BOTTOM FEEDER

St. Mark's homeless shelter is watched over by three valiant crusaders: Ezekiel, the Divine herald of Death and reincarnated son of Christ; Franklin, veteran soldier in the Last Free Army of the American Revolution; and Chris, two time alien abductee. It's almost four o'clock in the A.M. when they notice movement in the crowded sleeping area...

Ezekiel sees a demon feeding on the souls of the sleepers. He springs to his feet with a crucifix in his hand / and shouts, "Be gone from this place, Fallen One!" / (His player explains that Merovingians inherit Christ's authority over demons.) (3) The demon looks up and its eyes flash with hellfire. / It spits blasphemy at the Merovingian / and then turns to flee. (3)

In the land of objective reality, a common thief is stealing watches and petty cash from his fellow homeless. However, the GM frames the scene for the first player by describing the thief as a "demon;" when he bends over to loot his victims, the GM frames the act as "feeding on the souls of the sleepers." The player then chooses to confront the fiend with the power of Christ and earns 3 dice doing so. Since he's not being attacked, Ezekiel's player decides to roll them all as Yang dice. (Yin dice are for defense.)

The GM earns 3 dice for the thief by describing his perfectly reasonable response (running away) in terms of Ezekiel's delusion. The flashing eyes are an hallucination and the "blasphemy" is just a startled "goddamnit!" The GM declares them all Yin dice.

The player rolls against Ezekiel's "Merovingian (4)" Trait and gets 3,3,4... 3 successes. The GM rolls his Yin dice against the Nemesis' "Thief (3)" Trait and gets 1,2,6... 2 successes. That's a difference of one, so the GM cashes in 1 of the thief's 3 points of Chi.

Chris sees a Man in Black taking medical scans of sleeping subjects. When someone tries to stop him, the MiB defends himself with some kind of mental confusion ray. / Fortunately, Chris brought his EMP wave generator / (reverse engineered from the thing aliens use to shut down human electronics). / He points its business end at the MiB / and cranks the Radio Shack dimmer switch all the way up! (5) The MiB curses like a sailor / when the EMP pulse knocks out his cybernetic implants. / He takes off for the exit in a regimented sprint / that betrays his military training. (4)

Chris' player earns his first die on a Pass, by interpreting Ezekiel's strange behavior as the effects of a "confusion ray." Then, he stacks up 4 more dice in super-science wackiness. He's also not being attacked, so he declares all 5 dice Yang. The GM reuses those bits about swearing and running away, but earns dice for them again by recasting them in terms of Chris'

world view. He declares all 4 of his dice Yin.

Since he "reverse-engineered" his EMP from alien tech, Chris' player rolls against his "Alien Abductee (4)" Trait and gets 4 successes. Again, the GM rolls against the Nemesis' "Thief (3)" Trait and gets 2 successes. He has to spend his last 2 Chi points to stay on his feet, leaving him at zero. With another PC between him and the exit, his chances of escape look pretty slim.

Franklin sees an Illuminati black ops tracker, no doubt searching for him. When some religious nut goes all evangelical on his ass, / the spook makes a b-line for the door... and Franklin is waiting! / He strikes out of the shadows like an angry rattler / and clotheslines the bastard square in the throat! (4) The Illuminati stooge flips over 270 degrees / before landing face-down on the floor. / His eyes roll back in his head as he tastes sweet oblivion. (3)

Franklin's player also takes a Pass by describing Ezekiel as "some religious nut," then racks up 3 more dice in good, old fashioned smack-down! Since he's actually engaging the enemy, he splits his dice evenly between Yin and Yang. Knowing the end is near, the GM decides to go all-out offensive (despite the fact that he only described himself getting hurt).

Franklin's player only needs 1 Yang success to knock the Nemesis out. He rolls against his "Paramilitary Badass (5)" Trait, getting 2 Yang successes and 1 Yin success. The GM rolls his 3 Yang dice and gets 2 successes. The Nemesis takes the hit and gets knocked out, but not before he forces Franklin to toss in a

point of Chi. The player and GM decide that Franklin must have wrenched his elbow when he laid out the black ops tracker/MiB/demon from the bowels of Hell.

PLAYING HAARP

The cold, Alaskan moon illuminates a field of antenna that rise from the permafrost like a forest of steel. Faustinas the Dark, master xenomancer, casts her soul into the astral plane and investigates a small bunker. Confound, Scourge of the Grid, surveys the scene for signs of a security system.

