

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>

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

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 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.