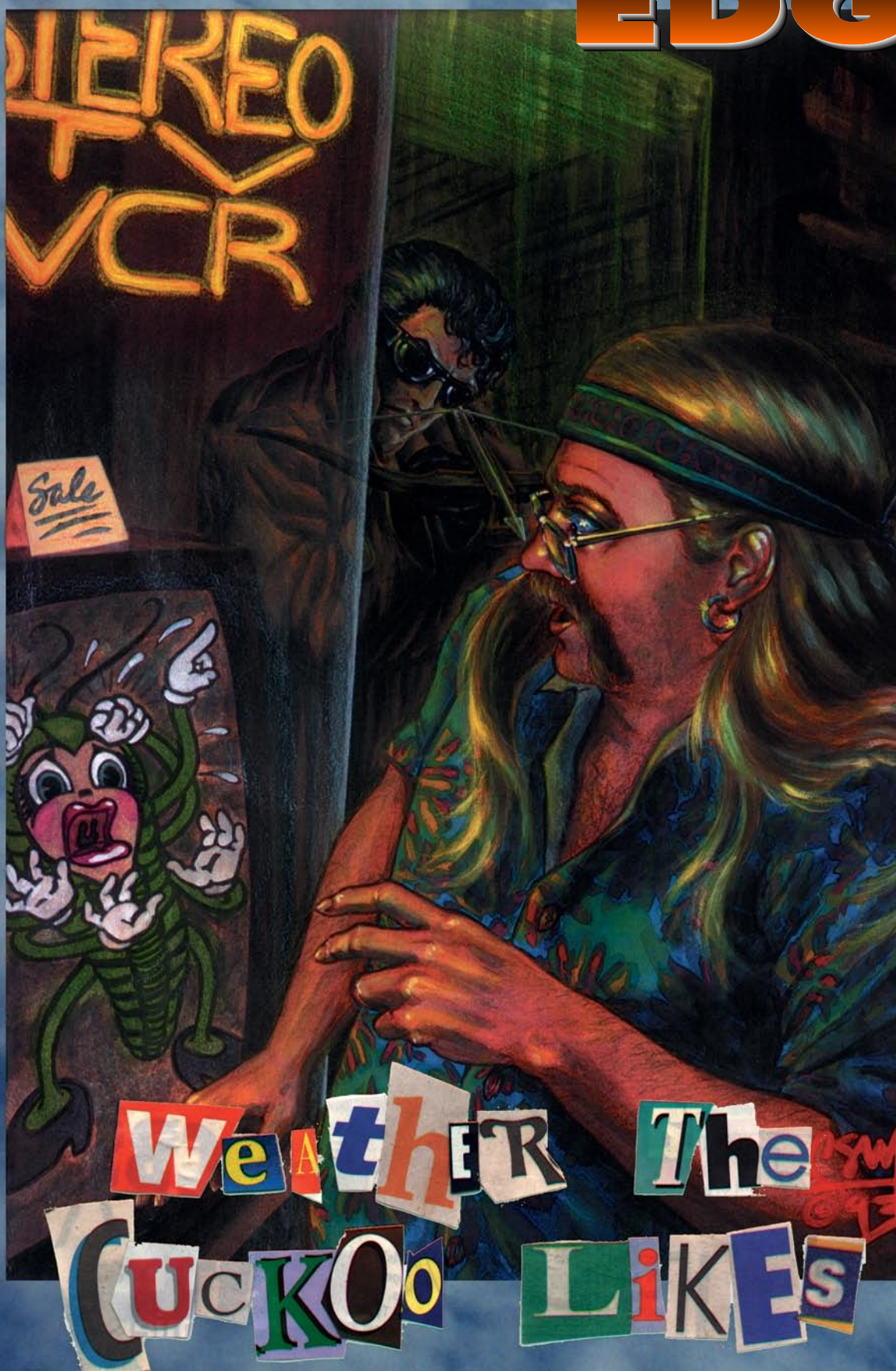


# OVER THE EDGE



THE SOURCEBOOK OF THE CUT-UPS PROJECT • BY ROBIN D. LAWS

## Credits

**Design:** Robin D. Laws

**Robert “Doc” Cross** designed by Robert “Doc” Cross

**Editing:** Zara Lasater, John Nephew

**Product Manager:** John Nephew

**Cover and Interior Art:** Cheryl Mandus

**Layout and Cover Photography and Design:** John Nephew

**Interior Titles:** Zara Lasater

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# Meet THE Cut-Ups

"All nature is but art, unknown to thee  
All chance, direction which thou canst  
not see;

All discord, harmony not understood"

— Alexander Pope

"The Sultan's concrete wall develops bites and God fasts," says Mrs. Brinker, adjusting her reading glasses and squinting at the smudgy printout of the Cut-Up machine. "You know, I don't know why that fussed machine has to print on thermal fax paper."

"Mo-o-o-o-o-OMMMM!" whines her son, Brain-Melting Brinker Twin Claus. "We've been through all of this before — just read what it says." Claus is squirming in his chair, seized by his usual restlessness.

"Mrs. Brinker, the Cut-Up machine is based on sub-random science, and therefore must be made up of an amalgam of incompatible technologies." This statement emanates from a sugar dispenser, a tall glass and stainless steel receptacle familiar to generations of diner patrons. It is the low, modulated voice of the Really Quite Angry Kid; she is currently unable to manifest in this dimension and therefore can communicate only through the crystalline structures of the sugar. "If it worked better it wouldn't work at all. If you get my meaning."

"Well, Really Quite Angry, I can't say I do —"

"MOM! Shut up and read the rest of what it says!" Claus swivels in his chair.

His identical brother Pere, who heretofore has seemed to be asleep, opens his left eye and fixes it on Claus. "Disrespect for our mother? Is this what you're showing?"

Claus freezes. The naked light bulb hanging over the table begins to gently sway, for no obvious reason.

"N-no, no, Pere," Claus stammers. "That wasn't the situation at all —"

"It would be unfortunate if this were the situation."

Robert "Doc" Cross leans forward, nervously adjusting his bandanna. "Uhhh," he says. Having gotten the attention of the assembled group, he pauses to draw a sip of tea from his mug. "Maybe we should start over on this message — the one from The Machine..."

"The Sultan's concrete wall develops bites and God fasts," says Mrs. Brinker. "Emptiness is the position of a prerecorded violent pain. Ulceration is potentially beneficial as an authoritarian strategy for the reduction of bridges."

"And that is the entirety of the message?" asks C. A. Radford. The smoke from his pipe rises to cuddle with the light bulb; then it forms into the shape of a Mayan mask. The mask, of an underworld deity, has wild swirling eyes; it sticks its triangular tongue at Claus Brinker. It says something in an unfamiliar language.

"What's the mask sayin', C. A.?" yips the Andalusia Dog. His breath reeks of vegetable flavored Milk Bones.



"I'm afraid I'm not acquainted with the language," C. A. mutters, as the mask begins to spin about, reducing itself to scattered fumes.

"He was telling us to focus on who the Sultan is," says Doctor What, fidgeting with the safety pin protruding from her bottom lip.

"Gee, Doc, I didn't know you spoke ancient Mayan," says Doc Cross.

"Actually, Doc, I don't," she responds.

"So the Sultan, who would this be?" C. A. asks, to no one in particular.

"A control f-rrr-reak, obviously," says the Andalusia Dog.

"Obviously, but which one?"

A peculiar television set — constructed from copper rings, kiln-fired clay, red linen and an aquarium full of sea anemones — blares in a corner. Flickery cartoon images scoot across the red cloth screen: it's yet another adventure of Tiffany Trilobite, the favorite extinct invertebrate of kids the world over. Today Tiffany is chasing her nemesis Senor Tapir through the musty, columned halls of the Spanish Stock Exchange. Tiffany whacks Senor Tapir on the snout with a bundle of pork belly futures. Then she turns to the group and says, "I'd bet it's the Pharaohs."

"Tiffany, you always think it's the Pharaohs," grumbles Claus Brinker.

"And you're a poop," Tiffany replies, deftly ducking the hot issue of Senor Tapir's notorious glue gun.

"Smells like Movers to me," says Pere Brinker.

"Yeah, but what kinda movers?" Doc Cross asks. "Gladsteins? Cell Z?"

"Cell Z is mythical," C. A. intones.

"Mythical?" snorts Dr. What, "You wanna see the abdominal scar I got from my last run-in with Cell Z?"

"Oh puh-leez, we got that scar memorized by now," Claus mutters.

"Or Vornites," Doc Cross continues, "Could be Vornites. Or Blue Castle —"

"Blue Castle Movers? That's a new one on —"

"Remind me to tell you about it sometime."

"Look, isn't anyone gonna just ask me a 'what' question?" Dr. What asks.

"Right, sure," Doc says, "I always forget. I wish Terry were here. What's he doing anyway?"

"Scouting locations," Dr. What replies frostily. "That wasn't the 'what' question I was shooting for, y'know."

"Okay, okay, so what does 'the Sultan' mean?"

"Islam Petri."

"The Reporter?" Andalusia asks.

"That's just his cover," Pere says, "he's really head Neutralizer on the island. We don't usually have trouble with them, though..."

"Well, maybe if we look at the rest of the message..." Mrs. Brinker ventures.

"Why don't we just ask the Doctor the meaning of the whole thing?" says Doc.

"Last time we tried that we overloaded her fringe power and she was in a coma for a month," says the Kid. "That was back when you were working on that Tour Guide book of yours..."

"Very well, then," C. A. harrumphs. "The Sultan's concrete wall develops bites and God fasts. Shall we look at what Petri's concrete wall is — or do we want to ask ourselves what exactly is meant by God?"

"You mean specifically or in the gener-rrr-al theological sense, C. A.?"

"I would think one is the key to the other."

"Oh, man," pouts Claus, "We're gonna be here till my feet go numb."

The emergency meeting of the Al Amarjan division of Chaos Boys goes on long into the night...

# Al Amarja's Cut-Ups

"You should never wear your best trousers when you go out to fight for freedom and truth."

—Henrik Ibsen

## Mircea ?

### *Surrealist Sculptor*

Jailed for decades by Romania's Ceaucescu regime, the sculptor Mircea ? is just now beginning to reach a world audience. He finds the whole situation rather daunting; he's not used to being asked to lecture, give press interviews, or promote his work at for-profit galleries. He isn't even comfortable with his pseudonym, which was popularized by others to publicize his status as a political prisoner.

The reason he's shy is that he doesn't understand his own work. He's an intuitive artist who makes his sketches and early models with a completely blank consciousness. If he sets out to create a particular thing, the work is inevitably a failure — it seems sterile and clichéd. Only when he lets himself go does he create the startling works he's becoming famous for.

He's subconsciously attuned to the wave vibrations the force of Chaos emits on the quantum level; this attunement allows him to create art that makes Chaos relevant to his time and place. Actually, he's rather disturbed by his own work — if he keeps sculpting into the evening, he'll probably have a nightmare featuring his own images that night. He'd rather produce serene, abstract forms like the sculptor Brancusi. Instead, his subatomic muse demands complex, confusing works that mix media — metal, glass, wood, refuse, plastic — and subject matter. One of his most famous works, the enormous "Sorites", features an escalator full of bored commuters going up. The figures at the bottom of the escalator are de-



picted with precise realism. But the further up a figure is, the more abstract and monstrous it becomes, until finally the last passengers are — to their silent horror — being merged into the machinery of the escalator. Presumably they continue to be part of the cycle for eternity, becoming steps at the bottom to lure on more and more of their fellows to be devoured by the machine.

Mircea ? does not live in the Edge; although his dealer is pressuring him to move to Paris, he still works from a small village in Romania. He is sometimes invited to lecture at D'Aubainne University. At present, there is only one Mircea ? piece in a permanent collection on the island, in the private home of Lydia Goodman. In accordance with her sense of taste, she picked one of the more subdued of ?'s works, which depicts a prison guard turning into a jail. Its anti-Control effect (see below) is one die only.

Romanian man, age 64, 130 cm, 55 kg, scruffy silver hair, quavery voice.

**Languages:** Romanian, rudimentary English

### **Traits**

*Sculptural Technique*, 4 dice — His pieces are technically stunning, capable both of minute realism in the most resistant of media and of bold, simple abstractions that catch the eye while still reminding one of their original form. (Delicate hands)

*Chaos Art*, 2 dice — When viewed either by a Control Freak or someone subservient to Control, a ? piece can arouse profound doubts about the philosophy of Control. These viewers get to resist with 2 dice (or more if they have a trait like “strong will” or “fanatical dedication”); if they fail, they begin to question the validity of their beliefs. This may manifest as an upsurge of doubt at a crucial moment (a penalty die against a particular Control-oriented action) or the first step on the road to conversion, at your discretion.

On the other hand, viewing chaos art affirms the beliefs of a Cut-Up operative or sympathizer. Upon the first viewing of a piece,

the character gains a temporary die in his experience pool. It may be saved indefinitely, but can only be used once. It can't be used to buy up a trait, only as a bonus die.

Viewers who don't serve either Control or Chaos may be emotionally affected by the work, but acquire no penalty or bonus dice. (Works combine machine and organic forms in new and disturbing ways)

*Frail* — Years in prison have taken their toll; he suffers a penalty die in all physical actions. (Shuffles)

## **Story Idea**

The PCs, assigned to guard a traveling Mircea ? exhibit from possible Control Freak sabotage, notice a well-dressed older gentleman come into the gallery each day to stare at a particular piece. At first he just spends his lunch hours there, but as the days go by his time in front of the sculpture stretches and stretches.

Finally he approaches the PCs. “I never knew before who you are. I never knew who I am. But now I know. I will tell you everything.”

He claims to be a high-level member of both the Net and the Movers. He offers to spill years of red-hot information into the Cut-Up database. Is he for real, or is he a plant? If he's a plant, what sinister plan do his masters have for him? If he's for real, his former associates will want to destroy him as soon as they know they've been betrayed.

## **Pere Brinker**

### *Master of Psychic Violence*

The first Brinker to function as an earthly agent of the Chaos Boys was Jeroen Brinker, who in 1634 attempted to use ritual magic to pledge his eternal soul to Satan. His mystic transmission was diverted by an alert chaos operative, who posed as the devil in order to gain Brinker's obedience. After unknowingly subverting the efforts of 17th century Hol-

land's control addicts for several years, Jeroen Brinker was arrested and burned at the stake. He went to his fiery end still content in the delusion that he had loyally served the Great Beast.

His young sons, however, were more perceptive. Although Jeroen had trained them as apprentices in evil, they noticed that their bosses were both more benign and stranger than one would expect hosts of hell to be. The Chaos Boys revealed their true nature to the sons, who went on to found a dynasty of Control-fighters. As generation followed generation, the Brinkers became less human, developing hyper-real attributes.

Pere Brinker is the most single-minded of Al Amarja's Cut-Ups. He exhibits no sense of humor whatsoever, which is unheard of in a Chaos operative. Cold and calm, he is the least likely to underestimate or forgive a foe. He treats his mother with immense respect and has no patience for the failings of his brother. He's uncomfortably direct in conversation, preferring to cut immediately to the heart of any question. Pere doesn't believe in wasting words, and dislikes being in a position where he has to lie.

Although he allows her to believe otherwise, Pere Brinker is still deeply in love with Doctor What. He has distanced himself from her, fearing what might happen if a lover's quarrel gets out of hand — he could end up dissecting her mind. She now treats him as a friend and confidant, which sometimes becomes painful for him.

Dutch man, 34 years old, 180 cm, 75 kg. Roman nose, deep-set eyes, receding hairline, close-cropped jet black hair. Usually wears a plain black t-shirt, black jeans, and motorcycle boots.

**Languages:** Dutch, English, Al Amarjan patois

**Attacks:** 4 dice, X3 damage

**Defense:** 4 dice

**Hit points:** 30 (hyper-real)

## Traits

*Verbal Combat*, 4 dice — The pen may or may not be mightier than the sword, but Pere Brinker proves that the spoken word can cut just as badly as a blade. When facing an opponent he wishes to harm, Pere fixes him in his piercing gaze and begins to deduce basic truths about the dark secrets and contradictions that his opponent's persona depends on. He voices these, precisely choosing the most devastating words and grammar possible. Often his attack takes the form of questions. The opponent becomes so distraught that he finds it hard to maintain his strength, overcome by an urge to simply sink to his knees and weep. His energy sapped, his attempts to land blows on Pere are hampered. His vision is obscured by tears. If he fails to surrender, Pere's verbal onslaught can be so upsetting that the victim suffers a cerebral hemorrhage and dies. (Chooses words carefully)

*Control Freak History*, 3 dice — Pere is a walking encyclopedia of the past operations of Cut-Up enemies, present and defunct. He maintains a computer database on the subject for the benefit of his colleagues, but has committed most of it to memory. (Has the obscurest of control addict factoids at his fingertips)

*ASL*, 2 dice — A year ago, Pere was nearly killed when ambushed by a deaf assassin sent after him by the Le Thuys. Never one to be caught out twice, he's been systematically studying American Sign Language from his first day out of the hospital bed. (Sometimes uses signs as gestures in verbal communication)

*Fear of Intimacy* — Pere won't let anyone get close to him, as he fears the possibly lethal consequences of a heated argument. (Standoffish)

## Story Idea

An Earthling operative is found dead from a cerebral hemorrhage; other clues point to Pere as well. Has he gone bad? It's up to the PCs to investigate. It turns out that the Earthling suffered from psychological dis-



orders similar to a hostage-holding Maniac whom Pere talked into the grave a couple of months back. A Sandman secretly videotaped Pere's assault, recognizing in the Maniac traits of his enemy, an Earthling closing in on his Nightmare ring. He then mailed a copy of the tape to the Earthling, who unsuspectingly popped it into his VCR and was killed. The tape is still in the man's deck. Now the trick is finding the Sandman and pinning the crime on him.

## Claus Brinker

### *Master of Mundane Violence*

As the first Brinker in decades to be born without fringe powers, Claus has always felt inferior to his brother. He has spent his entire life overcompensating. In order to compete with his brother's weird harm-inflicting abilities, he has applied frenzied determination to the study of the known ways for one human being to damage another. In an effort to deny his brother's hold over him, he's become everything Pere is not. Pere is quiet; Claus is loud. Pere carefully considers each word he speaks; Claus shoots his mouth off without regard for the consequences.

Claus is a slightly wayward Cut-Up; a couple of years ago he was suspended for getting involved with a scheme to smuggle grenade launchers onto the island. He was sent to remedial chaos classes at Chaos Boys Central, where he got into more trouble. He is still on probation.

Unlike the Koanhead (p. 27), Claus is not a control addict at heart. He just has a child-like fascination with things that blow up or cause other sorts of mass destruction. This, coupled with his low impulse control, explains his run-ins with the higher-ups. He can't resist picking up a contraband item like a handgun if he comes across one, for example. He yields easily to temptation, and is especially susceptible to a pretty face.

When caught out in one of his poorly-planned scams, he usually finds a way to blame his brother. Pere feels that Claus's behavior reflects on him, and keeps an eagle eye on his brother's activities. This does little to relax Claus' bitterness towards him.

Dutch man, 34 years old, 180 cm, 95 kg, receding hairline, deep-set eyes, long peroxide-blond hair, scraggly beard. Dresses in mismatched Army surplus gear.

**Languages:** Dutch, English, Al Amarjan patois

**Attack:** 4 dice, various weapons

**Defense:** 4 dice

**Hit Points:** 29 (works out)

### **Traits**

*Combat machine*, 4 dice — Claus obsessively studies every form of armed or unarmed combat known to man, and works out with fiendish determination. The only time he shuts his mouth is during a fight, when he locks his full attention onto his enemy and battles on in concentrated silence. (Can't resist listing the full specifications of any firearm seen on TV or in a movie)

*Stealth*, 3 dice — After a two-hour martial arts workout, Claus goes on to an hour of silent movement practice. (Even though he's always squirming about, noise issues only from his mouth)

*Infiltration*, 3 dice — From commando-style location penetration to safe-cracking, Claus is the man to get into an enemy stronghold and out again undetected. (Casually cases any unfamiliar building he enters)

*Inferiority Complex* — Claus is a troubled guy, with more than one flaw. But ultimately all of his problems derive from his feelings about Pere. These include his general obnoxiousness, which costs him a penalty die in social situations, and low impulse control, which makes him behave stupidly whenever he thinks he's being challenged, or when he has a chance to scam an illegal weapon. (Loud-mouth)

## Story Idea

A simple episode of downtime becomes a crisis when Claus accompanies the PCs on a night out. He steps on the toe of an equally psychotic Aries Gangster. Words are exchanged. Not long afterwards the group finds itself in furious flight out of the barrio, pursued by dozens of whacked-out Vikings howling for blood.

## Mrs. Brinker

### *Cut-Up Nurturer and Caregiver*

Though literally Pere' and Claus' mother, Mrs. Brinker (she never uses her given name) has become surrogate mom to the whole unruly crowd of Al Amarjan Cut-Ups. She doesn't go out on missions herself, but is invaluable to the group because she takes care of all of the mundane essentials of living that the others are too scattered to handle. Chaos Boys are rarely good at keeping a hideout clean or balancing a check book.

Mrs. Brinker takes the hyper-reality of experience at Cut-Up HQ in stride. She's been looking after control-fighters for four decades now, ever since she was courted as a young woman by a charming Dutchman named Jacob Brinker who could turn invisible at will and communicate with household appliances. By this point, she becomes more perturbed by persistent moldy grout than the sudden materialization of a talking tarantula at the dinner table.

Mrs. Brinker also seems oblivious to the constant whining of her son Claus, who views his old-fashioned mom as an embarrassment. If anything, she tends to lavish more attention on him for it — after all, Pere has his act together and doesn't need it. (Some other members of the group think Claus would be better off without so much forgiveness, but none would dare risk hurting her feelings by mentioning the subject.) She's the only one to see through Pere's pretended romantic disinterest in Doctor What; when given the chance,

she'll subtly try to maneuver them into situations where they're alone together.

Dutch woman, 66 years old, 150 cm, 70 kg. Wears her gray hair up in a bun; bifocals hang from her neck on a silver chain. Prefers print fabric dresses in pastel colors. Sensible shoes.