Unbeknownst to either lunatic, their perceptions are being engineered by Psycorp, a military contractor that wants to take Raytheon's stock down a peg. Any information they get from the GM, accurate or not, will be in the service of Psycorp's nefarious plans. Faustinas' player makes a scab roll against her "Xenomancer (5)" Trait and gets a 5 as her highest success. The GM accurately describes the inside of the bunker to her, but adds a hidden, spherical room that contains "a bloodthirsty, alien presence."

Confound may be a maverick hacker, but there's nothing about burglary in his character description. His player wants to roll more than 2 dice for this, so he spends 2 points to create a new Trait called "Misspent Youth (4)." He now owes the GM 2 Details to explain his new Trait, but we'll get to that in a second. He rolls 4 dice and the highest result is a 6, so the GM tells him exactly where to find the security cameras.

"There's a blindspot in their security system," Confound tells his compatriot while pointing towards a fallen tree behind the bunker. "Right over there. Just like that time Fast Eddie and I snuck into the Universal Studios lot." Faustinas raises an eyebrow. "We had to make a supply run for our eBay souvenir business."

"This will be no juvenile milk run," the xenomancer replies. "The fools have caged a Hound of Tindalos in a spherical chamber beneath that bunker. (They travel only in straight lines; curves confound them.) It will surely destroy the place if we set it free, but it will make no distinction between us and its rightful prey."

"Uh huh... well, no point standin' out here in the cold." Confound uses the fallen tree to approach the fence unseen, / waits 3 seconds for the camera to pan away, / then cracks his frozen knuckles / and vaults over the fence! (4). Faustinas traces a complex sigil in the snow. / (Its precise angles represent a non-euclidean mathematical formula for defracting light.) / Thus protected from the security cameras, she follows in her partner's footsteps. (3)

This isn't meant to be a particularly challenging obstacle, so the GM puts no Threat Rating on it. All the players need is a single success. Confound's player rolls 4 dice against his brand new "Misspent Youth (4)" Trait and nabs 2 successes. Faustinas' player has managed to fit this under her "Xenomancer (5)" Trait and rakes in 3 successes. (Notice how she didn't just walk right

up to the security camera, but followed Confound's path over the fence. Did her "magic" really do anything at all?) They both make it inside the fence without being spotted.

The bunker's only door is protected by a security camera and an ID card scanner. Confound studies it from around the corner, then says, "This is going to take all my skill..." / and smashes his elbow through a blacked-out window next to him! / He puts his hands together and offers Faustinas a lift. (3) She accepts reluctantly and claws her way inside. / While Confound follows suit, she casts her will into the astral plane / and clouds the minds of any nearby personnel. (3)

The GM is toying with the idea that Faustinas' xenomancy is really powered by low-grade psychic abilities she acquired as an unwitting Psycorp test subject, so he has no problem with her rather ritual-free Description. Again, each player only needs 1 success to avoid detection. Confound's player rolls against his new Trait once again, getting 2 more successes. Faustinas rolls against "Xenomancer (5)" again and gets a single success. Good enough.

"You'll find the research data on a set of server computers down the right hall," Faustinas tells the phreaker. "Third door on the left. I've got bigger dogs to, um... fry."

"Yeah, sure. Do what ya gotta do." He heads out the door, then turns back. "Thanks for all your help."

"May we live to help each other again," she replies.

From here on out, each character has their own objective. Confound wants to prove that HAARP is meant to disrupt global telecommunications during a U.N. invasion. Faustinas just wants to tear the place down, as she thinks it's a beacon to call the Great Old Ones down from distant stars. The GM tells Confound's player that he'll need to wrack up 6 successes before he can take home the data he seeks. He tells Faustinas' player that 3 successes will buy her the means to release the Hound of Tindalos from its prison.

Confound creeps down the hall until he hears the telltale whine of computer cooling fans. / He can't believe his luck when he finds the door unlocked! / He drops into an office chair and rolls across the small room. / When his fingers find a keyboard, / he effortlessly cracks the password and starts digging! (5)

This definitely falls under his "Phreaks & Geeks (5)" Trait. He rolls his 5 dice and every one of them comes up a success! All he has to do is upload the data to his external hard drive...