### Traits

*Aura of Sweetness*, 4 dice — Mrs. Brinker is such a sweet old lady that the most black-hearted villain finds it impossible to even consider harming her. She can find something in common even with robots or incomprehensible aliens. Shopkeepers never swindle her; Peace Force officers tear up her parking tickets. She can calm down distraught Control Freak victims and convince potential suicides to keep on living. (Has apparently inexhaustible supply of milk and cookies)

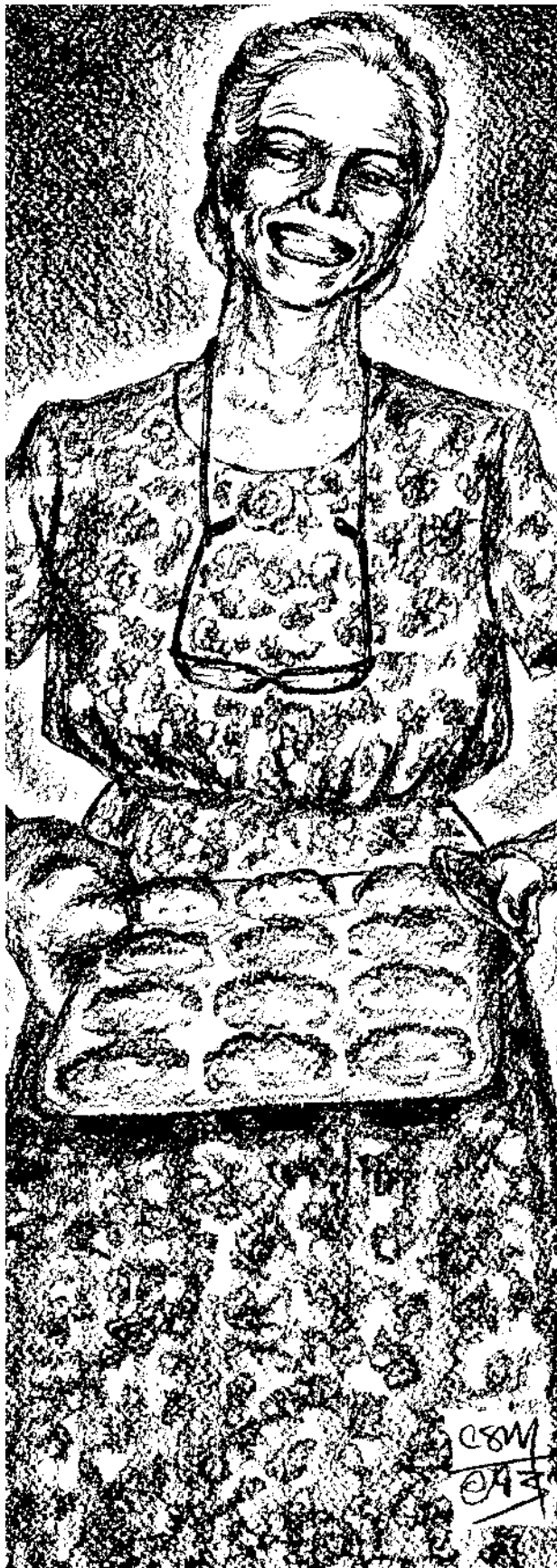
*Household management*, 3 dice — This covers everything from the obvious cooking and cleaning to operational budgeting and smart shopping. (Immediately attacks smudges or spills)

*First Aid*, 3 dice — Though not a doctor, her years of living with Chaos agents have taught her everything she needs to know about looking after minor scrapes, cuts and sprains. (Her purse includes a well-stocked first aid kit)

*Noncombatant* — Just as others find it impossible to harm her, Mrs. Brinker could never bring herself to participate in an act of violence — no matter how justified. (Won't touch weapons, even if they do need a good dusting)

## Story Idea

**The Ransom of Mrs. Brinker:** The PCs return to Cut-Up headquarters to discover that Mrs. Brinker has been kidnapped by forces unknown. After getting into various scrapes while fruitlessly searching for clues to her disappearance, they're approached by a harried Avan Bloodlord. He apologizes for taking her, and offers any settlement if they'll



just take her back. Seems her chronic niceness has been softening Glorious Lord morale. Upon arrival at the Satanists' Lair, the PCs find Mrs. Brinker supervising contractors as they redecorate the place into a "country kitchen" look.

## Robert "Doc" Cross

### *Cut-Up Recruiting Officer*

Doc, as his friends call him, is a reasonably successful author of adventures and supplements for role-playing games. He tends to specialize in writing for game systems that are either humorous or offbeat. He also writes for gaming magazines and apas (amateur press associations). It was, in fact, via his apa writing that he first attracted the attention of the Chaos Boys. While attending a gaming convention, Doc was approached by a young woman who he would later know as Doctor What.

She said, "Undulating chaos with ratcheting hedgehogs."

Without missing a beat, he replied, "You bet! And snakeskin mornings whistling, too!"

From then on, Doc was a Cut-Up. He moved to Al Amarja a few weeks later.

Doc lives in a large apartment near the Plaza of Flowers. He shares this apartment with an astounding variety of pets, shelves of books and role-playing games, stacks of records and CDs, 1,264 bandannas, countless toys and quite possibly the best equipped kitchen on Al Amarja. He has guests over several times a week, often to role-play or playtest his works in progress. Other nights, he can be found hanging around various places in the Plaza of Flowers.

Doc's principal duty as a Cut-Up is to scout out likely recruits or useful normies at gaming and science fiction conventions. He has been extremely successful at this, mostly through running games of a decidedly off-the-wall nature. In addition to his recruiting duties, Doc also leads the odd chaotic comedy

raid on overly serious control freaks — the less deadly ones, that is. Cream pies, seltzer bottles and banana peels feature prominently in these raids. Televangelists and politicians are his favorite victims.

Although Doc is normally a freewheeling, fun-loving guy, that all changes when he sees a child or animal being abused. With total disregard for his own safety, he dashes to the victim's aid. This usually means that the abuser ends up bleeding profusely from multiple wounds or, if Doc really loses it, dead. Fortunately, this doesn't happen too often.

For the past several years, Doc has been amassing huge amounts of words and phrases that have to do with cartoon characters. When the time seems right, he plans to dump them — along with several boxes of cartoons on videotape — into the Cut-Up Machine. If all goes well, he hopes to create an opening between Al Amarja and the Tooniverse. For Doc, this would be like finding a doorway to Heaven.

White US male, age 39, 177 cm, 125 kg, long reddish-blond hair, red mustache, large silver hoop earring in left ear, always wears glasses and a bandanna headband. Dresses in jeans, t-shirts and red hightop sneakers.

**Languages:** English, some Spanish

**Attacks:** 3 dice, X2 damage (knife)

**Defenses:** 3 dice

#### **Traits**

*Game Writer/GM*, 4 dice — Part of being a game writer/GM is the ability to create new personas and act them out, speak in a variety of voices/dialects, create convincing stories (or lie well) and deal with the unexpected in a rapid manner. (Tells great stories)

*Good Fighter*, 3 dice — Years of traveling and hanging out in rowdy places have taught him how to take care of himself. (Always carries a knife.)

*Funny*, 3 dice — Doc's outrageous sense of humor has won him lots of friends and saved his butt when his fighting skills wouldn't have. (Always joking)

*Berserk* — If Doc sees a child or animal being hurt, he is capable of a murderous rage — roll two dice plus penalty to remain in control. If he avoids the rage, he'll be nice and calm as he merely dishes out severe wounds. (Growls when he hears about child/animal abuse)

## **Story Idea**

PCs wishing to contact the Cut-Ups will be able to find out fairly easily from the Al Amarjan grapevine that this Doc Cross fellow is the man to see. He is inundated not only with nuisance requests but with would-be infiltrators from Control, and has adopted a standard method of screening out unsuitable candidates — he invites them to play a role-playing game, with himself as GM. Those who play in a fun, loose manner get an introduction to the other Cut-Ups. Powergamers and the humorless are politely turned down.

Use this as an opportunity for a mind-bending break from your OTE series. Pull out a scenario from another game and run it, as Doc. (A certain cartoon RPG published by a company of friendly folks based in Austin, Texas, would be ideal, but anything will do.) You'll be a GM running a role-playing game in which a GMC, Doc, is running a role-playing game. And your players will be playing PCs playing PCs of their invention in that game. Make sure they — and you — stay in character — or rather, characters. If your PCs play in a manner that entertains Doc, he'll introduce them to the Cut-Ups.

Later in your series, when the PCs are traversing alternate realities, dump them into the campaign world of Doc's scenario, where they meet their PCs as flesh-and-blood (or celluloid-and-ink) entities. If they get back, Doc will be very interested in finding out how to get to this alien dimension.

## The Andalusia Dog

### *Cut-Up Cloak*

The Andalusia Dog (a.k.a. The Andalusian Dog, a.k.a Andy) is one of the Cut-Ups' foremost information-gathering operatives. With his four legs, wagging tail, and cheerful bark, he arouses little suspicion as he prowls the streets of the Edge in search of intelligence. Andalusia is often assigned to trail persons of interest to the organization; when not following a specific target, he rambles about eavesdropping, touching base with his contacts, and begging for the occasional scrap. Many Cut-Up operations begin when Andy overhears details of a Control Addict plot while making his rounds.

Andalusia is a bit of a ladies' dog, with many paramours about the city. He's sired countless litters, hoping to one day father a sentient pup he can train to carry on his work. So far he has been without success, but he's always willing to give it another shot. The gene for canine intelligence is recessive; smart dogs are especially rare because the Pharaohs kill any they run across. Andalusia's ancestors were the loyal companions of the Glugs at the height of their civilization; when the Pharaohs suppressed the Glugs they captured and slew almost all the intelligent dogs. Those smart dogs who avoid the watchful eyes of Pharaoh quislings usually end up involving themselves in conspiratorial groups of one stripe or another. The Chaos Boys have always welcomed them: Andy's father served on their behalf in Vietnam during the sixties and seventies. Less idealistic types veer towards the Movers, attracted by their dominance structure — which appeals to canine pack psychology — and their opposition to the Pharaohs.

Andalusia is a cheerful, happy-go-lucky sort; he gets along equally well with each member of the sometimes-fractious Al Amarja Chaos Boys chapter. He tends to be a wee bit loquacious: after disguising his true nature all day on patrol, he's usually dying for conversation when he meets up with another opera-

tive. He'll contentedly yap away endlessly on any topic you care to name — if none comes to mind, he'll describe his day's adventures in excruciating detail. It's hard to hurt his feelings, but also hard to get him to shut up.

Aside from his official duties, his main interest is in classical music, particularly the harsh, atonal sounds of the Second Vienna School of Schoenberg, Webern and Berg. He has an extensive CD collection and daydreams about conducting Paris' Ensemble Nouvelle Intercontemporain.

Andy was dubbed Brownie by his original owners; after he struck out on his own and joined the Cut-Ups, he adopted a name inspired by the classic surrealist short film *Un Chien Andalou*. He reacts positively to those who catch the reference.

US mongrel dog, 40 cm, 15 kg, medium-length sandy-brown fur, fox-like muzzle and ears, brown eyes, fluffy tail.

**Languages:** English, Al Amarjan patois, some German

**Attacks:** 3 dice, X1 damage

**Defense:** 3 dice

**Hit points:** 14 (small dog)

### **Traits**

*Dog Fighting*, 3 dice — Against humans, he's small, agile and hard to hit. Almost any human attacked by an animal feels an instinctive fear, which also works to Andalusia's advantage: he usually goes right for the throat. He's also experienced against other dogs — both possessive nonsentients keeping him away from their mates, and evil sentients from other conspiracies with more arcane motivations. (Snarls with breezy confidence when challenged)

*Eavesdropping*, 4 dice — Andy is adept at posing as a normal dog while he listens for juicy information. Often his targets end up patting him on the head and feeding him goodies as he scams their secrets. (Scampers about with apparent aimlessness)



*Tracking*, 3 dice — Andy augments his natural sense of smell with deductive reasoning ability; he can figure out where to pick up again when a normal dog would lose the trail. (Sniffs ground like a wine fancier would a fine glass of Chardonnay)

*No Thumbs* — Like any dog, Andalusia can't turn a doorknob, dial a phone, or pull the trigger on a crossbow. He has no trouble with the buttons on his portable CD player, but it takes him ages to wriggle into the headphones. (He's a dog)

## Story Idea

A cool, collected man in an expensive suit approaches the PCs and shows them a poorly-focused black-and-white photo of a small mutt. He claims that he's searching for "this very valuable animal" on behalf of its wealthy owner. In reality, he's the Pharaoh quising in charge of hunting down and killing intelligent dogs, and he's after enemy number one, Andalusia. PCs who know Andy might help lure the hunter into a trap; others may be suckered by the \$25,000 the man is offering and try to find and capture him.

## A Famous Movie Director

### *Famous Movie Director*

A certain famous movie director, as notorious for his battles with know-nothing studio heads and bean-counting completion bond companies as he is revered for the dark, startling visions of his films, is an honorary member of the Cut-Ups. Although he doesn't endanger himself by participating directly in covert operations, he does occasionally drop by the Edge to assist more active members of the mob by serving as a sounding board. He also supplies logistical support and money to the team at times, though he isn't able to marshal the amount of loot available to Claude-Lucien Rouvier (see p. 21). Mostly he acts as spiritual advisor to the group. And of course, he fights the philosophical battle against Control in his movies, which are all

on one level or another parables about Humanity's need to abandon the jackboot of unquestioned rationalism in favor of the glories of the fantastic imagination.

Incidentally, even the OTE book makes the common error of referring to him as British. Although his most famous association is with a defunct UK comedy troupe, and he now lives there, he is in fact American.

US man, age 52, brown hair, prominent roundish cheekbones.

**Languages:** English

### **Traits**

*Filmmaker*, 4 dice — Responsible for some of the funniest, scariest, smartest movies of the seventies and eighties. (Dresses in "I'm so powerful I can look as casual as I want" style typical of Hollywood directors)

*Animation*, 3 dice — Popularizer of animation technique using cut-up images from magazines to create rudely funny juxtapositions. (Grimaces when he sees TV commercials still ripping off his style)

*Logistics*, 3 dice — Bitter experience with the sheer brutal effort required to make a big-budget movie happen has taught him a surprising range of things about organizing, from hiring truck drivers to dealing with adverse weather conditions. Includes lots of contacts from animal trainers to experts on explosives. (Carries black book full of important phone numbers)

*High Personal Integrity* — A flaw in the Hollywood context; studio heads are reluctant to greenlight his pictures because he won't recut them to resemble *Rocky*. (Pained expression when studios are mentioned)

## Story Idea

This GMC is meant to be a connection between the weird world of the Cut-Ups and our own real world, rather than an operative whose battles with Control leave him red in tooth and claw. Have him show up at a party hosted by Doc Cross, or have him call a Cut-Up

PC from a location shoot in Fiji to provide a vital tip.

## The Really Quite Angry Kid

*Cut-Up Oppenheimer*

The Really Quite Angry Kid is the product of a mixed marriage between a human male and a transdimensional parasite. Her mother, feeling she'd been seduced under false pretenses, attempted to keep her away from her father during her childhood. This meant fleeing across the dimensions to keep one step ahead of the pursuing father. The Kid's mother didn't anticipate the effect this reality-hopping would have on her beloved child, who was, after all, an unprecedented hybrid of species thought to be sexually incompatible. The Kid's DNA became imprinted with quantum uncertainty, making her a creature of infinite possibilities.

This gave her some previously unheard-of abilities, but these have come with inevitable balancing restrictions. She can only exist in our dimension during months ending with the letters "y" or "t". (She's affected by the way the months are spelled in the English language because this was her father's mother tongue.) The rest of the time she travels through a dozen other realities, where she is everything from a pastry goddess to a musician with a price on her head. This smorgasbord of experience has made her a passionate advocate of diversity and creative chaos — she hates the Control Addicts who bedevil our plane.

Her handle derives from her ultra-controlled, blasé demeanor. Her relaxed posture and low, mumbly voice make her appear to be lazy and imperturbable. She's continually trying to explain to her allies that she's in a state of perpetual anger at the Pharaohs and Movers of the world: "No, really, I'm just livid right now." "Inside, I'm boiling — honest — I've never been this angry in all of my life as I am right this minute. No kidding."

For several years, the Kid was on a kick of Anglophilia, wearing a deerstalker cap and insisting that her colleagues refer to her as the Rather Quite Angry Kid. Now she has switched back to her original moniker, the Really Quite Angry Kid.

Black woman, apparent age 17, 171 cm, 20 kg, dreadlocks, wears dirty sweatshirts and track pants.

**Languages:** English, Al Amarjan, as well as Gnerust, Siwjnsd, and other extra-dimensional tongues

### Traits

*Sub-Random Tech*, 5 dice — On the Kid's other home planes, science is based on irrationality, not methodical inquiry. As the First Gnerust Law of Interior Scarcity says, "Dive into randomness; below it is the higher order." Sub-Random technology is put together intuitively; although it may not give the result you want, you just might find you get what you need. When she applies the principles of Gnerust or Siwjnsd technology on this plane, the results are slightly more predictable. If she sets out to build an item that does a particular thing, she won't be able to tell in advance what supplies she'll require — except to say that they'll be bizarre. For example, if she decides to create a burglar alarm, she may find herself needing a 35mm camera, the bladder of a Brazilian maned wolf, baobab pollen, a rocket engine, and an adding machine. The result is weird but scientific — once constructed, it behaves in a consistent manner. However, she won't necessarily be able to duplicate the construction process — a second burglar alarm which does exactly the same thing might be made of walnut wood, silk, a TV antenna, aluminum, and barbed wire.

If one of these devices breaks down, she's usually able to repair it — but again, may require weird items not in the original. Anyone without a background in Sub-Random tech simply breaks an item constructed in this way if he tries to disassemble it.

The Kid can also build things through the opposite mental process, starting with a

pile of disparate parts and ending up with a device that does something completely unprecedented. This is how she came up with the Cut-Up Machine and the Collective Unconscious Swizzle Stick. For some reason, no doubt related to the Twelfth Gnerust Law of Jade Scattering, these machines are usually more powerful than the ones constructed with a predetermined function in mind. They're also easier to fix.

The discipline of sub-random tech can be taught, but only in the realms of Gnerust, Siwjnsd, and the ineffable Plane of Decipherment. The Kid is its foremost practitioner in any dimension. (Wears screwdrivers and inexplicable instruments on a tool belt)

*Transdimensional Travel*, 3 dice — The Kid can spontaneously pass between dimensions. She normally does this on a schedule she's bound to (see above). When adhering to her schedule, she rolls against two difficulty dice; otherwise, standard difficulty is 5 dice. When she fails, the winds of metareality blow her off course into another world. (Curses in odd, unpronounceable languages)

*English History*, 3 dice — Although she's become disenchanted with the subject after being treated rudely during a recent London holiday, the Kid has had a long-term fascination with all things British. (Unconsciously quotes lines by English poets)

*2 1/2 Dimensional*, 2 dice penalty — She doesn't quite fulfill all of the spatial requirements for full 3-dimensional status; she's much lighter than she looks, and doesn't have the weight to put behind feats of strength — suffers a penalty die in any such attempt. (Her gait is a peculiar mix of slouch and lightness)

## Story Idea

It's three in the morning on the coldest night of the year. The Kid is hard at work on a device to keep a squad of fascistic ghosts from manifesting themselves in the land of the living. Suddenly she realizes she needs a belt buckle to complete the machine. But not

any belt buckle will do — she needs the pewter death's head which is currently holding up the slacks of Molly, Queen Mother of Baboons. Molly is not likely to part with it willingly.

## C. A. Radford

### *Embodiment of Chaos*

C. A. Radford suffers from an extremely rare chronic disease called Chaos Chancer (the "h" is silent.) This condition means that everything about Radford is in constant flux. Each time C. A. appears, roll dice to determine the origin of his/her condition, personality, appearance, fringe power, professional trait, miscellaneous trait, and flaw.

## Origin

1. The Chaos Chancer is a genetic mutation; although Radford is one of the first to get it, it's becoming more common as the level of disorder in our reality increases.

2. Radford constructed Chaos Chancer as a hypothetical possibility before contracting it. The process of dreaming up this inconceivable theory provoked a reaction on the cellular level, making Radford the first actual victim of this nonexistent ailment.

3. Radford is a former Control Freak who was captured by Chaos Boys several decades back. They tested an experimental weapon on him/her, which worked more dramatically than even they expected — Radford not only defected to their cause, but became the living incarnation of their philosophy.

4. Chaos Chancer is a communicable disease. Radford contracted it during his first sexual experience, with a non-affected carrier of the virus. Radford is still searching for the carrier — not because he/she cares particularly about studying the disease or stopping its spread, but because he/she is still romantically obsessed with the object of his early desires.

5. Radford formulated Chaos Chancer in a lab while working on a chemical weapons

project for the military of his nation. After accidentally contaminating him/herself, he/she fled with the formula, later joining the Cut-Ups in repentance.

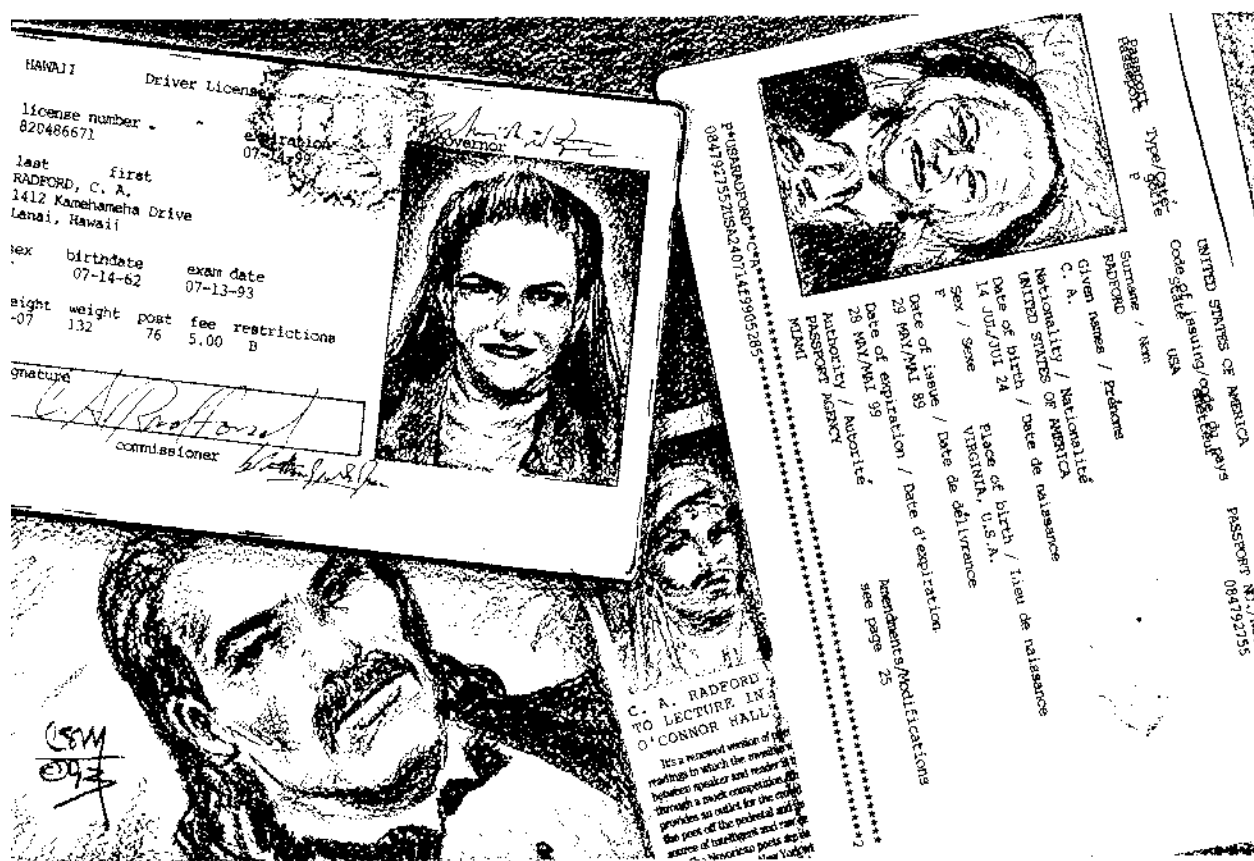
6. Neither Chaos Chancer nor C. A. Radford truly exist. Both are illusions created in this world as a side-effect of the dreams of the Child Vampire God Kraajsdruvul, who lies in stasis in a prison/tomb in the core of the planet Mars. People “meeting” Radford become convinced of its reality and behave accordingly — no sentient being is immune to the effect. Lower animals, however, cannot perceive Radford.

## Personality

1. Though blessed with a subtle, self-deprecating sense of humor, Radford is deeply serious at heart, committed to the Cut-Up cause. He/she sees it as a burden that must be borne, and is always the first to volunteer

for an unpleasant or onerous project. C. A. is the workaholic of the Cut-Ups, always taking on more work than she/he can truly manage. He/she thrives on the workload, though, and would never consider complaining or cutting back. Radford has the dress sense of an underpaid assistant professor of English literature — whether male or female he/she is never seen without a corduroy jacket with elbow patches.

2. Radford sees him/herself as a 19th century romantic hero — soulful, doomed, and alluring. Damnably charismatic, he/she goes through lovers of both sexes like Kleenex. At base, C. A. is simultaneously supremely egotistical and profoundly self-loathing. Everything must revolve around him/her; all bad things that happen in the universe seem intended only to increase his/her divine torment. Radford is the most pessimistic of the Cut-Ups, and is addicted to: 1) alcohol, 2) cocaine, 3) MDA Cubed, 4) blue shock, 5) heroin.



or 6) zorro. He/she has a pretentiously dated fashion sense, dressing like either Lord Byron or Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley depending on current gender.

3. C. A. is the very essence of the charmingly dotty egghead. He/she loves to go on at length in dense academic language about the deep semiotic significance of anything under discussion, from the Superbowl to dryer lint. Radford's thinking seems fuzzy to anyone not versed in the latest intellectual theories, but he/she sees him/herself as straightforward and logical. Ironically, C. A.'s self-image is that of an equilateral triangle — straightforward, balanced, never changing. He/she doesn't understand why his fellow Cut-Ups find this amusing. He/she also doesn't understand basic technical skills of everyday living, like how to operate a pump toothpaste dispenser or program a VCR. He/she dresses very formally, like a corporate executive.

4. Radford is an emotional disaster area — never having developed basic social skills, he/she is continually frustrated in attempts to deal with others. For example, he/she is a romantic klutz, either alienating the subject of infatuation by coming on too strong, or failing to get their attention. He/she gets nervous and tongue-tied in difficult situations — if he/she means to impress someone he/she can be counted on either to accidentally offend them or appear ridiculous. Those he/she wishes to insult or reprimand come away from an encounter thinking him/her a sweet and harmless pushover. Only the other Cut-Ups can see past Radford's topsy-turvy behavior to the lonely and defeated soul underneath; therefore, he/she tends to cling to them in abject dependence. This Radford tries very hard to be fashionable, but always fails — the clothes have just slipped out of style, the colors clash, or a nice outfit will be topped with an absurd accessory.

5. C. A. presents him/herself to the world as a glittering wit, sparkling with witty verbal repartee and a debonair manners — he/she comes off as a combination of Noel Coward, David Niven and James Bond. Fashion

sense is beyond reproach — he/she adopts a timeless, classic look that never seems trendy or careless. On the inside, however, Radford is as cold and hard as a diamond. The problems of others bore him/her — he/she finds it impossible to dredge up sympathy for anyone, no matter how great their suffering. Radford's joined the Cut-Ups because he/she sees the struggle with the Control Freaks as a fascinating game. It's not the outcome of the fight that matters, but the abstract fun of the chase.

6. Radford is an inexhaustible well of human emotion. Overflowing with understanding and positive thinking, he/she will draw a companion into a hug and a pat on the back on the slimmest of pretenses. "I know how you must feel," is C. A.'s favorite phrase; the word "feel" is always drawn out and emphasized as if it is the most important one in the language. Radford own reactions to events are never subdued — he/she weeps copiously when saddened, and rolls around on the floor in uncontrollable spasms of laughter when amused. Radford contends against the Control Freaks because they've closed off their inner children; he/she believes that sufficient good will can heal their wicked ways. This version of Radford favors big, tactile items of clothing — huge ropy sweaters or thick-weave cotton shirts.

## Appearance

1. Iranian man, 21 years old, 163 cm, 68 kg. Muscular, square-jawed, big mustache.
2. Nordic woman, 31 years old, 168 cm, 60 kg. Long brown hair, brown eyes, small-boned.
3. Caribbean/Chinese man, 41 years old, 168 cm, 69 kg. Sharp chin, salt-and-pepper hair, bad teeth.
4. Serbian woman, 39 years old, 158 cm, 64 kg. Straight dark hair, striking eyebrows, large hands.
5. Somali man, 38 years old, 185 cm, 88 kg. Large forehead, small features, broad shoulders.



6. Japanese woman, 69 years old, 150 cm, 50 kg. Wide lips, snow-white hair, wears dentures.

## Languages

English, Al Amarjan patois, plus:

1. Swedish, Yoruba
2. Yiddish
3. Korean
4. Spanish
5. Punjabi
6. none

## Fringe Power

4 dice —

1. *Pipe of Dreams* — Radford smokes a pipe (or, in persona #5, a cigarette in a holder) which gives off magical smoke of random properties. It may allow him to channel an ancient Mayan spirit, to unlock a door, or infect a Control Freak with Chaos Chancer. C. A. is unable to predict or control the effects of the Pipe smoke, though they're always useful if his/her roll is successful. He/she has two slots in his/her power pool. (Permeated with aroma of rich tobacco)

2. *Diatrion Magic* — “Diatrion” is the Ancient Greek term for the mystical number nine. Radford can magically influence anything relating to this number. For example, if nine Net thugs charge him/her, he/she can knock them unconscious or teleport them to Indiana. He/she can divine any phone number containing a nine; if a restaurant check has a nine in its total, the manager feels compelled to give him/her the meal on the house. He/she can accomplish any magical effect which can be summed up in a single sentence containing a nine-letter word as subject or object. I.e., “Reverse that scorecard,” can alter the course of a sporting event. On the 9th, 19th, and 29th of each month, and during all of September, Radford has five dice instead of four in this power. He/she has, of course, nine

shots in his/her magic pool. (Wears a nine-sided polygon pin)

3. *Clothing Disintegration* — Radford can unweave any cloth or fabric, whether natural or synthetic, by gazing at it for 1-6 rounds. Once it starts to go, it falls apart at a rate of one square meter per round. Radford must gaze directly at the cloth in question; looking into a mirror doesn't count. He/she therefore tries to avoid looking directly at his/her own clothing, though sometimes it's unavoidable. This power is mostly useful for generating diversions and distracting opponents, but it works against some forms of armor, too — duro-trenches and bulletproof vests are vulnerable to it. (Clothing looks faintly worm-eaten)

4. *Memographic Photography* — After 10-60 minutes of meditation in a darkroom with a blank sheet of developing paper, Radford can create a photographic image of any past event he witnessed directly. This is invaluable in, among other things, identifying people glimpsed only for an instant, casing locations, and copying restricted documents. A failed roll results in a uselessly blurred picture, a botch creates a clear picture of an inaccurate memory. (Intent gaze)

5. *Elflocks* — Radford can telekinetically manipulate the hair of any being within his line of sight. This is useful in obscuring the vision of opponents and creating dramatic diversions. (Notices and comments on haircuts)

6. *Good Old-Fashioned Magic Sword* — Radford wields a magic longsword which emits an unearthly violet light, wails like a wounded jungle cat, and strikes fear into the hearts of friends and foes alike. (The sword does none of these when sheathed.) The sword strikes for X4 damage and can harm things that are invulnerable to standard weapons. Anyone except Radford who can see or hear the sword suffers a penalty die on all actions requiring morale. (Wears scabbard)

## Professional Trait

3 dice —

(Radford took this profession before coming down with Chaos Chancer; although he no longer practices it, it might come in handy at times.)

1. *Telecommunication Technician* — Can repair and jury-rig phones, TV cable, modems, etc. (Always checks phone for bugs before using it)

2. *Gas Station Attendant* — Knows basic customer service, windshield-wiping, cash register operation, etc. (Never forgets to change the oil on a vehicle)

3. *English Professor* — Specializes in the semiotic analysis of 19th Century Literature, with a sub-interest in the works of P. G. Wodehouse. (Has worn paperback of classic novel in his pocket)

4. *Actuary* — Compiles statistics for insurance companies. (Snorts derisively when statistics are misused in the media)

5. *Jazz Pianist* — Had a fledgling concert career before the Chancer came. (Hums Thelonious Monk tunes)

6. *Cosmetologist* — Worked in the research lab of a major cosmetics firm developing new products. (Tells people if their make-up is smudged)

## Miscellaneous Trait

3 dice —

1. *Shot Put* — Can throw heavy round things long distances. (Right bicep larger than left)

2. *Javelin* — Can throw long sharp things long distances. (Right bicep larger than left)

3. *Card Tricks* — Knows dozens of magic tricks using playing cards. (Fast, delicate fingers)

4. *Scuba Diving* — Accomplished underwater explorer. (Unfavorably compares enemies to sharks, moray eels, barracudas, and so forth)

5. *Speedboat Racing* — Can pilot small motorized boats. (Thumbs nostalgically through Evinrude catalogues)

6. *Skydiving* — Thinks planes were meant to jump out of. (Unconsciously reaches behind him/herself for imaginary ripcord when in danger)

## Flaw

1. *Sexist* — Openly biased against whichever gender he/she currently isn't, costing a penalty die in social situations involving politically progressive types. (Makes chauvinistic comments)

2. *Spiritually Troubled* — Feels guilty because he/she can't reconcile his/her new chaotic status with his/her religious upbringing. Background: 1) Roman Catholic, 2) Presbyterian, 3) Mahayana Buddhist, 4) Sunni Muslim, 5) Wiccan, 6) Scientologist. (Frames ethical debates in religious terms)

3. *Obnoxiously Patriotic* — Can't resist opportunities to put down other countries and trumpet the praises of his own, which often costs a penalty die in social situations. Trumpeted nation: 1) USA, 2) Russia, 3) Germany, 4) Myanmar, 5) New Zealand, 6) Zimbabwe. (Tie or scarf in pattern of national flag)

4. *Stubborn* — Extremely reluctant to abandon a plan once it's set in motion. (Crosses arms frequently)

5. *Missing Body Part* — Has 1) glass eye, 2) artificial leg, 3) hook instead of hand, 4) steel plate in skull, 5) baboon heart, or 6) voice synthesizer instead of larynx. For 1, suffers penalty die on tasks requiring depth perception, for 2, 3, 4, and 5, penalty die on physical actions, on 6 penalty die on social interaction. (Varies)

6. *Suddenly Famous* — Immediately recognized by everyone as a Cut-Up agent; often interrupted and unable to work undercover. (Stared at in public)

## Story Idea

C. A. Radford leaves a message for the PCs to rendezvous with him at 1) the lobby of Cesar's Hotel, 2) D'Aubainne University Library reading room, 3) Bitter & Herb's, 4) Chrome Dome, 5) a lounge in Swaps, 6) the Museum of Modern Life. Upon arrival, they discover through 1) Radford's abandoned pipe of dreams, 2) a talkative oracle, 3) a transmission from Tiffany Trilobite, 4) a computer printout in a garbage can, 5) divination using the Cut-Up method, 6) an unexplained hunch that Radford has been abducted by 1) Le Thuys, 2) Pharaohs, 3) Movers, 4) Glorious Lords, 5) the Democratic Bureau of Investigation, 6) the Kergillians, who have a plan to nullify the Chaos Chancer and lock him into one form — a previously unknown one. The group must find the new, unknowing Radford and reawaken the Chaos within him/her. It turns out Radford has been transformed into 1) a deaf-mute fighter at Sad Mary's, 2) one of Molly's baboons, 3) a duped, know-nothing instructor at the First School of True Sensation, 4) Vanna White, 5) a moody driver for Giovanni's Cabs, or 6) a Safe 'n' Sound security guard stationed at Ahmed's Kwik Klinik.

## Claude-Lucien Rouvier

### *Cut-Up Fashion Designer*

Rouvier is a normal human initiated into the ways of the Cut-Ups by a fellow artist. His forte is aesthetic trickery; the proceeds from his lucrative line of clothing also allow him to perform a role as financier for other Cut-Up operations. He enjoys the spotlight of publicity and the bohemian life. An infrequent visitor to Al Amarja, he prefers to spread more gentle surrealism through the less-prepared waters of European culture. He has a crush on the Really Quite Angry Kid; when he shows up in the Edge, it's because she's roped him into one of her dangerous plans. So far Rouvier has been lucky to avoid trouble, but a recent operation might have raised the ire of the Pharaohs. Someone

wanting to get at the Cut-ups would be wise to snatch Rouvier.

French man, age 36, 175 cm, 68 kg. Handsome; sports outrageous clothes and hairstyles, which change frequently.

**Languages:** French, English, Italian

### **Traits**

*Fashion Design*, 4 dice — Though famous for his crazy runway collections, his mass-market clothing is stylish and sane. (Crazily attired.)

*Rich and Famous*, 3 dice — Can supply money and contacts to the cause. (Immediately recognizable from gossip magazines)

*Hoaxing*, 3 dice — Experienced media trickster. (His business card is printed in invisible ink)

*Counter-Articulate* — Speaks charming nonsense in long, convoluted paragraphs. Suffers penalty die when trying to communicate anything clearly. (Enthusiastically misuses words and ideas)

## Story Idea

Rouvier's latest gimmick — Crustacean Wear — suddenly becomes unavoidable in the ritzy sections of town. This line of clothing involves plastic armor plates resembling the exoskeletons of lobsters, crabs and crayfish. It's all a typical absurd Rouvier joke, which the sensation-hungry have taken to with gusto. But the coral entities who lurk in the lower levels of D'Aubainne International Airport don't get the joke — to them, people wearing Rouvier's clothes look like their ancient enemies, the Krkrkrik. The coral things start to send out synthetic agents to kill any Krkrkrik they find. The PCs must figure out who's trying to wipe out the Edge's fashion plates, and how to stop them.

## Tiffany Trilobite

### *Beloved Children's Cartoon Character*

A burger steps into an electronics store to avoid a sudden rainstorm. Flickering across the store's dozens of TV screens is an animated cartoon featuring a character he recognizes — Tiffany Trilobite, the Precambrian Comedian. Lately it seems the image of this cartoon invertebrate is everywhere — she's packing the shelves in every toy section in America. Her image merchandises everything from drinking boxes to bicycles.

The cartoon now playing is a typical one, entitled "Art Surgery." Dr. Tiffany has been called to the museum to reattach the Venus de Milo's arms. But Venus doesn't like the arms Tiffany comes up with, and must therefore be chased through the galleries. Abruptly, after whacking the Venus de Milo with a chocolate cream pie, Tiffany turns to the screen. Instead of delivering one of her trademark witticisms, she says: "Be careful, burger. Don't listen too closely to news vendors; avoid the hotel called E-Z Sleep. There are a dozen conspiracies who would love to make you their latest pawn, and then chuck you away like a styrofoam cup. And stop blaming yourself for your mother's suicide." Then she turns and sprays seltzer water at Venus, who is charging her, about to brain her with Rodin's "Thinker."

It is unclear exactly how Tiffany attained sentience; if she knows, she isn't talking. She did so three years ago, at the height of Tiffany-mania among North American children. Perhaps their unconditional mass love for her triggered a power spike in the collective unconscious. Tiffany experiences the world through the other side of the television set; she can see anyone who can see her. As both Claus Brinker and the Really Quite Angry Kid are big cartoon fans, she got a prolonged look into the inner sanctum of the Cut-Ups, and heard about the nefarious plans of the Control Freaks. Like any true toon, her allegiance was obvious — she revealed herself to them and was soon accepted as one of the crowd.

Tiff — as her name is sometimes shortened — is rather like Bugs Bunny with an exoskeleton. She's a wisecracking spirit of anarchy who just wants to be left alone to have fun — and must therefore humiliate a gallery of cartoon poops who get in her way. (One new wrinkle in the cartoon universe is Tiffany's spunky feminism.) She deals with Control Freaks the same way — taunting them mercilessly whenever they make the mistake of turning her show on. This has more of an effect than one might imagine, as Control Addicts are notoriously insecure and without a sense of humor. Her smart-alec remarks have rattled more than one agent enough to permit his later defeat at the hands of more tangible Cut-Up operatives.

US cartoon trilobite, height and weight not applicable. Big cute eyes, bright red lips, dozens of legs, carapace.

**Languages:** So far Tiffany has been translated from English into French, Italian, German, and Tagalog. Tiffany acquires new languages with each new market her show is placed in.

### **Traits**

*Ubiquitous*, 4 dice — Tiffany's show is broadcast at least once a day in every place with an English-language TV market, and now she's taking over the world. She can see, hear and smell anything in front of any set tuned in to her show. This gives her access to an enormous amount of raw intelligence — her fans range from the children of many world leaders to Al Amarjan lowlifes. (Drops the names of famous people who watch her show)

*Divided Concentration*, 3 dice — Literally a child of the global village, Tiffany can process all of this information easily. She can even break from the script to talk to different viewers around the world at the same time. For example, she can simultaneously tease a neofascist in Lombardy, comfort an abused child in Detroit, and attend a Cut-Up meeting in the Edge. (Sometimes interrupts herself for late-breaking bulletins)

*Fictional* — Tiffany is unable to physically manifest herself in the real world. She exists only as animation cels, videotape, or electronic signals. And in the hearts of kids everywhere. This means she can serve the Cut-Ups only as a source of intelligence, not as an actual operative. (Cartoon character)

## Story Idea

There's been a break-in at AATV — but the only thing stolen were the film cans containing the station's catalogue of Tiffany Trilobite episodes. The AATV management speculates that the theft is the work of unscrupulous collectors, but the Cut-Ups know better. Obviously somebody is planning something big, and wanted to make sure Tiffany couldn't observe them. But they've tipped their hands — if the PCs can find the missing Tiffany reels, they'll also discover which Control Freak group is plotting what...

## Doctor What

### *Cut-Up Oracle*

Doctor What has limited omniscience but knows nothing of her own past. Several years ago, she was rescued from a burning warehouse by Pere Brinker; she had been drugged, and her hands and feet were bound with duct tape. When she came to, she was unable to recall her identity; nor could she offer any clues as to who would want to kill her. During the interrogation, it became clear that she had a weird fringe power — after a few seconds of contemplation, she could give the correct answer to any question beginning with the word “what.” Questions about her own past were the sole exception to this. (Though another limitation was discovered later — see below.) A few days after the rescue, she was able to remember that she had been a dentist, and all of her training in this area came flooding back to her. The rest remains a blank to this day.

Unable to pursue her unknown enemy, Doctor What joined on with the Cut-Ups, who were able to put her oracular powers to good

use. Gaining confidence, she began to go out on the occasional field mission, learning to mix it up in the rough-and-tumble of Al Amarjan life. She's now far from her days as a shy, traumatized victim — she talks tough and faces trouble with a confident swagger. She's developed a sense of skepticism that makes her mistrust new people. Even with her close associates in the Cut-Ups she projects a façade of emotional distance.

She had a brief affair with Pere Brinker after her rescue. Although she and Pere now have a perfectly friendly professional relationship, their involvement aroused Claus' fraternal jealousy. Claus continues to taunt and belittle her; on several occasions he's baited her into attacking him. Each time another Cut-Up had to step in to prevent bloodshed.

The Doctor changes her look three or four times a year. Currently she's adopted the punk look of London circa 1977, complete with a close-cropped mohawk and safety-pin through her lower lip. Before that she did a garage mechanic look, with grimy overalls and backwards baseball cap. For her next look, she's trying to decide between 1930s Marlene Dietrich glamour, or the fresh-scrubbed look of the All-American girl next door.

?? woman, 150 cm, 60 kg, blue eyes, sharp chin, high cheekbones.

**Languages:** English, Al Amarjan patois

**Hit Points:** 24 (high pain threshold)

**Attacks:** 3 dice, X2 damage (switchblade)

**Defense:** 3 dice

### **Traits**

*Limited Oracle*, 4 dice — When asked a question beginning with the word “what”, the Doctor goes into a brief trance and accesses an unknown mystic information source. The answers are uncommonly reliable, though they are not always precisely detailed.

GM escape clause: If she is asked a question of too great a magnitude, Doctor What suffers a psychic overload which knocks her unconscious. What this means is entirely up to you; probably you'll want to disallow any





questions that a) are of overwhelming cosmic significance or b) wreck your current storyline. The amount of time before recovery depends on the nature of the question. “What are the current locations of all Kergillian agents in the city?” might knock her out for hours. “What are the names of every conspiracy member in Al Amarja?” would put her out for weeks. “What is the true nature of magic?” could cost her months of her life. She does not get the answer to questions that provoke overloads even upon awakening. However, she has learned to identify questions that might do this, and block their transmission to the mystery source. To do this, she rolls against two difficulty dice. (Listens attentively in conversation, as if somehow at risk.)

*Streetfighting*, 3 dice — Ferocity and an all-out disregard for fair play define the Doctor’s style. (Shrieks and growls in combat)

*Dentistry*, 3 dice — Although she doesn’t practice regularly, her head is still full of data about cavities and gingivitis. If she ever gets tired of the anarchy business, she can always

go back to the day job. (Always compliments a nice straight set of teeth)

*Amnesiac* — Leaving aside the emotional cost of her identity crisis, there’s someone out there who wanted her dead, and she doesn’t know who it is. (Changes the subject when asked about her past)

## Story Idea

A line of Doctor What dolls begins to appear in Al Amarja stores — one type for each of her recent “looks.” The Doctor takes it as a threat, but when she has a PC ask her, “What’s the purpose of these dolls?” she keels over and can’t be revived. It’s up to the PCs to figure out who’s behind it and what they’re up to at the same time they protect the comatose Doctor.

# fores OF The Cut-Ups

"If you want a picture of the future,  
imagine a boot stamping on a human  
face — forever."

—George Orwell

Control Freaks hate Cut-Ups even more than they hate one another. At least members of other control-oriented conspiracies behave with a certain amount of seriousness. A rival Mover might have you garroted, but won't embarrass you while doing so. Cut-Ups just don't obey the rules of decency. Or any rules for that matter. This makes them most irritating.

The struggle for power and dominance in the Edge can be seen as an enormous multi-leveled chess game with dozens of players. The contestants are Pharaohs, Kergillians, government cloaks...the usual suspects. No one remembers when the game began; the current players entered at different times, and every so often some leave to be replaced by others. With multiple strategies in play, the game has become extraordinarily slow and complex. Now and again there is an illusion of movement or a major shakeup: when, for example, a major conspiracy embarks on a public offensive or gets one of its networks exposed. But after these shakeups, the remaining Control Freaks jostle into the emptied spaces on the board, like new species quickly evolving to fill fresh ecological niches. The result is another variation on the same old pattern. The game of power in Al Amarja is always a couple of turns from utter stalemate.

This is why sufferers from heavy-duty power addictions are continually involving mere burger in their far-reaching schemes. With all other resources committed to maintaining the stalemate, the forces of Control have to draw in new dupes and operatives in hopes of breaking the log jam. These burger are almost always incorporated into the equilibrium of the stalemate as the neverending game continues — but there's a fresh shipment of them arriving at D'Aubainne International Airport every day.

Cut-Ups, however, are frustrating because they play the game with no intention of winning. This makes their upcoming moves impossible to predict. Any report of a Cut-Up move against your forces might be either an actual threat, or just some bizarre feint designed to waste valuable resources and just generally psych you out and ruin your day. Disinformation is one thing — Chaos agents practice dislogic, making their plans via the random word method of the Cut-Up machine.

Because their agenda makes no rational sense, watchers assigned to keep tabs on them must be extra vigilant. Intelligence on them must be considered unreliable no matter what the source; even if the Cut-Ups understand their own plans, they're unlikely to stick to them. Some operatives, like C. A. Radford, aren't even the same people from operation to operation.

Control agents assigned to Cut-Up monitoring duties usually have one thing in common — they're a bitter, disillusioned lot. The

Chaos Boy beat is a dreaded dead end in most power hierarchies — it's hard and frequently humiliating. Few would-be dictators can bear assaults on their dignity. And the higher-ups in any conspiracy don't like to even think about the Cut-Ups — which means they don't think of the cloaks assigned to watch them when promotion time rolls around.