A palpable aura of malevolence guides Faustinas deep inside the bunker. / The place is crawling with armed guards, unusual for an "innocent" research facility! / She avoids detection by sheer force of will / as she methodically moves from room to room in search of an entrance to the spherical chamber. (4)

Still rolling against her "Xenomancer (5)" Trait, she get 3

successes. The GM tells her that there is no entrance to the cage; it's completely sealed off. (Note how this makes it impossible to prove that it's actually there at all!) However, Faustinas does manage to find some explosives in a weapons locker...

Meanwhile, Confound is busy plugging in his portable hard drive when the resident sys admin returns from his coffee break! Only the fact that his mouth is full of coffee stops him from yelling for help / before Confound can club him with the chair! (2) The tech slams into one of the servers / and splashes hot coffee into the ventilation ducts. (2) Seeing his data flash before his eyes, / Confound spins like a top / and types in the upload command. (3)

The sys admin has no Chi and isn't rolling any Yin dice, so Confound's player only needs 1 Yang success to make sure he stays down. However, the GM will be using his 2 Yang dice to prevent Confound from getting the research data, adding them to the 1 success Confound still owes the GM. The player decides to roll 1 Yang and 4 Yin against his "Phreaks & Geeks (5)" Trait. The GM rolls his 2 Yang dice against the default target number of 2.

The GM lucks out; both of his dice come up successes. That means Confound will need 3 Yin successes to force his upload through. His Yang die comes up a 3, so the sys admin is out for the count. His Yin dice come up 1,3,6,6... Close, but no cigar. Thinking on his feet, Confound's player cashes in a point

of Chi to negate one of the GM's Yang dice and walla! The server dies in a shower of sparks, but not before the upload is complete!

Downstairs, Faustinas is guessing her way through Demolitions 101. Fortunately, most of the explosives have helpful labels like "THIS SIDE UP" and "PULL PIN TO ARM." / She carefully stacks a dozen of them on a supply shelf that abuts the wall of the chamber, / crosses herself out of childhood habit, / and backs slowly out of the room. / Then, she runs. (5)

Faustinas' player doesn't want to spend any Trait points on a demolitions skill, so she compensates for her low target number by earning a ton of dice. She throws all 5 against the default target number of 2 and gets 1 success. That's plenty, but before the place goes up in flames...

The xenomancer has just hit her stride when one of the guards steps around the corner! "Hey, you're not supposed to be down here!" / His broad shoulders completely block the narrow hallway. (2) Faustinas charges him like a raging lion / and launches a flying kick into his sternum! (2) The guard instinctually falls into a defensive stance / and catches her foot an inch from his chest! (2) When she lands, her pants pull away from her boot, revealing the Black Dragon tattoo on her ankle. / Faustinas gives the guard a wink / before launching herself into a backflip / and kicking the brute square in the jaw! (3) Stunned, the guard releases her tattooed foot and stumbles back. / He

draws his service pistol and aims for center of mass... (2) but the xenomancer is already rushing past him and around the corner! (1)

Both parties earned 6 dice that turn, but Faustinas' player needs to buy a Trait to justify all that wire-fu whup-ass! She meant for that Detail about the ankle tattoo to explain the new Trait, but now she's thinkin' she wants to spend 3 points, rather than just one, and get "Kung-Fu (5)." She reduces her dice pool by 1, but still owes the GM 2 more Details, so she says "She studied with a sect of Black Dragon ninjas / while searching for Mi-Go mining settlements in the Himalayas." She splits her dice between 2 Yang and 3 Yin. The GM goes all offensive against a target number of 3.

The GM ends up with 4 Yang successes. Ouch! Faustinas' Yang dice both come up successes. The GM tosses in the guard's only point of Chi, but it's not enough. Faustus gets away... or so she thinks! She rolls triple sixes on her Yin dice, leaving her defenseless! The player cashes in all her Chi, but she still takes a hit. (The guard must have gotten off a shot at her after all!)

Now, she can either accept her fate or buy her way back to consciousness by creating a new Symptom. She decides that, when released, the Hound of Tindalos will remember her psychic scent, so to speak, and come looking for her. From now on, Faustinas only sleeps in round rooms! Her new Symptom brings her up to zero Chi, which is just enough to limp her way out of the bunker.

Faustinas staggers through the doorway just as Confound is about to leap out the broken window. She takes his outstretched hand as the entire building quakes! "It's free. We must go," she gasps. The Lunatics race through the snow, heedless of the security cameras, as the bunker is consumed by flames... and the howls of something inhuman.