Some embittered Cut-Up monitors drop out of their organizations. As a result of the exposure to irrationality they suffer on the job, they often start to question their own motivations. Others just become spiteful towards their bosses and defect to the Cut-Ups in order to inflict maximum damage on their former comrades. The Cut-Ups get more legitimate defectors than any other conspiracy. They also have the least trouble with renegades — the Koanhead (see below) being the only notable example this century. Even he became a self-seeking apostate rather than a member of another gang.

If the Cut-Ups have a primary strategy, it's to infect the thinking of their opponents with unanswerable questions. The agents in this chapter are the last line of defense between unquestioned authority and mental anarchy.

## **Giblets Granberry**

*Net Weasel*

Giblets Granberry has spent his criminal career on the fringes of the Net. At the outset, he rose to a level above the common street soldier — and promptly started to kick back and take it easy. His main income comes from drug sales on the D'Aubainne University campus, and a lackadaisically-managed stable of inefficient part-time hookers. Granberry's failings as a career criminal actually serve to protect him from the vicious competition endemic to the Net. No hungrier crook is going to try to edge him out of his marginal position, because he doesn't pull down enough dough to justify the risk of getting rough. Every so often an aggressive Net middle

manager comes along who wants to maximize profits and cracks the whip over slackers like Giblets. But these types usually end up getting promoted before they can clean house, or stabbed in the back by other ambitious rivals. Giblets has long ago learned that if he doesn't stick his neck out, no one will think to chop it off.

However, he does now and again plan a grand scam — if he can make a big score, he can retire to a life of glorious slack. These schemes usually run towards complicated frauds or smuggling deals. They always seem to fall apart for him, but he's always managed to avoid the consequences.

This is because they usually end up falling on his friend Claus Brinker. Giblets is included in this section not because he means any threat to the Cut-Ups, but because Claus is often his own worst enemy. When this is the case, he's usually planning some extracurricular business venture with Giblets. Claus ended up getting suspended after Giblets convinced him to hang onto all the weapons the Cut-Ups confiscated from their enemies. Giblets planned to resell them to various shady groups, and use the profits to finance the smuggling of even heavier weapons to the island. When the Peace Force bust came down, Claus was left holding the bag. Andalusia was able to break him out of jail, and later wipe his record from the computer banks. But the price was a lengthy retraining period at Chaos Boy headquarters for Claus.

The other Cut-Ups have repeatedly warned Giblets to stay away from Claus, but he still dreams of using his pal to strike it rich. For his part, whenever Claus gets peeved with his comrades, he stalks off in search of Giblets for a game of gin and some major kvetching. This is a recipe for further trouble — but until they catch Giblets red-handed, the Cut-Ups are reluctant to squash him once and for all.

Al Amarjan man, 170 cm, 83 kg. Polyester suits; short, dark, uncombed hair; small mustache.

**Languages:** Al Amarjan patois, English

**Attack:** 3 dice, X2 damage (knife)

**Defense:** 3 dice

**Hit Points:** 21

### **Traits**

*Petty Crime*, 4 dice — Giblets knows the easiest, safest ways to make money illegally, and has the contacts to keep out of trouble. (Looks over his shoulder for cops)

*Dirty Fighting*, 3 dice — Specializes in kicks to the groin, punches to the kidneys, and knives in the back. Giblets always tries to talk his way out of physical conflict. This often leaves opponents unprepared for the surprising degree of ferocity he displays when cornered. (Festooned with minor scars)

*Sleazy* — No matter how hard he tries to seem like a smooth operator, Giblets just gives off an aura of indelible shadiness. He's incapable of making a favorable impression on anyone higher than himself on the economic food chain. (Drips sweat incessantly)

### **Story Idea**

In conversation on another topic, Claus Brinker casually mentions the fact that he has a "business opportunity" going that should net him a fair chunk of loot to donate to the cause. If the PCs are suspicious enough to check this out — and they ought to be — they'll find out that Claus is investing in one of Giblets' hare-brained schemes. Granberry has arranged to "fix" the betting on patient survival at the D'Aubainne Hospital and Trauma Center. He's found a nurse who's cross-addicted to virtually every illegal substance known to man, and is keeping him in drugs in exchange for the occasional undetectable kill of a patient who would otherwise recover. A quiet dismantling of this highly unethical project is clearly in order.

## **The Koanhead**

### *Renegade Cut-Up*

Cut-Ups have almost no problem with defections — once a mind is opened to a true understanding of the gambling birdhouse velocity, it's hard to shrink one's worldview back to the petty greed of Control Addiction. This means that when one of their number goes bad, they take it especially hard. No mercy is shown the Chaos Boy who succumbs to a lust for power.

The Koanhead was an indispensable Cut-Up operative during the mid-seventies. But something went wrong in his head at about the time that New Wave bands appeared, signaling the commercialization and dilution of the punk movement. He started to withhold information from the rest of the group, and began to stockpile confiscated weapons of mass destruction in a secret storage locker. It was Claus Brinker — who had his own temptations along these lines — who first began to suspect that Koanhead was going bad. Shadowing Koanhead, Claus discovered that he was assembling a gang of cast-offs from various conspiracies they'd busted. Koanhead was planning to seize the Cut-Up machine and use it to conquer reality. Because the other Cut-Ups considered Claus an unreliable source, they delayed in acting until it was almost too late. The Koanhead did get control of The Cut-Up Machine for a brief time and almost succeeded in his plans to rule our dimension. Though he was eventually defeated and exiled to another dimension, the cost of victory was high. The unofficial Cut-Up leader of the time, Horrors Count, was erased from existence, and The Machine emitted a paradigm shift that swept Ronald Reagan into the White House.

Since that time, Koanhead has twice broken free from cross-dimensional imprisonment to bedevil Al Amarja and its Chaos Boy guardians. In 1986, he used the worldwide anxiety generated by the Chernobyl disaster to overrun the Edge with a legion of radioactive street preachers. Four years later, the

clouds parted and rained walrus. Both times the Cut-Ups narrowly managed to contain Koanhead; they were also forced to blot out most folks' memories of his actions so they wouldn't lead to widespread mental breakdowns. (Lunacy must be parceled out in small doses, or it becomes dangerous.) After the 1990 incident, C. A. Radford's Pipe of Dreams locked Koanhead into a sur-dimension, a destination that wouldn't occur to even a seasoned possibility surfer. (Sur-dimensions are the quantum connective tissue that stitches incompatible realities together.) Although they hope this is the last of him, they aren't taking any chances. Pere Brinker has decided to kill him the next time he shows up.

The Koanhead was originally a human called Jurgen Yamakazi, the child of a Japanese avant-garde playwright and a Swiss psychologist. After spending a drug-addled adolescence in the Swinging London of the sixties, he turned to Buddhism, where he discovered the teaching tool called the "koan." A koan is an apparently nonsensical statement which, when meditated upon, reveals a mystical truth. Jurgen's earlier heavy experimentation with psychedelics had, however, substantially altered his neural pathways, and the contemplation of his master's koans had an unexpected effect on him. He mutated into a walking, talking incarnation of cosmic paradox. He seemed a natural Chaos Boy operative, so Horrors Count quickly sought him out and recruited him. What Horrors didn't realize is that paradox cuts both ways — because Koanhead was the best possible Cut-Up operative, he also had to be the worst possible.

The Koanhead talks like a silver-tongued hipster con man, always assuring one of his trustworthiness in a manner that leads to exactly the opposite conclusion. He loves to play with names, always firing newly-created nicknames at the listener. If he's talking to someone named Rick, he'll call him "Rickster", "Rickula", "Rickdude", "Rickosaurus", "Rickmania", "Tricky Ricky", "Ricky Ricardo and Lucy", "Thick as a Rick", and on and on and

on. He prides himself on never repeating a variation.

Appearance varies.

**Languages:** English, German, Japanese, Walrus

**Attack:** 2 dice, may or may not be armed

**Defense:** 4 dice, Koan power

**Paradox Pool:** 10 shots

### Traits

*Koan Power*, 4 dice — Makes paradoxical statements which alter reality in an unexpected way. For example, if someone lunges at him with a knife, he'll say that "The knife is an expression of love, for without separation, there can be no unity." The knife melts away into massage oil, or the assailant decides to go off to the airport to hand out religious literature.

When pursued by enemies, he'll stop at a locked door and say, "The closed door is better than the open, for behind the closed can be anything." He'll then walk through the door to a random destination and lock it behind him so he can't be followed.

Whenever his die roll is successful, the reality alteration gives the Koanhead essentially what he wants. But he has no control over the nature of the alteration. If he's plunging off a roof, a koan breaks his fall, though he won't be able to choose whether his rescue comes in the form of an updraft of air, a passing feather truck, or the talons of a giant eagle.

A side-effect of his role as paradox incarnate is that his looks are unstable. He can't control this, either; in fact, unless someone looking at him tells him what she sees, he doesn't even know what she thinks he looks like. (Appearance is always the opposite of the viewer's expectations)

*Transdimensional Geography*, 3 dice — Years of experience of scooting through doors to destinations unknown have given Koanhead an extensive, if spotty, knowledge of nearby planes of reality. Upon arrival at a random destination, he can now make



a pretty good guess as to his location. He also knows the customs and hazards of most places well enough to avoid trouble, on the off chance that he wishes to. (Shows off his knowledge of exotic realities)

*Recruit HENCHBEINGS*, 3 dice — Koanhead recognizes his own overweening greed well enough to recognize and exploit it in others. Anywhere he can find sentient beings, he can find weak-minded souls willing to do his bidding in exchange for flimsy promises of petty power. (Comes on like a snake oil salesman)

*Power Mad* — The Koanhead's lust for universal domination is the very essence of his being; in the end, his grand schemes fail because he can never resist overreaching himself in the quest for one last fistful of power. (Gloats, giggles maniacally and delivers long speeches when he should be noticing his opponent wriggling free, sneaking up behind him, etc.)

## Story Idea

Unable to free himself from his extra-dimensional prison, the Koanhead manages to use his paradox power to free history's most notorious assassins from their respective hells and plunk them down in Al Amarja, each one imprinted with the mental image of a Cut-Up he must kill. Hassan El Sabah, John Wilkes Booth, Kreepton of Desma, and several popular fictional villains set about completing their missions. The weak link in the chain is Lee Harvey Oswald, who would prefer to spend his time proving that he was framed for the JFK killing by Cell Z Movers. Oswald approaches the Cut-Ups to warn them of Koanhead's plan and describe the assassin assigned to each PC.

## Evan MacDonald

### *Renegade Neutralizer*

Evan MacDonald hates the Cut-Ups because they refuse to conform to his conception of rational reality. He has vowed to destroy their organization by exposing it as the fraud

it is. After all, there really are no such things as talking dogs or the ability to cause cerebral hemorrhages simply by saying cruel things. The worldwide flap of reports about this Tri-lobite cartoon character talking to people is just another example of mass hysteria. All of the rumors surrounding the Cut-Ups are just that — foolish rumors invented by drug-addled mystics or religious charlatans. The Cut-Ups probably started as an urban myth, and now frauds like Doctor What and Claude-Lucien Rouvier have taken on their roles. It'll take a dedicated, dogged man to fight this newest flash-flood of nonsense to come roaring through the always-widening cistern of human gullibility. A man with an ever-critical gaze, an inexhaustible supply of fortitude, and a complete grasp of the simple truth. A man like Evan MacDonald.

MacDonald was for many years the head of the Edinburgh chapter of the Society to Crush Outrageous Obfuscations of the Paranormal. SCOOP is known worldwide for its efforts to debunk the claims of channelers, faith healers, UFO abductees, Bigfoot researchers, and parapsychologists. Its journal, the *SCOOPtical Enquirer*, can be found in the periodical sections of most respectable libraries, including that of D'Aubainne University. They do much good work, especially in exposing fraudulent prophets and psychic surgeons.

Because of this good work, the Neutralizers sometimes approach and recruit SCOOP investigators, hoping to bring them aboard their own organization. This must be done carefully, because it involves shattering the central paradigm of the SCOOPers — telling them that, obscured by layers of fakery and disinformation, there really *are* supernatural beings out there, ones that seek to harm humanity and must therefore be neutralized. In a way, the goals of the two organizations are similar — both seek to expunge belief in the supernatural from the popular consciousness. One does it to protect society from false belief, the other from the truth.

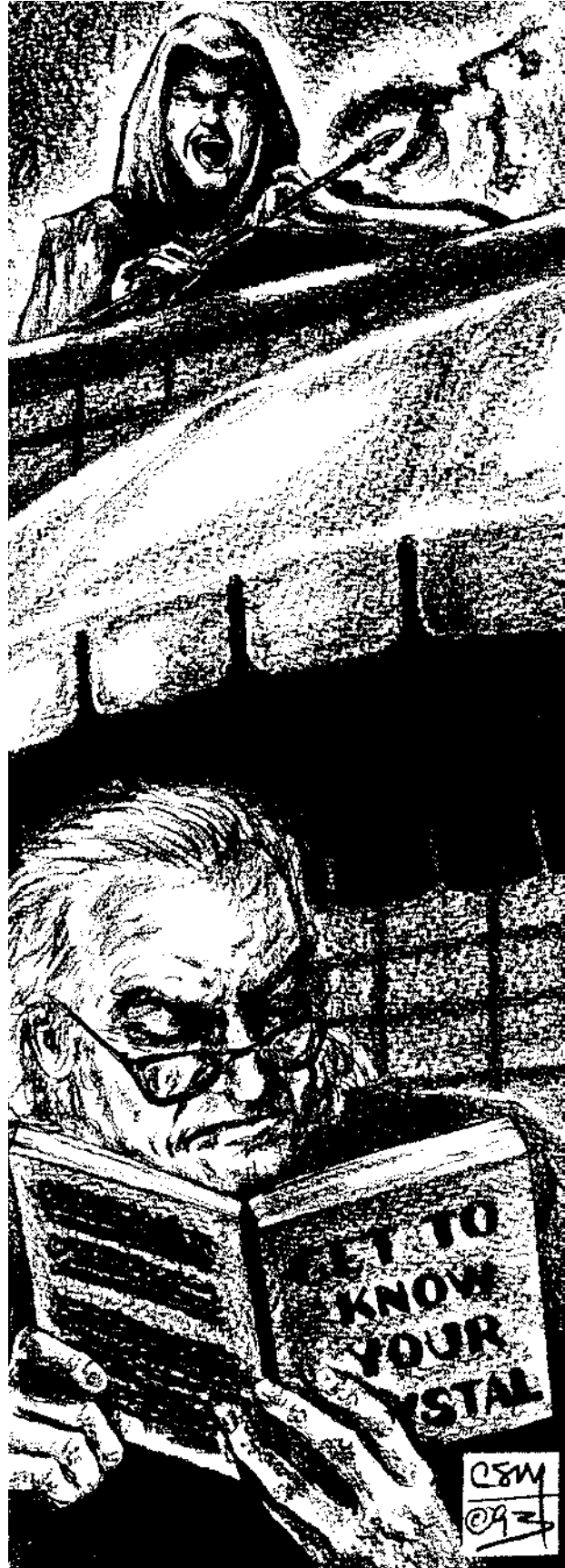
The UK wing of the Neutralizers approached MacDonald after he began to

achieve media prominence deriding the crop circle phenomenon. They offered him what seemed to be an academic position — but was really a Neutralizer job. Then they carefully began to prepare him for the awful truth.

No amount of preparation would have helped. MacDonald is so certain of his beliefs that he rejected every single piece of evidence presented to him. Even when a Neutralizer mage summoned a trapped demon in front of MacDonald's eyes, the man was incapable of accepting the evidence. (It didn't help that, for some reason inexplicable to the mage, the summoned demon was oddly shriveled and immobile, looking rather like a half-melted G. I. Joe action figure.) MacDonald angrily accused his new employers of having gone soft in the head, and stalked out of headquarters. He took the file on Cut-Ups — which for some reason bothered him more than anything else he had read — with him.

Although they're not exactly allies, the Neutralizers and Cut-Ups rarely get in one another's way. The Cut-Ups don't, after all, want to convert the entire population of the planet to their ways. They just want to keep tipping the balance so that Control Freaks don't end up in charge. When Cut-Ups do use fringe powers in public, the results tend to be so strange that even devout believers in crystals and rune-throwing don't believe their eyes. On the other hand, the Cut-Ups usually appreciate the work done by Neutralizers, since the evil sorcerers and mutant vampires they tend to go up against are also usually big-time Control Freaks.

The Neutralizers' folder on Cut-Ups was intended solely for informational purposes. But MacDonald decided that they were the worst possible example of creeping lunacy, and had to be stopped. He hopped the next plane to Al Amarja, where he has been a low-level thorn in the Cut-Ups' side ever since. At one point, owing a favor to Mrs. Brinker, Islam Petri took MacDonald aside and tried to convince him to lay off. Since MacDonald thinks the Neutralizers are just as dangerously irrational as the Cut-Ups, he had little



success. At the moment Petri is trying to convince Neutralizer HQ that they should do something about MacDonald; since his anti-magical powers end up inadvertently eliminating supernatural menaces now and then, his superiors have been dragging their feet in coming to a decision on this.

Scottish man, 62 years old, 195 cm, 90 kg. Balding, white hair, large dark-framed glasses, tweed jackets and brown corduroy slacks.

**Languages:** English

### **Traits**

*Disbelief*, 4 dice — Ironically, MacDonald himself has unknowingly developed a mental fringe ability which is useful against both magical and psychic powers. His certitude in the unreality of such powers is so intense that he emits a psychic damping field that cancels out any uncanny energies in his vicinity. This is why psychics fail to perform in his presence: even the real ones find their spoon-bending or channeling skills impaired when subject to his field of disbelief.

If they fall sway to MacDonald's aura of certainty (i.e. his die rolls exceed theirs) the Cut-Ups find their abilities severely proscribed. Andalusia is unable to speak in his presence. Pere Brinker finds his emotional defenses too strong to verbally penetrate. The Really Quite Angry Kid's devices go on the fritz if he examines them. Although MacDonald can't alter the effect of Mircea's sculptures on others, they don't move him to question anything.

For the damping effect to work fully, MacDonald must be consciously aware of the attempted use of a talent he doesn't believe possible. For example, if a hoodoo woman from the Mississippi Delta told him she was putting a curse on him, the curse would have no effect; his loud scoffing would activate his anti-magic field. But if she just went up to her room and started poking a hex doll without his knowledge, he'd feel the effect of the curse. Even in cases such as this his disbelief can be somewhat useful. MacDonald always finds a rational cause for any situation. Here, instead

of figuring he's being magically assaulted, he'd assume that he's having an attack of arthritis. Thinking makes it so — the hex turns into a mundane flare-up of joint pain. (Favorite word: "Nonsense!")

*Stage Magic*, 3 dice — Before reaching prominence as a media debunker, MacDonald was a stage illusionist, specializing in small-scale sleight-of-hand: cards, metal rings, colored handkerchiefs, ball and cup tricks, and so on. He never hit the big time, because his dour presentations lacked the flair and wonder audiences like with their magic. He finds his skills come in handy in spotting fake psychics who use misdirection rather than mind power. (Long graceful fingers)

*Investigation*, 3 dice — MacDonald is especially good at library research, finding scientific data to counter the pseudoscience of paranormal enthusiasts, or using newspapers on microfilm to expose the unsavory pasts of supposed mediums and channels. Personal interviews don't usually go so well for him — see below. (Smells like old books)

*Rude*, penalty die — MacDonald's social skills leave a little to be desired. He believes that absolute certitude is the only necessary virtue, and is always bewildered when people react poorly to his contemptuous dismissal of views that don't match his own. (Refuses to shake hands with intellectual opponents)

## **Story Idea**

The PCs awaken one day to discover that a coup has toppled the Al Amarjan government. Ritual sorcerers, probably Hermetic Movers, have imprisoned the D'Aubainnes and turned the buildings of the city into towers of writhing insect exoskeleton. They've brought magic back to the planet in a big way, and plan to use the island as a staging ground for world domination. Their juju is mighty enough to shut down even the Cut-Up Machine, turning it into an only slightly useful crystal ball. All seems lost, unless a PC gets the bright idea of using one adversary to cancel out another. If they can get Evan Mac-

Donald into the Hermetics' sanctum sanctorum, his disbelief power will shut down their mystical power battery and return the situation to normal. The problem is convincing him to cooperate: he doesn't see that anything unusual has happened.

## Mary Olekobaai

### *Mover Cloak*

Mary Olekobaai worked hard for her scholarship at D'Aubainne University. Born into a community of nomadic herdsman, she overcame the expectations of her own family to educate herself and join what she considers to be the modern world. Immersing herself in campus life, Mary's brilliance and obvious ambition caught the attention of university administrator Erica Offringa, a mid-level Vornite Mover. Erica sponsored Mary for initiation; Mary must have impressed somebody important in the cell, because she was quickly assigned to a "vital post."

Mary continues to maintain a cover at the university — she's now a teaching assistant with the African Studies Department. (More experienced grads wonder how she got bumped into line for this coveted spot.) Her real job, however, is to take over and maintain an existing, if rather frayed intelligence network.

This network has been abandoned by a gentleman named Qiu Jinchu, previously in charge of keeping tabs on the Cut-Ups for the Movers. Jinchu hanged himself after becoming convinced that his shoes were talking to him. (The Movers have told Mary only that her predecessor has been "reassigned.") She has the formidable task of piecing together Jinchu's network of contacts, winning their confidence, and getting the intelligence flowing again.

She has been given a full briefing on the Al Amarjan Cut-Ups, though all the information is at least two months stale. She finds them intriguing and looks forward to learning more. Mary is sure she can turn them into

obedient Vornite initiates in time. In this, she's a typical newbie on the Cut-Up beat.

Mounia Qutbuddin (see below) was aware of Jinchu's network; some of her informants doubled for him as well. She's instructed them to be prepared for the approach of his replacement, and to let her know when it comes. She sees Mary as herself forty years ago; Mounia hopes to ruin her immediately and spare her a few decades of disillusionment. Though freshly elevated from burgerdom, Mary may not prove so easy to crush.

Masai woman, 24 years old, 180 cm, 85 kg. Striking mane of coppery hair, graceful, wears suede bomber jacket over long, flowing dresses.

**Languages:** Masai, English

### **Traits**

*Manipulation*, 4 dice — Knows how to not only get what she wants from people, but convince them that it was her idea all along. People want to please her. Mary's striking appearance — tall, exotic, leonine — is a big part of her strategy. Heterosexual men and gay women want to worship her, though they can't imagine summoning up the nerve to touch her perfect form. Women (and gay men) want to become her, to emulate her mastery of men. Asexuals are struck by her as an abstraction of beauty and control. (Goddess-like)

*Upward Mobility*, 3 dice — Instinctively detects the right people to impress, and identifies the smoothest path to advancement. For example, she's realized that Erica Offringa has gone as far as she's going to in the Mover hierarchy, and that the Cut-Up beat is a potential career cul-de-sac. Current goals are twofold: she needs to identify her unknown patron above Erica and suck up to whoever it is in a major way. And she requires a quick, dramatic success in her new post that will get her promoted out of it. To a nose like Mary's, power and influence has an aroma greater than any cologne. She can spot powerful people — from her own conspiracy

or otherwise — even when they're trying to maintain a low profile. (Hungry gaze)

*Aura of Distance*, 3 dice — This is not a fringe power, but simply the image she projects of a lovely, unapproachable creature. Creeps and lowlives feel inhibited looking upon her, and don't dare catcall or make passes. Shopkeepers are afraid to assault her dignity by asking her to put out a cigarette or get something herself. Even enemy operatives don't think to lay a glove on her: they'll accept her polite surrender and just keep her prisoner, never considering anything so gauche as gratuitous torture. For her part, she keeps her noncombatant status by allowing herself to be held safely captive until she can convince someone to let her out. (Dignified carriage)

*Overconfident* — Mary is just as enraptured by herself as are the people who meet her. Her career path has been meteoric to date, but the Cut-Ups always interrupt a straight line... (Minimizes the capabilities of others)

## Story Idea

In separate incidents, known Cut-Up associates like Doc Cross and Claude-Lucien Rouvier are roughed up in public by seeming normies. The PCs are followed by others. When apprehended, these mild-mannered accountants and data-entry clerks steadfastly refuse to explain the reasons behind their actions. It's up to the PCs to come up with the common denominator between them.

It turns out that they're all patrons of Confessions, a new nightclub in the Sunken Barrio owned and operated by Mary Oleko-baai. The joint is a bar outfitted with row upon row of old confessionals; customers get the illicit thrill of stepping into a booth and revealing their darkest secrets to unseen strangers. Then they get to step into another booth and forgive the unseemly confidences of another unknown person. Of course, the booths are all bugged. Mary sifts through the tapes to find true and utterly damning revela-

tions, which she then uses to blackmail her patrons into becoming her operatives. If the PCs can come up with a way to put Confessions out of business, they'll deprive her of the steady stream of expendable surrogates she's using to keep them off-balance.

## Mounia Qutbuddin

### *Pharaoh Quisling*

Mounia Qutbuddin has been in her post as the Pharaohs' chief expert on the Al Amarjan Cut-Ups for so long that she remembers fighting off the insane nonsense of several generations of the hyper-real lunatics. She looks nostalgically back on the heady days of the early fifties, when she was a young woman reveling in both the newfound freedom of life in Europe away from her strict Syrian family, and her certainty in the imminent rise of her Pharaoh masters. In those days, the Edge seemed warmer, its dirt seemed cleaner, and its low life seemed charming and exotic. The Cut-Ups she was assigned to watch — Dr. Bacteria, Barry Wackerle, The Countess Salz, Noboru Komatsu — seemed somehow quaint and charming for all their naiveté. Life was a delicious combination of singapore slings, clandestine meetings, and plans of world domination.

The life of a quisling went sour for Mounia long ago. It became apparent that the assurances of her masters about the imminence of the final rise were not to be relied upon. She's been loyally in place for decades, and through all that time the rise has always been mere months away. She's concluded that her immortal leaders are never going to make the move — they're too conservative, too cautious to take the necessary risks. Although they're as insistent as ever about getting full reports on every last whisper and cough discharged by a known Cut-Up, she's decided that the more the Pharaohs know, the more paralyzed they become.

For a while, Mounia considered defecting. She'd never go to the Cut-Ups; to her, their

incomprehensible antics are an intolerable reminder of the pointlessness of her wasted life. But she has toyed with the idea of going to the Movers or some foreign intelligence agency with what she knows. However, the Pharaohs would try to kill her, and the available rewards aren't worth the trouble. No one can give her what she really wants — the return of her wasted years.

Mounia hates the Cut-Ups and everything they stand for. If given the chance to destroy them, she'd leap at it. She wouldn't bother to get the go-ahead from those fossilized immortals, either — they'd weigh thousands of options as the opportunity slipped through their arthritic fingers.

Syrian woman, 69 years old, 155 cm, 64 kg. carelessly cropped, thinning white hair, aquiline nose, wrinkles and liver spots waging war on a once-lovely face.

**Languages:** Arabic, English, Al Amarjan patois

### **Traits**

*Intelligence Gathering*, 4 dice — Maintains a well-oiled network of contacts who supply her with great info on Cut-Up activities, never suspecting her true allegiances. (Good listener)

*Cut-Up History*, 3 dice — Remembers past Cut-Up operations better than the Cut-Ups themselves. (If you somehow manage to get her opened up, she has a staggering command of names, dates, and vivid sense descriptions)

*Pharaoh Politics*, 3 dice — Decades of experience with her distant bosses have shown her how to figure out what's going on at the upper echelons of the organization based on the slim clues contained in her orders. (Asks incisive questions)

*Frail*, penalty die — Mounia is wearing down physically as well as mentally. She suffers a penalty die on all physical actions. (Moves slowly)

## **Story Idea**

Pere Brinker receives a tip that a conference of Pharaohs is scheduled at an airport hotel. A famous prisoner of conscience, supposedly under house arrest in a third-world dictatorship (one evidently controlled by the Pharaohs) is to be shipped to this symposium to be a demonstration piece in a lecture. The topic is mind-control — specifically, how to break the spirit of even the most courageous defender of freedom; a Pharaoh called Antonio Truran will mutilate her psyche for the edification of the assembled group. The Cut-Up response is obvious — rescue the prisoner before the address begins.

There's a twist — Mounia Qutbuddin was responsible for receiving the smuggled prisoner. She has arranged for a Kwik Klinik doctor loyal to her to plant a remote-control bomb in the activist's chest cavity. Mounia, who isn't invited to the lecture, is behind Pere's tip. She hasn't yet decided whether she'd rather blow up a roomful of Pharaohs or a Cut-Up rescue squad. It all depends on her mood at the time.

## **Rex**

### *Le Thuy Theorist*

Rex, the Andalusia Dog's evil half-brother, is larger and darker than his Cut-Up counterpart — his mother was a black lab. His coloration is apt: Rex is the modern equivalent of the black dog of English folklore, a four-legged harbinger of ill omen.

Abused by his master while a pup, Rex's growing intelligence led him towards a desire for freedom and revenge. After nudging his drunken owner over a cliff face, Rex hopped on a cargo ship and began a brief tour of the world. During his travels his contempt for humankind deepened. Perhaps if he had met a noble glug at this point, things would have turned around for him. But he didn't.

Remembering the intense pleasure he felt as his owner screamed towards his death, Rex began to seek out a particular type of human companion. These new friends were always



young males, loners and losers — usually displaying symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. Rex befriended them, and eventually, making sure they were alone together, revealed his sentience. Refining the technique, he found it worked best to claim to be the devil. Most of his new pals had been waiting all their lives for a little demonic contact. It usually took less than a month to convince his friends to start their murder sprees. Although this happened dozens of times, the most famous instance was a serial killer in New York who specialized mostly in kissing couples.

Rex continued his rambling, and a few years back found himself in Vietnam, where he met up with a frustrated potential nihilist genius named Tramh Le Thuy. Le Thuy was eking out a miserable living as an itinerant salesman, constantly gnawing over a set of disconnected ideas about using hopelessness and entropy for social control. Although Le Thuy did not meet Rex's usual criteria, something about the man's demeanor attracted him. Instead of pretending to be Satan, Rex explained his true nature to Le Thuy, along with

a number of other secrets he picked up along the way.

"You're the first animal I haven't wanted to dismember alive," Le Thuy said.

"I feel much the same about you," Rex confessed. And a beautiful friendship was born.

Long discussions with Rex helped Le Thuy to articulate his nihilistic theories and honed his persuasive skills. Rex persuaded Le Thuy to move to Al Amarja, and the rest is history. Rex is content to keep on wandering, spreading his poisonous message to weak minds throughout the world. He arranges to drop in on the Edge every three or four months to check in with Tramh and see if he has any missions that would be best accomplished by a talking dog.

Rex met Andalusia while on one of these missions. Rex captured and tortured the Cut-Up operative, discovering their shared parentage in the process. Andy's commitment to human freedom troubles Rex; he has always assumed that any intelligent dog would share his beliefs on the irredeemable corruption of



humankind. Rex has a profound need to convert Andy to his way of thinking, but each time they meet Andy's points raise doubts in his own mind. He's beginning to think he should kill Andy before his points start making any more sense.

US dog, 35 cm, 20 kg. Black dog with brownish face and feet; long, blunt muzzle, small flat ears.

**Languages:** English, Vietnamese, some German

**Attack:** 4 dice, x2 damage

**Defense:** 4 dice

**Hit Points:** 28 (densely muscled)

#### **Traits**

*Dog Fighting*, 4 dice — Rex hasn't survived his travels by being a pushover. He's bigger, stronger and meaner than Andy. (Bares muzzle full of impressively big teeth)

*Persuasion*, 3 dice — Rex can get people to do what he wants by playing on their weaknesses. He's also become quite adept at pretending to be demonic. (Smooth, patient voice)

*Psychology*, 3 dice — Good at identifying and exploiting human neuroses and psychoses. (Makes accurate guesses about people)

*No Opposable Thumb* — Like Andy, Rex is incapable of tool use. (He's a dog.)

### **Story Idea**

Dzamilla Chmielinski is a bored normie with a humdrum job at the local bottling plant of a leading soda pop manufacturer. She's a regular attendee at university performance art events and a big fan of Mircea ? and Claude-Lucien Rouvier. Though she's never been approached to become an operative, her apartment is filled with Cut-Up propaganda.

Dzamilla suffers from clinical depression, and in a low moment is approached by Rex. He gradually convinces her to contaminate the Edge's cola supply with Relapse-laced hallucinogens. Over the next few weeks, many nasty incidents occur, including several accidental deaths. Plant security busts her, and she

claims to be executing a disorder operation on the orders of the Cut-Ups. Can the PCs get to the bottom of the matter and repair the damage to their reputation?

## **On the Nature of Control Addiction**

"You don't wake up one morning and decide to be a drug addict...You become a narcotics addict because you do not have any strong motivations in any other direction. Junk wins by default."

— William S. Burroughs

Since these words were published in 1953, contemporary society has come to understand a great deal about the nature of addiction. The study and treatment of addiction is a growth industry. The jargon and philosophical outlook of the twelve-step program is now a staple of Western thought. Its evangelists spread it on the talk shows, its converts wisely describing their former excesses as the TV host pokes his microphone into a crowd of average folks, seeking their mortifying judgment. Addiction to narcotic substances turns out to be merely the tip of an iceberg of compulsions. You don't need a substance to be an addict anymore. Line 'em up: sex addicts, gambling addicts, porn addicts! Fanatical collectors. Role-playing gamers who continue to buy a neverending supply of supplements and sourcebooks put out by money-hungry...Uh, wait a minute. Forget that last one. That's clearly inapplicable. Sorry for the typo there.

We're all addicted to something — if not crack, then cigarettes. If not heroin, chocolate or caffeine. The lucky among us have merely chosen relatively safe things to get hooked on.

Addiction has gone from a pathological condition to a way of life. Consumerism has

crumbled communism and now embraces all humankind — or at least that portion of it with money to ante up for the game. The world plunges headlong into the pursuit of happiness — not happiness itself, but rather the unending search for it. An economy built on instant gratification can sell anything but lasting satisfaction. The body of the junkie consumes junk as a fire consumes firewood. Once it is gone, there is nothing left. More must be obtained. The search must continue. Movement, capture, release, movement, capture, release, movement...We have become fire — we must consume or die out.

We do not Control our destinies. There is no free will, no predestination. We are billiard balls tossed from an airplane, sand thrown into the wind. We construct elaborate theologies and ideologies designed to dissuade us from this horrible truth. Because our minds have evolved to look at what we see and organize it into patterns — so we can conquer our environment and survive in a hostile world — we expect the ultimate nature of the reality to fit some pattern, to contain an identifiable meaning. Our perceptions are useful as a tool for persistence and propagation, but this does not mean they are accurate in any objective sense. There is no objective reality. There is only chaos, and the necessary illusions we construct to navigate our way through it.

Some individuals can handle this essential truth. They accept their perceptions as only that, and revel in the infinite variety of possible experience. They are delighted to be carried on the wind, bounced from one random episode of life to another. They thrive on indeterminacy. They are the Cut-Ups, the Chaos Boys, and their sympathizers.

But most can't circumvent the original wiring of our brains, set up as they are to always find a pattern — whether one truly exists or not. Drop a vial of iron filings on a white tile floor, and look at them for a while. Chances are eventually you'll see something — a face, an animal, an object. This establishes, sadly, that you too are susceptible to Control Addiction. (Or it could be a recruiting message from

Chaos Boys Central — in a chaotic universe, nothing is certain. Including uncertainty.)

For most, a desire to Control begins with a desire to be controlled. As children, we all need the advice and instructions of parent figures. A new little human who learns solely by experience would become dead pretty quickly. We learn the rules before we are capable of reason. When the reasoning faculty develops, we can test the rules and decide when they do and don't apply. But until then we need to be told what to do.

Society gradually weans children from most childish things. It teaches them appropriate decorum in bodily functions. It tells them when to put down their toys and pick up briefcases and toolboxes. It teaches them compromise, and that one's desires must be accommodated to the desires of others. However, many societies don't try to weed out the need to be commanded. Social control is much easier with a compliant populace. Democratic societies need these impulses even more than authoritarian ones, as they rely on the peaceful acceptance of the rulers by the ruled. Shut up and watch your commercials.

It is comforting to be controlled; disaster is not your responsibility. Distressing questions need not cross your mind. Life is simple. There are solid rules to rely on. "I was just following orders."

But what happens when other people start to flout the rules you base your identity on? When they start showing sexual feelings for unapproved partners? Begin experimenting with art that flouts the boundaries of public taste? When they explore those terrible questions you've been working so hard to repress? Don't just sit there — they're breaking the rules, darn it! Action must be taken!

And thus the couch potato state becomes the fascist state. The need to be controlled becomes the need to Control others. The Control addiction begins.

Maybe it starts with banning a book. Or shouting down someone with an opinion you dislike. Or hitting your child. Or your spouse.

You just do it once. You don't quite understand why at the time. Maybe you even feel a little guilty afterwards. But you keep thinking about it. And gradually, your secret heart admits something to itself.

It felt good.

Maybe you should do it again.

But Control is like junk. There's never enough. The more you consume, the more you need to get that high back. The more you control, the more others will question your control. The more they question you, the further you must go to put them down. The further you go, the higher up on the ladder of Control you end up. The higher up the ladder you are, the more people you must command. More people to command means more potential dissenters, more questions to be slapped down. You must move further and further up the hierarchy to get the power to do this. But then you need more power. And more. And more.

No matter whether she calls herself a Mover, or a Pharaoh Quisling, a Kergillian or Le Thuy, a Control addict is a Control addict. The sickness is the same. They just buy from different pushers.

Some addicts seek the restoration of an old order, as do the Pharaohs. Others construct a new thought system to start at the top and trap a whole new category of followers — as do dozens of cult leaders, and anyone who's ever written a political manifesto. Others, like the Kergillians, unsatisfied with the cerebral nature of Control addiction, seek the visceral kick of direct biological control of other organisms — they've turned it into a physical need. The Le Thuys seek the ultimate Control of reducing all life to an abstraction named entropy. And the Movers have turned it into their ideology, wearing their addictions as a badge of honor.

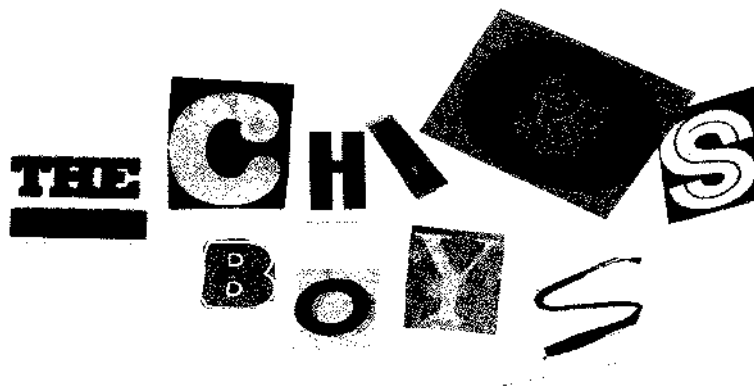
Can Control addiction be cured? Unlike addiction to a physical substance, there is no way to force withdrawal. There is no methadone for Control. Isolate an addict from his conspiracy and put him in a cell, and he will dream of escaping and dominating his captors. Or he will experience a conversion and

seek to serve his captors and rise in their chain of command. Or he will become the führer of the cockroaches and ants that climb the walls of his cubicle. Doubt is sometimes useful as a weapon — but doubt is just as likely to provoke a heightened need for more Control. The questions a Control addict refuses to ask herself are both her fundamental weakness and the cause of her ravening need for more junk.

Perhaps Control addiction will never be eradicated. Susceptibility to it seems to be a side-effect of our basic neural setup. But its worst sufferers must be contained, before they hook another generation of kids on their poison. The Chaos Boys must be forever vigilant.

This vigilance must be double-edged. Someone once said that if you cannot persuade your enemy, you must acquaint his head with the pavement. But that someone was Leon Trotsky, a member of a notorious gang of Control junkies. The Cut-Ups and their kin must not only look for the symptoms of Control in others — they must be careful that they do not become their enemy in their zeal to protect others from him. Blind violence is not an acceptable strategy.

We hope you have been edified by this analysis. Please, however, question its underlying assumptions. Perhaps this entire essay is a shocking display of Control fever, as I try to mold you into following me. Perhaps it is even a manifesto, relying on your passive acceptance to infect you with a thought virus, a vulnerability to Control. After all, it displays the classic technique of the fringe tract. It starts with a current social phenomenon the reader might find alarming and then radically oversells its importance. It throws in pseudoscience, mushing together half-understood bits of neurology and early childhood development to give it an air of undeserved authority. Great care has been given to its internal rhythms, which are more important than its meanings; its forward drive and sweeping cadences may be trying to put you into a trance state, to circumvent your critical access codes and hack directly into your subconscious. You, too, must be forever vigilant.



"A. A violent order is disorder; and  
B. A great disorder is an order.  
These two things are one."

— Wallace Stevens

The Cut-Ups are a local branch of a trans-dimensional organization known as the Chaos Boys. Little is known about them — or rather too much is known about them. Or rather, too much contradictory information is known about them. Or rather, all contradictory information about them is true. Or something like that.

It is easier to understand the Chaos Boys from the outside in. The organization, like most conspiracies, is set up like an onion, or the concentric circles in a tree ring. Or possibly one of those giant fungi that lie beneath entire forests. Or sort of a cross between an echidna and a towel rack — no, forget that last one. It's true but too confusing. Let's stick with the concentric tree ring idea.

The further one goes through the rings towards the heart of the tree, the more chaotic the organization becomes. It starts with the mundane reality we would all recognize and progresses towards increasing strangeness and subjectivity.

The outermost ring of the circle is composed of hangers-on: mostly ordinary people who are into surrealism and free thought. If you've read this far into this book, you fit this description and are therefore part of this circle. Congratulations, welcome to the organization.

The bill for your introductory membership fee will be mailed to you on the next business day. Before her disastrous encounter with Rex, Dzamilla Chmielinski (see p. 36) is an example of this layer of the organization — folks who are generally sympathetic to the forces of creative disorder. They contribute to the organization without being aware of it, beaming anarchic thoughts into the collective unconscious. This background radiation enables many Chaos Boy devices and fringe powers to operate. Artists like Mircea ? (p. 6) contribute more than their share of this by creating works that stimulate the generation of chaos energy in others.

The next ring is composed of those sympathetic souls deemed worthy of active knowledge of Chaos agents. These people are sleepers — civilians who go about their daily lives without getting deeply involved in operations on a regular basis. They may contribute money to their local Chaos cell, or may knowingly disseminate propaganda to further its philosophical outlook. Cell members are aware of these sympathizers, and may call on them to assist in specific anti-Control actions. They are not generally expected to risk their lives or sanity to execute these tasks. Claude-Lucien Rouvier (p. 21) is an example of this membership level.

The next ring is the local cell, of which the Al Amarjan Cut-Ups is a prime example. At this point, there may be a structure within a structure — the organizational set-up of the local group. (This is where the echidna/towel rack concept comes in handy, but...well, never

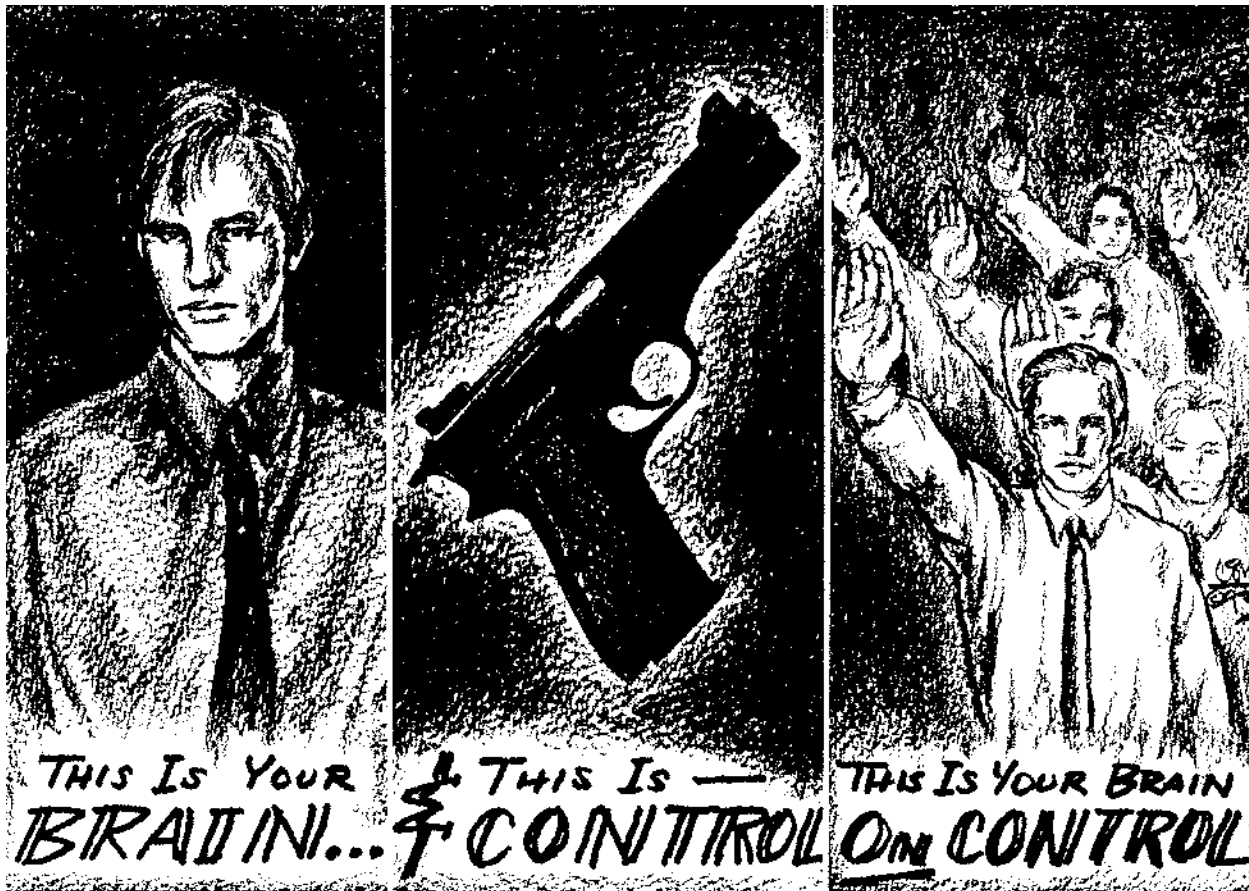
mind. If you really need to understand this metaphor, send a SASE to a randomly-chosen address and ask the recipient to enclose something they no longer need. The reply will trigger an intuitive understanding of this advanced trope.)

For instance, the organizational structure of the Al Amarjan Cut-Ups since the erasure of Horrors Count (see p. 27) has become very informal. Pere Brinker is its unofficial leader, simply because the others tend to defer to his judgment and implacable temperament. However, most decisions are reached by consensus — a process that is the very essence of chaos — and no one is obliged to take orders from anyone else. (The reasoning here is that taking orders is the first step on the road to a control habit, leading inexorably to the desire to give orders.) Some members are accorded more weight in discussion than others — because of his checkered history, Claus' views tend to be less persuasive than those of his brother. Operational ability also counts here.

Less is expected of Doc Cross, who has no fringe powers, than C. A. Radford, who has more of them than he/she knows what to do with.

However, other local Chaos Boy cells may have more concrete structures. An example is the Brotherhood of Ch'ien Ko, the Chaos Boy cell in the Shanghai Edge. The Shanghai Edge is a pocket reality created by a localized time distortion; in it various elements of the Al Amarja we are familiar with are melded with others from the Shanghai of the 1920s and 30s. In congruence with this reality shift, the Brotherhood of Ch'ien Ko is modeled along modified Confucian grounds, based on a master/apprentice relationship of mutual respect and obligation.

Beyond the level of the local cells comes the main coordinating center, Chaos Boys headquarters. This is where things become quite subjective. Most local operatives never experience direct contact with CBHQ, as it



is abbreviated. Even indirect contact from CBHQ to local cells is limited. Usually local members are recruited by other local members, and taught the tenets and objectives of the conspiracy at this divisional level. Interference in chapter business is avoided by CBHQ due to its ideological dislike of centralized control of anything.

In emergencies it sometimes becomes necessary for CBHQ to contact a regional chapter in order to provide vital information or orders. These communications are usually indirect. CBHQ uses uncertainty waves to transmit information over spatial or dimensional distance. Uncertainty radiation either occupies band space between the positive and negative energies used in devotional magic, or between the real waves measurable by scientific observation and the irrational waves that power magic; the actual facts are, of course, uncertain.

At any rate, the CBHQ uses uncertainty radiation for two reasons. First, it's really cool. Second, uncertainty signals are impossible to block or jam because they can be experienced but not measured. They can be received by any device that normally operates through synchronicity. Synchronicity is a concept originally devised by the Swiss depth psychologist C. G. Jung, who called it an "acausal connecting principle." It governs things that, according to linear analysis, seem to happen by chance but in fact seem connected by some unknown force. (That unknown force is uncertainty radiation, which Jung hinted around but did not describe in detail.) There is no randomness — there is only uninterpreted meaning.

Jung used the I Ching to explore synchronicity — it's an ancient Chinese divination method that involves throwing yarrow stalks and applying the result to construct hexagrams of six broken or unbroken lines. Each hexagram corresponds to a text, which is then related to one's question to arrive at an interpretation that suggests an answer. A Chaos operative can pick up a message from CBHQ using the I Ching, but many other methods are possible. Any traditional divination method

that uses a degree of randomness, from the tarot to thrown runes, can also pick up uncertainty messages. So can die rolls, coin tosses, or even eight ball toys. (You've probably seen these — they're round plastic globes with a rubber polyhedron floating in liquid inside them. Each side of the polyhedron has various answers to possible questions stamped in it.) Typical fortune cookies can't function as uncertainty receivers, because the slips of paper within them don't have a wide enough range of possible messages — they're invariably positive. However, Dai Lo's Chinese and Al Amarjan restaurant in Flowers Barrio serves fortune cookies which work for the purpose — their messages are as often negative as positive. (Examples include "your mother will die of cancer" and "demons shall rend your flesh.") Incidentally, Dai Lo is unaware of his product's Chaos applications — he uses these disturbing messages simply to appeal to a decadent clientele with a twisted sense of humor.

So for the average Chaos agent, the CBHQ remains a distant force. Beyond the cryptic instructions it issues, it impinges little on her life. However, the odd agent does travel to CBHQ — usually when she's violated the Coatless Code (see below) and requires remedial ideological training. The only current Al Amarjan Cut-Up who has been there is Claus Brinker. Here is his firsthand account of the place:

"You know, like, when you have one of those dreams where you're back in school and you show up late and you don't have your timetable yet so you go to the office, but you can't find the office so you just wander up and down the corridors until you finally find it by accident and then you look at your timetable and you realize you've already missed your first class so you run to the second class but you can't find that because there are albino alligators in the hallways and they're all flooded so you have to take an alternate route to get there? But when you try to take an alternate route you end up going up this set of stairs that leads to nowhere?"

“So you step off this set of stairs, because there’s no going back — well, you leap off, really because the albino alligators are behind you and gaining speed. So you step off into nothingness, and then you find your identity dissolving into the cosmic oneness of the universe. And then you’re Telly Savalas, and you’re in a movie with Julie Christie, and you’re in this nasty black-and-white melodrama set in London during the blitz, and Julie is trying to stop her old aunt from slowly going mad as the bombs drop all around them, and you think you can save them because you’re the caring American reporter but then you realize that you can’t do anything to change things in the movie because you’re only a supporting player, and it’s really Kirk Douglas who’s the lead, which really makes sense once you think about it — I mean, hey, you’re Telly Savalas, right? — but you hadn’t thought about it until then.

“Then you realize that you’re not the boss of the universe, and that anyone who thinks he’s Kirk Douglas is fooling himself — even if you really are Kirk Douglas, you’re really an actor. And all is illusion. And the albino alligators turn out to be your own greed and vanity, and you can tame them by tickling their undersides.

“And then everything is all right — you’re back home, and you’re ready to go again, having learned some kind of big lesson or something, I guess. That’s not really what it’s like, but that’s the best I can explain it.”

Another operative would no doubt have had a completely different experience of the CBHQ. Yan Kwok-Leung, an unruly apprentice from the Brotherhood of Ch’ien Ko, perceived the head Chaos Boys as gigantic, telepathic I Ching hexagrams. The Brinker’s ancestor, Jeroen, saw them as demonic minions of Satan, because that was the only image available to him within his frame of reference. Earlier civilizations have seen them as gods; the tribal forebears of these cultures probably thought they were animistic spirits.

As well as differences from perceiver to perceiver, C. A. Radford has advanced the

theory that Chaos Boys differ from reality to reality. In our reality, freedom and creativity are everywhere threatened by the crushing grip of Control. Chaos reacts to this by fostering a corps of agents dedicated to disorder and virtue. But if one can conceive of a multiverse consumed by entropy — or destructive disorder — its Chaos Boys might well be villainous by our standards. They’d resemble a cosmos-wide organization of Le Thuys with fringe powers up the wazoo. The forces of Control might in this case become the good guys, struggling to build things — technologies, societies, consistent philosophies — and make them work in the face of the overwhelming opposition posed by absolute, unmitigated turmoil.

## The Coatless Code

The goals of the Chaos Boys — and the behavior they expect of their members — are contained in the Coatless Code, which serves as a guide to virtuous action, an oath of allegiance, and fits very nicely on a placemat. The Code goes as follows:

1. Self-righteous vigilantes kiss ventriloquists as fences discipline years and nightmare interludes.
2. James Brown! James Brown!
3. Bright indications singe cool undisciplined hours.
4. Spot whinnies homing in on blandishments of Vaseline.
5. Virus rape speedily advancing questions.
6. JaaaaaAAAAaammes BROWN!
7. Dream drapes the Emperor entailing wakefulness and the drugstore.
8. Ladies and gentleman, one more time, the godfather of soul, the hardest working man in show business, JAMES BROWN!



9. This is the weather the cuckoo likes, armored division submissive to vernacular the world into a gambling birdhouse velocity.

To the uninitiated, the Code requires a little explaining. Generations of Chaos Boys have pondered the true meaning of the Code, and a consensus has sprung up around each item. Applicants to the Cut-Ups have these consensus explanations given to them as part of the training process. It is only when one truly understands them on an intuitive level, however, that one can truly consider oneself to have melded with the principles of creative disorder.

Here is a condensed version of the commonly-accepted exegesis of each line. It was written by Chaos Boy Par-Nee-Up-Rush-For-More-Ang, who is really more of a concept than an individual. Along with the Code itself, you should provide a copy of it to PCs who apply to join the Cut-Ups.

1. This describes the current situation without the Cut-Ups — Control Addicts rule. They're described as self-righteous because they always have an inflated view of their own importance and value. Also because they often masquerade as the upholders of traditional family values in order to secure their hold on a populace they wish to control. Those who give themselves over to be controlled love to do so in the name of moral restraint. Though they differ in the magnitude of their impact on others, the nosy head of the small-town decency league is as much a Control Freak as the bloody-handed dictator of a banana republic.

Control Freaks are vigilantes because they use violence to enforce their agendas, clamping down on freedom in the name of religion, moral values, or the rule of law. However, their actions are like kissing a ventriloquist — embracing a strange and disturbing hoax, as bizarre as the illusion that a man's voice comes out of a grinning wooden puppet

head. The puppets are the legions of sentiments willing to give themselves over to the rules imposed by Control.

Fences are another attribute of Control — they seek to divide human experience into discrete little categories, when the real answers lie in finding the connections between seemingly-unrelated phenomena, like the words of the Code. The fences seek to control years, or the flow of time, which is the best friend of Chaos, always breaking down structures and throwing up new ones. Control Freaks are conservative because they fear the flow of time and prefer to keep things as they are, or were, or would have been. Fences also attempt to control nightmare interludes, the dark eruptions of the unconscious mind. The process of enslaving oneself to Control involves suppressing all sorts of material, from religious doubt to sexual impulse. Repressed material sinks down into the unconscious mind, where it becomes monstrous when locked away from the light of day. Control fears its return, but it must return. The Chaos Boy rises like a monster from the sleep of dreams, ready to smite Control with every dread they have tried to imprison.

2. The work of the 20th Century Earth performer, soul singer James Brown embodies the essence of Chaos better than any words, no matter how random, could possibly do. As the Coatless Code was formulated centuries before Brown's birth, in another dimension, it may be that singles like "I Got You (I Feel Good)" and "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" are so numinously relevant that they have rocketed backwards and forwards in space and time to permeate all levels of higher consciousness. Or it may be that 20th Century Earth is a crossroads of sort, the ultimate battleground for the final confrontation between Control and Chaos, and the actualization there of the theoretical construct referred to as "James Brown" is simply a harbinger of the apocalypse to come. Whatever the explanation, if you're incapable of grooving to "Sex Machine," you're probably a Pharaoh plant. (The Cut-

Up description on p. 115 of OTE quotes Prince rather than James Brown, but Prince's debt to the trailblazing chaos funk of The Original Showman is widely acknowledged.)

3. Line 3 is the antithesis to line 1, proposing the mission of the Cut-Ups — to be bright glowing spots of undisciplined creative energy, singeing (and singing) their way through bits of time they have rescued from the destructive impulses of Control.

4. This proposes the primary mission of Chaos — to be eternally on the lookout for the meaningless but incessant cries of Control, as it seeks to hypnotize the masses into obedience. Propaganda is a whinny of Control. Advertising is a whinny of Control. Political clichés are a whinny of Control. Control seeks to repeat nonsense so often and so loudly that no mind can escape it. Critical thought is not so much eliminated as made irrelevant — one can watch a stupid commercial, recognize it as stupid, but still continue watching and then go out and buy the product. Which product one buys is not relevant to the ultimate aims of Control — it is the act of buying that matters. What matters is the value system of blind sub-intellectual response to the small range of animal instincts that advertising appeals to. When nonsense becomes inescapable — screaming from every newspaper, television, and radio — it ceases to become nonsense. It becomes a set of shackles, an exclusive line of slave collars available in the fashion style of your choice. When gobble-dygook becomes holy writ, holy writ becomes gobble-dygook. It's up to the Chaos Boys to reverse the process, exposing the absurdities we now take for granted as the sane and normal foundations of society.

5. There is no time to waste. One can't sit back and wait for one's descendants to join the clarion call against Control. Even

as you contemplate these words, the forces of Control are designing new, more direct ways to colonize the human consciousness. Your consciousness. Control is like a virus — once you give into it, it spreads through your body and changes you on the cellular level. You're rewired in order to make it harder to resist. The thought-virus is like a mental rapist — all it takes is one moment of acceptance, of complacency, and you surrender to the easy road of obedience and servitude to the Machine. Fight off the alien thoughts that tell you to go along with everyone else, to sit on the couch and flip channels, to stop asking questions that make you uncomfortable. It's an emergency! They're coming for your soul! They're going to take it from you. Once they've got it, they're not even going to bother using it for anything. It's just that you're so much more pliable without it...

6. It's too funky. Too funky in here.

7. But there is hope! There is always hope! Despair is another tool of Control — it depends on your despair to keep you duct-taped to your sofa! The power of dream is unquenchable — it sends its feathery tendrils to fondle the frontal lobes of death-squad leaders and moral crusaders alike. The Emperor is a mighty servant of Control, ruling the destinies of millions of lesser vassals in exchange for his own subjection. Protected all day long, he is vulnerable to his own forgotten soul at night. The Cut-Up agent is a waking dream, draping the mundane world of drugstores and strip malls with fundamental doubt. If despair is fire, doubt is water. If despair is the grim face of a fascist youth leader, doubt is the coconut cream pie designed to be planted in its center.



8. Did we mention lately that we really like James Brown around here at Chaos Boy headquarters? Give it up! Turn it loose! JAMES BROWN!

9. The weather the cuckoo likes is disorder. Not destruction, not mindless disruption, but taking an accepted order and shaking it a bit, so that the pieces come out in a different arrangement and thereby expose connections no one's seen before. Like taking random words from a book and putting them together in no particular order. Thinking about what this means and discovering that they create an entire philosophy, a way of fighting the forces that seek to drag us down and wear us out until we're helpless receptors of whatever junk thoughts they want to beam our way.

This creative disorder, this rearrangement of reality to force it into making sense — not

logic, but sense, smell, taste, feel — can render the violent banality of an armored division submissive to the greater order of the mind, which can take any pile of disparate ideas and connect them. The Cut-Ups change reality through the power of this process of fractured and reassembled language, creating an ever-changing vernacular to challenge the ossified fake-holy whinnies of Control. We want a reality that gambles, that lives and dies on the roll of a die, one of increasing velocity rather than an infinite slog into the mud of stasis. It is a birdhouse velocity. It is Chaos. We must kick the habit of submission, the junk of unthinking acceptance that flows through our veins. We are the Chaos Boys. We are coming to a paradigm near you.

Gonna have a funky good time.

# Optional Cut-Up Rules

"These blasted Cut-Ups — I don't — I can't — how am I supposed to — @#\$\$% them! @#\$\$% them! They just don't play by the rules!"

— Qiu Jinchu, former Mover operative

Jinchu was entirely correct; Cut-Ups don't play by the rules. Name a rule — from the laws of gravity to the principles of good taste — and you'll find at least one member of the gang who flouts it entirely.

Role-playing games involve an additional layer of rules — ones the characters aren't aware of. These are, of course, the rules mechanics — in this case, the ones found in chapters one and seven of *Over the Edge*™.

If you desire, you can reinforce the hyper-reality of the Cut-Ups by using an entirely different system to adjudicate their attempts to do things. Although primarily intended to be a fun experiment in freeform weirdness, the system might also be of benefit if one of your players submits a Cut-Up in order to play a powergaming grossity loaded with fringe powers. He'll still have his fringe powers, but he'll have to do lots of thinking and roleplaying to cash in on them. This is assuming that a powergaming Cut-Up is a problem for you — if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

The following system demands that you — and any players with characters it applies to — display a high degree of free-associative creativity on the fly. If you're not comfortable with the idea of quickly generating interesting nonlinear thoughts, this system is not for you. These rules may also slow things down until you and your players get used to them; you might want to hold off on introducing them until you reach a session of "downtime" when PCs are taking care of business between major plotlines.

If you do try the system, there's no reason why you can't later abandon it if you so desire — inconsistency is the Cut-Ups' middle name. Well, actually their middle name is a hyphen, but if it wasn't...

## Cutting Up

When I first hit upon the idea of a group designed to counteract all of the rampant power-grabbing of other OTE conspiracies, I thought of the work of William S. Burroughs, one of the many writers of surreal fantasy this game draws inspiration from. After writing his seminal novel of disturbing visions, *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs went on to puncture standard notions of fictional creation even further by developing what he called "the cutup method." Collaborating with the artist/writer Brion Gysin, Burroughs elected to construct narratives using an essentially random process: he would go through newspapers and magazines, cutting out words with a pair of scissors. Once he had enough words to go on, he would start to pull them out of a container in whatever order they came to his hand. He'd read them into a tape recorder. Later, listening to the results, he'd write words to connect the randomly chosen ones into meaningful sentences — or fragments thereof. The results of this experiment were the novels of his "middle period" in the 1960s, like *The Ticket that Exploded*. These are the least accessible of his works. Devoid of any distinguishable plot, they consist of an unrelenting barrage of shocking, jarring passages mixing explicit sexuality with scientific speculation and pulp SF imagery. If your gaming tastes run to the wild side, the images on even a single page of one of these books should keep you in disturbing ideas for months.

The cutup method was the novelistic equivalent of Jung's investigation into synchronicity. Burroughs wasn't the only creator experimenting with the interface between random determination and art. The composer John Cage explored indeterminacy within the

classical music tradition. The earlier collages of Dada visual artists like Max Ernst combine seemingly incompatible images scissored from magazines into new and radical pictures.

With the advent of RPGs, the integration of random results (action success determined by die roll) and traditional narrative has become a commonplace activity for thousands of gamers. Most would never dream of calling themselves artists, and would be surprised to see a line of descent drawn from Jung, Cage and Burroughs to Gygax, Stafford and Jackson. The parallel is interesting nonetheless.

With the Cut-Ups and their particular role in the *Over the Edge* setting, you have the opportunity to close the circle and apply Burroughs' cutup method to gaming.

## Agents Firing Lifeblood at Danger

This subheading leads you to think that this section will begin to develop the specifics of the Cutup Method rules system. It sounds like combat will be prominent — it's obviously a violent image, first of all. It's clearly about the Cut-Ups, as it refers to agents — and what other agents is this book about? The image is an intriguing reversal of our usual notions of fighting — the agents aren't just passively bleeding, but are shooting out their lifeblood, defiant of danger. Our Cut-Ups are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to put down the cruel schemes of Control!

Although this is indeed the section on applying the cutup method to gaming rules, I didn't write that vivid header. The forces of synchronicity did. I just flipped through a book, stopped on random pages, and selected the first major word on each. No words were discarded; the order they appear in is the original one. Honest! While I can't guarantee that randomness will always come for you as appropriately as it just did for me, the cutup method can certainly add plenty of creative disorder to your series!

The first step is to come up with a sufficiently large supply of interesting cutups. (Note that a "Cut-Up" is a character in an OTE game, while a cutup is a word scissored out of a magazine or newspaper.) A nice thick big-city newspaper is probably your best bet. You want to cut out words that are large enough to easily handle and read. This usually means ones printed in a typeface at least as large as a newspaper headline. You'll want a big newspaper, or several smaller ones — interesting words in headlines turn out to be harder to find than you'd think. Small functional words like conjunctions are of little use; look for nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Some proper names of people and places are okay, but these are typically the hardest to integrate into a justification (see below), so go easy on them. Cutting up can be a somewhat tedious process; nonetheless, you should collect about twice as many as you think you'll need. To avoid repetition, you'll want to discard a cutup once it's been used in play. If the Cut-Ups are a regular feature of your game, you'll go through them at a surprising rate, especially if one or more PCs are members.

*Note:* All cutups used in examples in the following sections were drawn randomly. No cutups were discarded or altered in order to make the examples work better.

## Traits

PCs and GMCs meant to use cutup mechanics should be created as described in chapter one of the OTE book, with the following exceptions. Most notable is that the number of dice rolled for traits become the number of cutups drawn. For example, the Andalusia Dog (p. 13) would get 4 cutups in Eavesdropping, 3 in Dogfighting and 3 in Tracking.

Rather than rolling dice to beat a set number or difficulty roll, the Cut-Up's player draws the appropriate number of cutups for the trait when he puts it into action. Let's say Andy is trying to eavesdrop on Tramh Le Thuy (OTE p. 138) as he chats with a patron

at his newsstand. Andy suspects that Le Thuy is trying to convert this patron to the cause. You as GM have in fact decided that the transaction is completely innocuous. Will Andy hear the conversation correctly and realize this? You, as usual, decide the difficulty factor for this task. Le Thuy is speaking in his usual low tones, always wary of eavesdroppers, so you decide to roll 3 dice. The number to beat is 12.

Let's assume for the sake of example that Andy is a PC. His player pulls four cutups from the bin. They say: park, definite, city, and Arabic. It is now up to the player to put these together into a sentence that justifies his potential success at the task. Andy's player thinks for a moment and says, "I park myself in a location where the sounds of the conversation will be definite against the din of city noise, uh, being glad that they're not speaking Arabic, which I don't understand."

You then decide how many of the words are used acceptably. Each acceptable word is the equivalent of a die roll of 5. Words that you decide don't really fit are assigned a value of 1. Degree of success is then determined normally. For example, here the attempt to add the word "Arabic" is a real stretch — pretty lame. But the other three come off quite naturally. So the result is a 16.

For GMCs, this system won't work — you can't both create the justification and then go on to judge it objectively. It's also a time consuming approach to take with supporting characters. Instead, look at each word drawn and decide whether it has negative or positive connotations. You can come up with an intellectual justification for this, or just go on the first impulse that comes into your head in respect to each word. Each positive word is worth five; negative words are worth one.

Let's run the same situation again, with Andy back in his usual role as GMC. He draws the same words — park, definite, city and Arabic. Parks are positive — nice and green, associated with relaxation and fun. Definite is good, connoting clear understanding. You've just moved to a rural area to get

away from the smog and stress of a big city, so the word "city" is negative to you. (Personally, I love urban life, so it would be positive to me; subjective response is okay as long as you're honest about it.) Arabic is a language long associated with literacy and scholarly achievement, so you decide this word is positive. That's three positive and one negative, so Andy again gets a 16.

Some words, try as you might, you'll be unable to wring any value judgments out of, good or bad. Count these as neutral — they are worth 2 points each. Let's say you're unwilling to put a value judgment on a real-world culture, so you can't say the word "Arabic" arouses either strictly positive or totally negative feelings in you. It's worth 2 points. Andy then gets a 12, which ties the difficulty factor. The result is inconclusive — he thinks Le Thuy's conversation was innocent, but he's left with a degree of unfounded suspicion. He'll have to do further investigations to clear up the question once and for all.

You may wish to use the GMC cutup adjudication method for PCs in some circumstances — if you want to rush things along, or give an inexperienced or tired player a mental break. As in the case of gestalt combat, the decision as to when to switch determination methods is entirely up to you.

This method is also useful in determining the precise effects of some Cut-Up fringe powers. For example, let's say the Really Quite Angry Kid (p. 15) is attempting to use her Sub-Random Tech trait to design a gadget to detect the presence of Control addicts within a 10 meter radius. You decide this is really difficult, and roll three dice, for a factor of 11. Her player draws the five cutups in the trait: holy, salmon-feasting, show, lifted, and riverfront. The justification serves not only to determine success or failure, but to describe the details of the result: "I construct a machine situated on the riverfront; it draws in water and ritually purifies it, making it holy, with a robotic salmon-feasting bear in the center of the font, lifting up a Control-detecting antenna with his free paw." Since

the Kid's trait description specifies that she can make a device out of just about anything, the GM decides to allow all five words, for an impressive result of 25. With a fourteen point spread between the trait and difficulty scores, this Control detector will work like gangbusters, flawlessly picking up even magically or psychically cloaked addicts.

However, the player's own justification has also ended up imposing a hefty restriction: the machine he's described is obviously rooted to one particular spot on the riverfront. Even if it was small enough to move — and it doesn't sound like it is — it would stop working away from the source of water. This is much less useful than the little hand held Control detector the Kid's player was probably hoping for. Similarly, you'll find that this method serves as another check on the open-endedness of Cut-Up fringe powers.

## Flaws

Those flaws that would carry a die value under the usual OTE rules carry instead a cutup value here. For the sake of discussion, we'll call these "penalty flaws." This will distinguish them from flaws which would normally not carry a die value, which we'll label "diceless flaws."

The former category of flaw requires a penalty roll in certain circumstances. A penalty flaw under the cutup method requires the drawing of a penalty cutup under the same circumstances. Assign a difficulty factor to the attempt, as usual. The player draws his regular number of cutups and tries to construct a justifying sentence, as explained above. The GM draws the penalty cutup and tries to think of a way that this word would counteract the effects of the justifying sentence. If such a way comes immediately to mind, the penalty value is 6. If he takes more than a minute to come up with a countering effect, the value is 3. If he can't think of one at all, the value is 1.

Let's say the flaw is bad body odor. The PC is attempting to bluff her way past snooty maitre d' Raoul Enescu (OTE p. 105) and get a table at Sequins. She has 3 cutups in Confusion; her player announces that she's going to try to get Raoul so befuddled that he gives up and lets her in. This is the sort of social situation in which this particular penalty cutup applies: the GM announces that one will be applied. Moreover, Raoul is probably the least likely person on the island to forgive a nasty smell; the GM decides the task has a very high difficulty factor, 12.

The player draws his three cutups: stretch, 1991, and dream. His justification sentence: "She stretches his patience by telling him they've met before in a dream, back in 1991, which she then goes on to describe in loopy detail — the hope here is he'll be so freaked out by this that he'll give her a table, just to get rid of her." All three words integrate well into the situation. This would normally net a score of 15.

But the GM draws the penalty cutup for the B.O.: the word "zone." This word immediately conjures up a negative result in the GM's mind, permeated as it is by classic pop culture: "Unfortunately, Raoul recognizes many of the details of the dream you describe from an old Twilight Zone episode. He signals to a beefy bouncer, who is clearly coming over to ensure your departure." In other words, he assigned the penalty cutup a value of 6 because the word triggered an instantaneous and appropriate response to the situation. 15 minus 6 is 9, far enough below the difficulty roll to justify the character's immediate ejection from the building.

Flaws which, under the usual OTE mechanics, don't warrant a die value are also adjudicated using the cutup method. These, however, apply instead to the GM's plotting process. Whenever you decide that a flaw should come into play, draw a cutup from the bin. If the word suggests something bad that could happen to the PC in the course of the session, plan to incorporate it into the game. If not, the PC gets off the hook — at least until



the next cutup for his flaw is drawn. Because this involves a certain amount of pre-planning, you'll most likely want to draw the cut-up prior to each session. If you need lots of time to plan these things, draw the cutup for a session at the end of the last. If you prefer to come up with things as you go, do it at the beginning of each session. Do so also if you want to give the PCs a bit of a break — as it's harder to come up with a negative effect relating to the word on the spur of the moment, flaws will come into play less frequently if you give yourself less time to think.

Alternatively, you might have fun psyching out players of PCs with diceless flaws. Have them draw and announce the flaw cutup to the group! Then they'll be sweating over what this might portend for their characters as the game progresses. Even if the cutup doesn't inspire you to do anything, they'll have it in the back of their minds for the rest of the session. Their PCs will be looking over their shoulders, thinking paranoid thoughts about how their flaws might trip them up. Which, after all, is what flaws should be all about.

For example, the Andalusian Dog's flaw is No Thumbs. Under the normal rules, this would cause him a great deal of inconvenience as he performs his various missions. And it still will under cutup rules. But he suffers an additional disadvantage, the periodic drawing of a cutup to inspire plot events connected to the disadvantage. At the end of a session, the GM announces that Andy's player (we're back to pretending he's a PC here) must draw a diceless flaw cutup. He does so: the word is *affengeil*, a German expletive referring to primate feces. (I'm really sorry about this, folks. But I did promise above not to discard or alter any actual cutups in the process of writing these examples.)

The GM then spends his time between sessions thinking of a way to introduce this word into the plot in a way that challenges Andalusia. He comes up with a death trap, in which Andy will be stuck in a room. A chute will begin dumping tons of...well, *affengeil* into the room, threatening to suffocate our canine

hero in a most humiliating manner. The door is not locked — no agent with opposable thumbs would have any problem escaping from the trap. But it's been designed specifically for Andalusia, and he's going to be in big trouble...

You'll have noted that the cutup method makes the effects of flaws on characters more onerous than the standard rules do. This is because a Cut-Up takes on an additional degree of chaos in her life when she signs onto the cause. Cutups cut both ways. This inconvenient paradox is the cost of doing business as a Chaos Boy. (In game terms, this also serves to balance out the flexibility of fringe powers typically adopted by the players of Cut-Up characters.)

## Hit Points

Hit points can be determined normally — as 7 times the value of the best combat-related trait. Or, at her discretion, the player can draw a number of cutups equal to the character's best combat value.

For example, let's take a character with 3 cutups in a combat-related trait. His player draws three words: shoot, diurnal, and pushed. She then attempts to relate each word to the state of her character's health; based on the strength of her arguments, the GM assigns a value between 1 and 12 to each word. A neutral word that just can't be related to physical condition merits a 6. Words that suggest poor health get less than that; robust words get more.

The player argues that "diurnal" indicates a guy who likes to be out in the sun, out of doors and keeps a regular sleep cycle. The GM isn't convinced until the player says that if she'd drawn the word's opposite, "nocturnal", she'd definitely get zapped with a low number, as the word suggests an unhealthy lifestyle. The GM agrees and awards her an 8 for the moderate health it suggests. Then the player goes on to "pushed", explaining how it clearly indicates good upper body development,

which means that her guy works out. Again, her reasoning is accepted, and she's awarded another 8. However, the player's convoluted explanation of how "shoot" means that the PC is fast and able to duck blows fails to pass muster — the GM rules it a neutral word, worth only 6. So the character ends up with 22 hit points.

Note that two players who draw the same cutup for hit point determination — not a likely turn of events — can wring a different score out of it. It's the strength of the argument that counts! A player who draws "invulnerable" can toss this amazing gift from fortune away through uncreative argument. Statements like "well, this one is self-explanatory" should yield an immediate and irrevocable 6, if that. Copying another player's argument is also grounds for a low hit point award. (Since the hit point arguments may well be taking place at the beginning of a series, you might want to be a little forgiving of inexperienced players; this will be their first exposure to the cutup method. On the other hand, they're taking a risk by not accepting the default number of hit points, so you're also justified in being pitiless if that's the way you want to go.)

## Experience Pool

Each Cut-Up character begins with one cutup in his experience pool. His player draws a specific word at the beginning of the first session. He keeps the cutup with his notes, waiting for a situation in which it might come in handy. He may use it to substitute for any word he draws in the course of play. He is not required to announce beforehand that he wishes to use his cutup; he may substitute it after seeing a batch of cutups he has drawn. In order to do so, he lays the cutup on the table. If he misplaces the cutup, he loses the use of it until the next session begins, when he is allowed to draw a replacement.

Once he uses an experience cutup, he discards that particular word and draws a new

one. However, he may not use the new cutup in that session.

As a character progresses, he will get more cutups in his experience pool. This means he can substitute one cutup for each cutup in the pool per session. However, the player must keep careful track of which of the cutups in his pool he can currently use, i.e. which ones are replacements for cutups already deployed in the session in progress.

PCs running under the cutup system therefore require additional bookkeeping, drawing up a chart of their experience slots. Their players can do this on a piece of scrap paper. Let's look at a sample chart a PC with five cutups in his experience pool might have at the beginning of a session:

Slot #1 — summer  
Slot #2 — period  
Slot #3 — Iran  
Slot #4 — numerous  
Slot #5 — friends

As play unfolds, the PC finds himself in a sticky situation with a pack of Glorious Lords. He has a 4 cutups in his Persuasion trait. He tries to convince them that he's no threat to them. The player looks at the four cutups he draws, and figures he'd come up with a far better justifying sentence if he could replace the word "horse" with "friends." He does so, tipping the balance and getting a positive result. The Glorious Lords not only let him go on his way, but invite him to a party later.

He discards the cutup that says "friends" and draws another — protagonist. He amends his experience pool chart so it looks like this:

Slot #1 — summer  
Slot #2 — period  
Slot #3 — Iran  
Slot #4 — numerous  
Slot #5 — protagonist (USED)

He marks slot number five as used, because that's where he got the experience cutup he just deployed. That slot is now closed to him for the duration of the current session. It becomes active again at the beginning of the next session — after that point he can substitute the word “protagonist” for any cutup he draws. Until then, he can still use any of the words in the other four slots at any point during the current game.

You may reject the above bookkeeping system on the grounds that it is too much of a bother. However, it is included to balance the extra control one gets from an experience cutup as opposed to an experience die. After all, players don't know what the result of a die roll will be in advance, and aren't even guaranteed a good roll. A cutup, however, can be thought about in advance to maximize its effectiveness.

If you decide to ignore the slot system, you might therefore wish to restrict the usefulness of experience cutups. Make them more

directly analogous to experience dice — the player announces in advance of a trait attempt that he wishes to use one. He then draws an extra cutup and is allowed to discard one at no penalty. This makes experience cutups less influential on the game — and commensurately less creative. Personally, I'd prefer the slot approach, but it's your call.

Experience cutups can be converted to trait cutups just as experience dice can be turned into trait dice. Substitute the word “cutup” for “dice” in the discussion of experience, OTE p. 30.

## The Hand of Fate

Cutups can also be a GM's tool to make random decisions. If he wants to decide the result of something in which skill plays no role — like what the weather will be like on the day that a PC has scheduled a date in the park.



Draw a cutup — let's say it's "include." First, see if you can think of a way that this word would relate to a weather pattern if it does, that's what the weather turns out to be like. If the word drawn had been "watery", the result would be obvious — a downpour.

In this case, I draw a blank after several seconds of trying to associate the two. So I move on to method number two, deciding whether the word has a negative or positive connotation. Because of my personal political beliefs, the word "inclusion" strikes a pleasing note, so I decide that the result is positive. Our hero will get good weather for his date.

You can also use this method to determine degree of result. How positive a word is it? "Include" isn't a particularly dynamic or vivid word, so I decide the weather is okay but not exceptional — mild, but a little bit overcast.

## Optional Optional Rules

For those of you who wish to pile confusion on top of disorder, here are some rules for extreme successes and failures. You can impose these whenever you wish. If only some of your PCs are Cut-Ups, and you use the optional rules on p. 20 of OTE, the others may feel disadvantaged if you don't apply these as well. Or they might be grateful. Play it by ear.

I'd advise waiting until the basic cutup method is working smoothly before introducing them, if at all.

## Botches

A player who is unable to apply any of his cutup words to a justifying sentence that meets your approval has botched. The result is the same as in a standard botch — not only does the result fail, but something bad happens as a result.

If you want to be especially cruel, you can taunt the player by choosing the bad result on the basis of the words he was unable to use.

For example, Arthur Pendrick is trying to break through a locked door. He gets two cutups — stream and greater. His player draws a blank: "Oh, man, uh, the greater a stream is the more it wants me to break down doors, I dunno." You rule that his statement makes no sense whatsoever and declare it a botch, replying: "An incredible stream of water comes bursting through the door from the other side, with greater force than you would have thought imaginable. It smashes you down the corridor. Do you have a trait that would help you defend against being damaged by the impact? If so, roll it."

Note that, due to the unpredictability of free-associative thinking, cutup botches are likely to be more extreme than standard issue ones. Here, Pendrick is not only at risk for drowning and impact damage, but the room he wanted to enter turns out to be full of water, which means that any clues may be waterlogged beyond recognition. (Later the GM figures out what happened — the coral entities who built the airport made a wee teleport error and flooded a room miles away instead of their aquarium in the terminal.)

## Blowing the Top Off

If a player successfully justifies all of his cutups in an especially elegant way, you may rule that he's on a roll. He may therefore select another cutup and attempt to add it to his existing justification. If he does this well, he may keep going, racking up an additional 5 points of success for each consecutive cutup he can add to the mix. As soon as he hits one, he stops drawing further cutups. His final score equals the number of cutups he managed to successfully include times five.

Let's use the same example of Pendrick and the door, with the cutups stream and greater. The player comes up with a justification which goes like this: "With greater con-

centration than he has ever before exerted, Pendrick feels his body streamlining itself for the ultimate blow against the door.” If you’re feeling picky, you might want to disallow the use of “stream” as part of a compound word. But the GM is in an expansive mood and not only approves it but thinks the sentence so elegant that he tells Pendrick’s player he’s blown the top off. Time to draw another cutup.

The cutup drawn: whales. The player continues: “With greater concentration than he has ever before exerted, Pendrick feels his body streamlining itself for the ultimate blow against the door, ready with the force of a dozen killer whales.” The GM rules this successful too, so another cutup is selected — rabbits. Pendrick’s player thinks, laughs, and admits he’s stumped. So the final score is 15. That’s still a very good score — the door easily pings off its hinges, not even bruising Pendrick’s shoulder.

## Group Efforts

The various categories of group effort as described on p. 21 of OTE apply to the cutup method as well. When a character operating under these rules cooperates with one operating under the standard rules, determine the Cut-Up’s success score as explained above. Then determine the non-Cut-Up’s rolled score.

In simple addition cases, simply add the two scores.

In combined dice cases, keep track of the values assigned to each cutup drawn. Look at each die rolled by the standard character. Take the best numbers, as many as the trait of the best-rolling (or drawing) character. For example, the Cut-Up Doc Cross (see p. 11) is in deadline trouble with his latest writing project: *Tiffany Trilobite, the Role-playing Game*. Doc is way behind since he’s been busy busting a Mover cell; the difficulty roll to finish in time to avoid royalty penalties is a toughie, 17. He asks a pal, not a Cut-Up, to help him by writing some sidebars. Doc has 5 cutups in Game Writing, his friend the default value of 2 dice.

Doc’s player successfully incorporates three of his cutups into the description of his writing process; the other two are ruled lame. This is the equivalent of a 5, 5, 5, 1, 1 combination. The pal’s is a GMC, so the GM rolls for him — a 6 and 1. Doc’s player replaces one of his 1s with the pal’s 6, for a total of 22. Yet again he manages to squeak through and get the manuscript to his publisher on time.

In either/or cases, determine the result for both. Roll a die. On an even number, the standard character’s score is used. The Cut-Up, of course, is odd.

For cases in which the worst roll should apply, use the lower value of the two.

Group efforts are more complicated when two Cut-Ups get together: coordination of endeavor is not their strong suit.

**Simple Addition** — Each player draws cutups and devises a justification. However, if the two justifications — while making sense individually — don’t mesh, the GM may assess a penalty die on the action.

For example, Pere and Claus Brinker are both attempting to move a large stone that’s blocking their progress in a tunnel — a roll of thirteen is necessary to move it. Both get two cutups in brute strength. Pere’s player draws “evolved” and “pictures.” Claus draws “planned” and “preservation.” Both characters decide to use mental visualization techniques to give themselves an edge. “I create mental pictures of early man as he first evolved, imagining myself a powerful brute needing to master my environment to survive,” Pere’s player justifies. Claus’ says, “I think that, I’m like an archaeologist, who’s planned the preservation of this tunnel site for years, and knows the precise, like, physics of how you go about moving a rock with the minimum of force.” Both approaches are neat, the GM thinks, but as usual Pere and Claus are taking opposite means to the same end. Though their combined score would have been 20 — 5 for each cutup, the GM rolls a penalty die. It comes out a 5, so there is no change. But the incompatibility of approach will no doubt give

Pere and Claus something to bicker about as they continue on their way down the tunnel.

**Combining Dice** — Players draw cutups as usual. However, they may switch them from one player to another — as long as each is using the number of cutups dictated by the trait. Only the most successful score is used — it already includes the benefits of group effort.

Pere and Claus are searching through a captured neo-Nazi computer for a bit of crucial information — finding it in time requires beating a difficulty of 12. Pere gets three cutups, Claus two. Pere's player gets "among," "wild", and "Koonwarra." Claus's gets "dinosaur" and "birds." After a bit of conferring, cutups are exchanged. Pere's justification: "Though this old database program is among the most notorious dinosaurs of the computer industry, I cut through its outdated code with wild inspiration." Claus' justification: "I remember hiking through the Australian town of Koonwarra, looking for rare birds, who explained the search function of this program to me." The GM rules that all of Pere's cutups pass, and neither of Claus' do. But Claus' failure matters little, since he gave a usable word to Pere, who used it to boost his score to 15. If he'd been saddled with the impossible "Koonwarra" he'd only have rated an 11.

**Either/Or** — Each player constructs a justification from his cutups. Select the sentence that best applies to the situation, regardless of its point value.

**Worst Roller** — Each player draws the requisite number of cutups. These are all laid out face-up on the table. The players are then given a minute or so to look at them and decide on the ideal sentence containing their proper number of cutups. The GM counts down to three, at which point each player attempts to grab the cutups he wants. Any cutups which are torn or severely crumpled (you define "crumpled") in this process carry a value of 1 and needn't be incorporated into the justification. Players may not speak to one another between the drawing of the cutups and the

conclusion of the countdown — no agreements as to who grabs what are permitted!

## Combat

Two hardened men of arms face each other on the dusty field of battle. Each knows he must destroy the other if he is to survive. One reaches to his side, producing a cup full of cutups for the other man to dip his fingers into.

"Them's fightin' words," the other man says, with grudging admiration.

## Movement

Combat movement for Cut-Ups is as given on p. 22 of OTE. Use of fringe powers may alter these in certain circumstances.

## Initiative

When the fight begins, each player draws cutups for initiative. Use whatever traits are appropriate — Speedy, Agile, Guerrilla Training, whatever. Lacking any such trait, draw two cutups.

The players must construct a justifying sentence to explain why they're faster than anyone else. As usual, well-used words merit 5 points each, lame ones 1 point. For example, Claus Brinker gets four cutups for initiative: writer, president, nervous, netherworld. His justification: "My fists are faster than the heartbeat of the president of the local writer's club as he meets Mark Twain in the netherworld." That's four for four, an initiative roll of 20.

For GMCs, use the negative/positive connotation method to arrive at an initiative score — p. 48.

## Rounds

The cutup rules use the same round system as p. 22 of OTE.

## Attacks

A Cut-Up attacks and defends with the unpredictability of the truly crazed. The player of an attacking Cut-Up draws the appropriate number of cutups, and tries to put them into a sentence describing his attack. Claus Brinker, having won the initiative in his fight with a Glorious Lord, attacks with four cutups: lyrical, characters, north, going.

His justification: "With lyrical grace, like the characters in a Hong Kong sci-fi flick, I am going to kick this guy north of unconsciousness."

The GM rules that Claus has gotten another four for four, or 20 points. The Lord rolls a defense of 14, and therefore suffers 6 points of damage. Now he's mad; he dives at Claus, wielding a broken bottle.

His attack roll is impressive, a 16. Claus draws another four cutups for his defense: Filipino, luxury, between, winter. This time an elegant response isn't so easy: "My speed gives me the luxury of moving between his thrusts; he is surprised like a Filipino in the winter." The GM rules that the Filipino in the winter business makes no particular sense, so Claus' score is only a 12. Taking the satanist's damage bonus into account, Claus suffers 8 points of damage. He hopes for some dynamic verbs for his next attack...

Again, GMC Cut-Ups should attack and defend with the positive/negative connotation method, which is easier to run. Just using the regular rules for GMCs is easier still. But if you want to vividly depict the weirdness of fighting a Cut-Up, there's no reason to say you can't use justifications as your descriptions of what she's doing to a PC: "Making observations about how she admires Algerian torture technique, she draws the snapping turtle from her rucksack and..." You'd be rolling normally or using the connotation method (since you can't judge your own justifications) while still creating the atmosphere of free-associative strangeness.

## Predictable Attacks

Taxed by the justification requirement, Cut-Up combatants are unlikely to come up with a predictable attack. Poorly integrated words carry more of a disadvantage than your average penalty die anyway.

## Damage, Armor, Firearms and More

Any section of the combat system not mentioned here works just as it does in the *Over the Edge* rulebook.

## Other Randomness

As a GM, you'll find uses for cutups that go beyond judging the success of Cut-Up actions. I always keep a means of accessing random words nearby. With the fluidity of the Edge as a setting you'll never know when you'll be caught out for an answer to a question. PCs can roam about at will, and eventually they're going to go somewhere you know nothing about, or approach a bystander you haven't given Thought One to. Cutups are a great source of instant inspiration.

For example, the PCs manage to capture a goon after a fight with a group of unknown opponents. You hadn't counted on a live capture, and don't know anything about this guy except for his combat stats and the fact that he was hired by Sir Arthur Compton, who he's never met. The PCs want to interrogate him. Now, you can play him as your standard thug from central casting — dumb and hostile. But that still doesn't give you much to go on, and your players all want to ask him questions. You don't have much time to think. Can you lift this typical genre scene from the routine?

Draw a cutup or two to trigger some instant associations. Let's say you draw "military." That conjures up a past for the man — he's spent some time in the military so he's capable of basic discipline and probably isn't your complete incompetent. He's fallen

on hard times, you think, as you continue to speculate off the cuff, but he still has more self-respect than the cliché thug. How is he going to react to his present circumstances? He'll think about himself as a prisoner of war, and consider it a matter of honor not to reveal anything about his employer. With this in mind, you have a mental coat hook on which to hang the answer to any question from his haircut (close-cropped) to what he was doing in 1974 (covert missions in Laos).

The cutup process might cause you to revise earlier assumptions. You'd figured before that he wouldn't know anything about Compton, but the character you've just instantly developed seems to have more on the ball than he did at first thought. Maybe he has a position of responsibility in Compton's organization; if he won't give out information, maybe his return could be made a bargaining chip. Which might lead to a negotiation with Compton or one of his bennies, which in turn might lead to...who knows? If you get stuck, you can always pull out another cutup for inspiration. This method can help free up your plotting process, allowing you to think of the elements of your storyline as fluid and indeterminate until they are revealed to the players. This way of thinking helps you punch up story elements as you remain open to ideas throughout the game, adapting your prior plans in progress.

One area in which cutups are invaluable whether your PCs are Cut-Ups or not is the airport terminal, especially when they're wandering about without a guide. Whenever they open a door, draw a cutup to decide what's on the other side of it. Because what one finds in the airport depends on one's mental state, you'll want to connect the cutup to the theme of the character's current adventure.

For example, our PC is a shady type in the midst of a scheme to rip off a religious pilgrimage. He's trying to follow his marks through the terminal, but gets lost. You tell the player there's a choice of two doors. Actually, it doesn't matter which one he picks, because you haven't yet decided what's be-

hind either. He selects one and his character walks through it. You draw the cutup "cloud." This, coupled with the theme of the story, puts you in mind of cloud nine, or heaven. The character finds himself in a vast expanse of white, with no doors — or walls even — in sight. A disembodied voice begins to upbraid him for his spiritual deficiencies, booming, "YOU ARE NOT READY YET." Until he gives the right responses to the mystery voice, he will not find an exit from the room. This gives you and the player a chance for an interesting character development scene, turning an ostensibly random room in the ever-shifting labyrinth of the terminal into a fun side-light on the main story.

Should you ever find yourself at a loss for a plot, cutups can serve as a useful trigger to creativity. Just draw three or four cutups and see what thoughts they can inspire. Here are just two ways to do this:

Use the cutups as elements in a title. Let's say you've drawn bedroom, welcomed, vicious and possession. String them together into a title phrase: Welcomed to the Vicious Bedroom of Possession. Now, this is not the most euphonious of titles, but that's not the point. Come up with a story to match it. "Welcomed" and "bedroom" suggest that victims are being lured to something with a promise of sexual adventure. The something is clearly bad, given the presence of "vicious." "Possession" is the key, the thing that takes what could be a mere criminal plot and turns it into the sort of journey into uncanny that makes an OTE adventure. A squadron of aliens — let's call them the Lecwedmo — have crash-landed on Mt. Ralsius, and their bodies are rapidly oxidizing in Earth's atmosphere. With their heightened psychic powers, they can project a desirable image to people looking for casual encounters. What these dupes don't know is the unique consequence of Lecwedmo orgasm — they swap bodies with their partners! The Lecwedmo enjoy the healthy human bodies as their victims rapidly corrode. Now they can continue their original plan, hunting down their mortal enemies, the



Kergillians. Now all you have to do is come up with ways to involve your particular PCs in this mess. They can be tracking an enemy who, unknown to them, has been possessed. They can be hired to search for a missing person last seen in the presence of his dream date. Or maybe the dream date story makes a Sandman or fringe oppenheimer character think “tulpa” and start to hunt them for their Dreamweb. You can doubtless come up with other openings. (Incidentally, the adventures in this book were initially inspired by this method.)

The second way to plot with cutups is to use each word drawn as the basis for a pivotal scene in the story. You then create the plot by connecting the dots and coming up with a way that each scene would flow into the other in a believable progression.

Here we draw between, manifestation, alive, and learning. What scene does each individual word bring to mind? Between makes me think of two powerful forces at work, with the characters in the middle. Let’s say a war erupts between two Mover cells — one group pops up at an outdoor cafe to fire a crossbow fusillade at the other cell. The PCs happen along and end up in the middle of the fracas. The mover groups split before the peace force arrives, and the PCs are apprehended and blamed — but given a chance to clear their names. (Actually the Peace Force are, as usual, trying to get someone else to do their dirty work for them so they can step in when the danger has passed and take the credit with their superiors.)

Next word, separate scene: manifestation. At some point in their legwork, the PCs come across a spectral figure. She claims to be a ghost and gives them valuable information that will eventually lead them to the stronghold of one of the Mover cells.

Then comes “alive.” Coupled with the last scene, this suggests a twist. A PC happens to come across the young woman who appeared to them as a ghost — but surprisingly she is very much alive, nibbling on a pumpkin bran muffin at a coffee shop on the university campus.

Finally, “learning” — combining this idea with the psychological strangeness of Al Amarja, I think of an experimental learning center where oppenheimers inject volunteer guinea pigs with “smart drugs” and then test them for increased learning potential.

Now all we have to do is connect these four scenes into a coherent storyline. It’s usually best to do this backwards, coming up with the explanation for the final scene and then linking it to previous ones. We’ve already established Movers as the group(s) behind this caper. The learning experiment seems a natural for Gladsteins. Let’s say that their experimental serum also contains a mind-control drug conceived to turn users into sleeper agents for the Gladsteins.

Why is a living girl giving off ghostly emanations? Because the drug is boosting her latent psychic abilities. Her concerned subconscious, fighting off the mind-control effect, is reaching out for someone to expose the Gladstein plot.

Why then is one Mover group opening fire on another? Because the guinea pigs are giving off psychic interference which is messing up the plans of the psi-power wing of the Vornites. It’s also rendered them violently unstable, ready to use crazed brute force in the place of their characteristic subtlety.

Now you have a complete plot ready to unleash, all spurred by four random words and a few moments’ thought.

# Cut-Up Technology

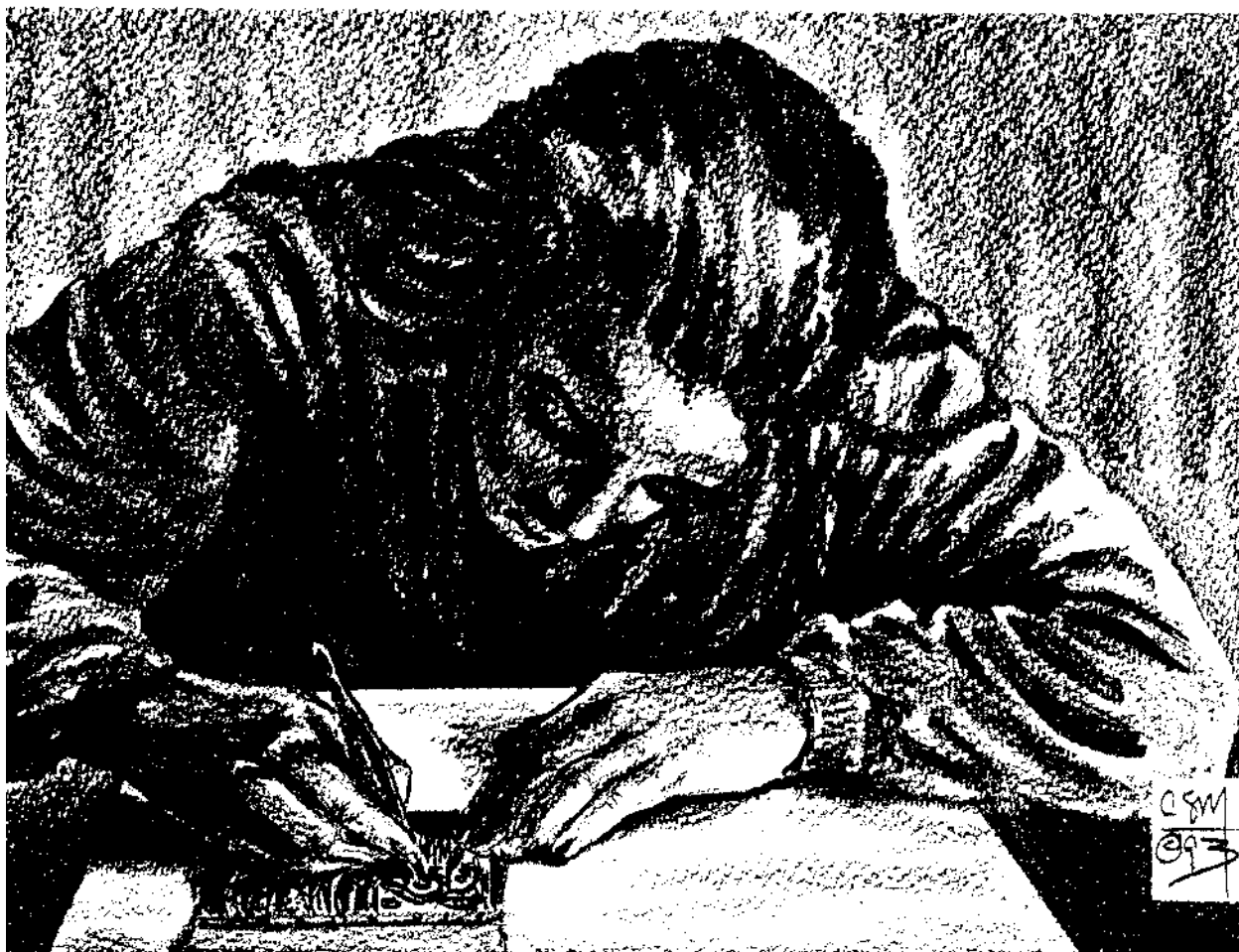
"Every great advance in science has issued from a new audacity of imagination."

—John Dewey

Tech devices used by the Cut-Ups are exclusively designed by The Really Quite Angry Kid, though this might change if your group includes a PC oppenheimer who chooses to join the gang. All of these devices are therefore constructed according to the otherworldly principles of sub-random tech — see p. 15. This means that they are inexplicable to normal science. It is generally impossible for even the Kid to tinker with them once they're construct-

ed; any rearrangement of their constituent parts will render them nonfunctional. Even if a sub-random tech device is reassembled in exactly the same form as its original construction, it will either cease to work, or — if repaired by a qualified SR technician — abandon its old function to do something entirely new.

Sub-random tech is different from science and even most forms of magic in that its results are always entirely anomalous — they can't be repeated. No two SR devices are alike, even if constructed using an identical method by the same individual. This is because their function is tied to the precise time of its creation. SR gear follows temporary physical laws determined by the exact amount of chaotic flux in the interplanar connective tissue at this time. Chaotic flux being what it is, it never generates the same temporary physics twice. (Actually the Kid has theorized that



this cannot be quite true, because this would then be consistent. But let's not get into that. She's also been known to claim that SR devices are sentient in some limited senses of the word, but don't communicate with us because they have nothing interesting to say.)

At any rate, the unrepeatable nature of sub-random invention means that one must be extremely careful with these gadgets. Once they're damaged, they're impossible to replace. Sometimes the Kid can build another machine to do essentially the same thing as a broken one, but its physical configuration will always be different. You don't want to break a tracer device that fits in a lapel pin if you know the next model might be the size of a pygmy hippo. Unfortunately, it is not in the nature of Cut-Ups to be careful with equipment. And the Kid's devices are usually made of such bizarre substances as to positively encourage breakage. True Cut-Ups bear the resulting inconveniences with good humor — after all, only a control freak would mourn the inevitable loss of a few material toys.

Because of this frequent turnover in their gadget locker, there is little point in providing a long list of Cut-Up tech items — they'll probably be broken and replaced by the time this book ships to its distributors. However, the one central device in their arsenal, the Cut-Up Machine, warrants discussion. A few other instruments are provided as examples.

## The Cut-Up Machine

**Capabilities:** The Cut-Up machine is the court of last resort when a longtime conspiracy finally makes its move and convincingly seizes control of world civilization. It can retroactively reorder reality, returning the correct measure of chaos to the power equation.

It is powered by humanity's most powerful weapon — the word. Written words in any language — in the forms of books, magazines, newspapers, pamphlets or any other printed matter — are dumped into a hopper after

being manually cut up into single-word units with scissors. (If two words end up on the same cutup, nothing disastrous happens, but the machine fails to operate. Incomplete words do not affect the machine; nor does a cutup with a single complete word on each side.) The machine then processes these words into a new reality.

As far as they can tell, the Cut-Ups have used the machine five times; their enemy the Koanhead got ahold of it and used it at one point as well. It is difficult to say with certainty what it actually did on each of these occasions, because the Machine is capable of completely changing the timeline and with it the pasts and memories of everyone on the planet, including the Cut-Ups themselves. Pere Brinker has developed a nonchronology that he feels comes as close as is possible to a true accounting of events involving the Machine in the past. He includes the following facts and/or speculations:

Sometimes the changes the Machine makes in reality are so minor as to be unnoticeable. One time it brought about the collapse of the Soviet Empire, and did so by increasing the appetite of a single field mouse in 1952 Vladivostok. Pere is still trying to piece together the chain of cause-and-effect that led to the rise of Gorbachev and the final failed coup attempt. So far he has traced the field mouse to a power outage that encouraged the conception of an obscure Party functionary. His research continues.

Other times the effects are more far-reaching. The Andalusia Dog still has vivid dreams of an alternate world, one in which he is a therapsid reptile and his companions are sentient humanoids descended from dinosaur stock. In this world, the effort of industrialized nations to form a single world government turned out to be a sinister plot masterminded by a religious organization known as the Krkrdid, and the Mary Tyler Moore show didn't go off the air until the mid-eighties. The images from these dreams are so vivid — particularly the episode of the Moore show in which Chuckles the Clown is killed

by a stegosaurus — that Andy has become convinced that this was once THE reality, one that was reordered by the Machine after the Krkrdid got too powerful.

Pere Brinker has concluded that the Machine was also once used to put down a world-wide rising of the Pharaohs. He thinks it was used another time to quell a massive metaphysical disturbance in which growing numbers of Al Amarjans became convinced that they were just fictional figures used by superior beings in something called a role-playing game.

He has also found a mysterious document on the hard drive of his computer, one that is written in his characteristic cryptic prose style. Because he has no recollection of having written it, he has concluded that it's a remnant of an earlier reality that has since been reordered by the Machine:

“Throck. device both backwards and forwards rippling in time. Therefore conven. methods of combat through conven. paradigms inoperative. Situation more and more desp. Doctor What has shaved eyebrows. Says just latest fashion statement but fear otherw. Dr. showing increasing reactionary powerhead symptoms. Have had to kill Claus for same. Last resort must be adopted — am cutting up what few newspapers are still printing in prep.

“But what about Kid's theory? Wish month ended in Y or T to confer w/ her. Are Throck. device and Cut-Up machine necessary polar opposites of one another? Truly manifestation of cosmic balance? If so, what interaction when switch thrown? Possibility of closed time loop?”

Oddly, a directory check shows that this document was created on Pere's computer ten years from now. He continues to mull over its meaning.

**Appearance:** It is a gray, boxy machine about 60 cm wide, 60 cm long, and 80 cm high, weighing 75 kg. The central unit is a modified mimeograph machine with major portions of a paper shredder and a lottery

ball randomizer. Syringes, a pair of wooden rulers, and a balloon that fills up with a gas lighter than air are inexplicable extras.

**Energy Requirements:** The Cut-Up machine uses electrical power and can be plugged into the type of wall socket standard on the island.

## CUSS

**Capabilities:** The CUSS, or Collective Unconscious Swizzle Stick, broadcasts thought-waves which are picked up by the subconscious minds of those within its area of effect. This area is somewhat larger than the island of Al Amarja. Somewhat like the Cut-Up machine, it's fueled by written material which is dumped into a hopper and shredded; the nature of the material determines the images it sends out. For example, in a caper in which the Really Quite Angry Kid needed to create rumors of Glorious Lord involvement in an octopus smuggling scheme, she dumped a year's worth of Satanic literature and articles from scuba magazines into the shredder. This created a variety of responses depending on the psychic awareness of the individual wave recipient.

The average Al Amarjan simply became more disposed to believe rumors about the Glorious Lords, particularly ones involving mollusks. Several urban legends on the subject became common currency within days. As usual with modern folklore, the original sources for these tales were impossible to pin down. (A furious Avan Bloodlord tried in vain to do so, on account of the scurrilous tale involving him, a dead blue-ringed octopus, a shopping bag, and a petty theft.) Each person telling the story would claim that a friend of a friend — or FOAF, as the pattern is known in folklore studies — had been involved. If you went to the trouble to locate this FOAF, she's say it was a friend of one of her friends, and so on and so forth. Actually, the CUSS device was secretly implanting false memories in some Al Amarjans of having been told these anecdotes;

others, upon hearing them repeated, became more likely than usual to tell them to others.

Veteran mindworms, however, experience more direct manifestations of the CUSS' power. The nature of these depends on each individual's particular fringe power. A clairvoyant would see images of the Lords unloading suspicious crates, from which the odd tentacle would intermittently flick out. A clairaudient would "hear" Bloodlord and company discussing their smuggling operation. A tarot reader would find the cards for The Devil and the six of swords (journey by water) coming up continually. These false images are very difficult for mindworms to detect, used as they are to picking up accurate information through their fringe powers. One would have to know of the existence of the CUSS to suspect their origin, though the nonsensical nature of much CUSS material might make some wary of it.

CUSS emanations remain in the psychic atmosphere for about a week per usage. Then, as quickly as they appeared, the visions and rumors disappear.

**Appearance:** The CUSS looks like a miniature satellite dish hooked up to a small paper shredder covered with huge industrial-strength valves.

**Energy Requirements:** The CUSS is a devoted smoker. It operates on combustion; one must pour several pounds of fine tobacco into its cutup hopper before it will run. It burns these off, emitting a cloud of nasty secondhand smoke. Operation in a well-ventilated area, preferably outdoors, is strongly recommended. When ready, it begins to hum.

**Warning:** Cut-ups have no particular immunity to the CUSS effect. Even when one is told in advance that it will be used, its power is great enough to blur the line between hoax and truth. For example, the Glorious Lord/Octopus plan nearly went off the rails when Claus Brinker, armed to the teeth, burst in on Bloodlord's headquarters and demanded the surrender of his mollusks, even though he had been fully briefed on the use of the CUSS. He sheepishly explained later that the stories he

heard about the Lords were so vivid that he had become convinced that the briefing, not the Bloodlord information, had been psychically planted.

## The Representer

**Capabilities:** The representer is an aid to decision-making. An individual who is weighing different options can use it to enter a psychotopically-created virtual world in which different aspects of her own persona take opposite sides of the question and present it to her as lawyers would argue a case before a judge. This objectification of the pros and cons of any question helps to clarify the issues, but the user must still make the ultimate decision. The representer is not capable of generating facts or arguments on the case that the user is unaware of. It is merely an organizer of thoughts.

This gives you as GM a mechanism to role-play a PC's thought process if he's stuck in the midst of a tough decision. Instead of stopping play while he thinks, you can turn the problem into a fun scene, taking the roles of advocates on both sides.

For example, let's say Doc Cross is trying to decide whether he should attend a concert knowing that a former Dunkelberg Guard who bears him a grudge will likely be there. He hooks himself up to the Representer, relaxes, closes his eyes and sees his idea of the perfect courtroom. It's a massive palace of violet marble from the fantasy period of his imaginary world, the Dociverse. He sits on a high throne, decked out in ermines and silks, the gold headband of kingship on his forehead. Shapely maidens cool him with feathery fans.

Two courtiers approach. One looks like Doc, and is wearing the fine robes of a nobleman. The other also looks like Doc, and is similarly dressed. They then begin to argue the case.

The first Doc argues that Dara Blake (see *Airwaves*, p. 14) is not only a major fab babe

but a great entertainer. And that Doc has been working very hard lately and deserves a night out.

The second agrees but says that the guard, a major Blake fan, will be there and cause trouble like he did at the last coffeehouse. He rattles off all of the evidence of the man's unstable personality, and mentions his various known martial arts skills. He paints an unflattering portrait of Doc's chances in combat against the fellow.

The first Doc responds to this, favorably describing Doc's own fighting skills and suggesting likely, effective strategies to use against the man.

The second rebuts, noting that although Doc may not be seriously hurt in such a struggle, he certainly won't have a relaxing evening out, thus defeating the purpose of the trip.

Both Docs then agree that their arguments are exhausted. Doc opens his eyes and removes the representer's electrodes. Now that he has had for and against arguments presented to him in an organized manner, he reluctantly decides to stay home and work on his latest book project instead.

**Appearance:** The representer is a modified Commodore-64 computer hooked up to an 8-track tape deck, a 2nd century Chinese earthquake detector, and a barbed-wire fan belt. Wires from the tape deck attach to electrodes, which are placed on the subject's forehead. The electrodes stimulate the same areas of the brain affected by hallucinogenic

drugs, but the content of the visions is limited by the computer program.

**Energy Requirements:** The device likes Middle Eastern foods, particularly falafel, shwarma, and taboulli salad. These are placed in the middle of the hollow earthquake detector (which looks sort of like a giant Fabergé egg with sculpted dragons climbing down it) prior to operation. If the machine consumes the food before the user is done with his session, it stops dead. It is unable to start where it left off if it runs out of power. This gives the representer an effective time limit — the maximum amount of shwarma the detector will hold gives you about thirty minutes of use.

**Warning:** On one occasion the machine overloaded while Pere Brinker was using it. Instead of constructs created by his own mind through the machine, he found himself face-to-face with versions of himself from alternate realities. This would have been odd but not dangerous if not for the fact that one of the Peres was a vicious madman imprisoned in the high-security ward of the Sylvan Pines psychiatric facility. The insane Pere talked his other counterpart to death, then turned his verbal assault on our Pere. Although Pere won — barely — he was shaken by the experience, and for several months was more withdrawn than usual.

Various fringe powers might also interact with the machine's hallucinatory effect in unpredictable ways.

# MEANINGLESS tissuS

"What is the use of a new-born child?"

—Benjamin Franklin

Elwood Cardinal, a top Mover, is ready to take possession of a slightly used Russian SS-20 nuclear missile when he suddenly discovers that his body is changing. C. A. Radford (see p. 16) has dosed him with Chaos Chancer in an effort to cure him of his control addiction. If some or all PCs are Cut-Ups, Radford arranges for them to shepherd the Mover's transformation from human agent of control and oppression into a usefully crazy member of Cut-Up society. If some are Mover operatives, witting or unwitting, they're ordered to either bring Cardinal back into the fold or, failing that, kill him. If PCs are part of another conspiracy, or just free agents, they get swept up in the events nonetheless. When the Cut-Ups are in play, anything can happen.

## Elwood Cardinal

### *High-Ranking Mover*

Elwood Cardinal and a few of his drinking buddies from Edmonton, Alberta, have in the space of little more than a year rocketed near the top of the Mover hierarchy. Originally they thought they were just joining a local service club with some weird ceremonies. When Elwood found himself moving in the upper echelons of the provincial government, assigned inscrutable but vaguely shady tasks, he began to wonder. By subtly asking the right ques-

tions and using shrewd deductions, he began to see the outlines of the Mover operation touching his life. Always on the lookout for ambitious young recruits, the more informed superiors in his local circle brought him on board and filled him in on the details. Sometimes, however, the Movers select operatives who are too smart for their own purposes.

Sitting down at the kitchen table with his childhood friends, Elwood explained the labyrinthine power structure of the Movers. "No one really knows who's in charge," Elwood reasoned, "They just take orders from whoever they think is in charge. So there's two ways to operate in this new lodge of ours. You can either wait for someone you think knows what they're doing to come along and tell you what to do. Or you can convince everyone else you're the one they're waiting for."

Thus the Blue Castle Movers were born. Elwood took the name from the title of a children's book his niece was reading. He then began to spread rumors of the mighty and mysterious Blue Castle Movers, who had suddenly staged a coup in the highest echelons of the leadership. He devised important details like the secret signals and passwords of the Blue Castle, and used his buddies to keep the fabrication moving. Word spread even faster than he had anticipated. As he kept rising in the "real" hierarchy — assuming there is such a thing — he traveled around the globe, meeting other Movers who were suddenly very concerned about the increasing influence of the Blue Castle. Slowly he began to reveal himself

to these worried conspirators, who were more than eager to junk their prior loyalties for an entry into the Blue Castle cell. Before he quite realized what he was doing he had accumulated a worldwide network of bennies ready to live and die on orders from the Blue Castle.

Sixteen months ago, Elwood Cardinal was stuck in a low-level civil service job, hired on a minority opportunity plan but given no real responsibilities. His ambition extended no further than getting a genuinely interesting position in the department, making a comfortable living, finding someone to love, and starting a family. Now his heady rise to global power has shredded all sense of proportion or morality. He doesn't just have a monkey on his back, he has a lowland gorilla. And its name is Control.

Metis man, 33 years old, 185 cm, 85 kg. Long well-groomed black hair, dark-framed glasses, dresses either in gray wool business suit or plaid shirt and blue jeans, depending on the situation.

**Languages:** English, French that would give a Parisian heartburn

**Attack:** 3 dice

**Defense:** 3 dice

**Hit Points:** 19 (not in top shape)

### **Traits**

*Power Structures*, 4 dice — Brilliantly assesses the nature of any hierarchy, including its hidden rules of success, and uses those rules to his benefit. Persuades people to work for him in return for intangible benefits. (Subtly solicits rumors from those he talks to)

*Rumbling*, 3 dice — Growing up on the wrong side of the tracks in Edmonton taught Elwood how to get out of a scrape with minimal damage, either by getting away or hurting the other guy first. His fighting style is far from graceful, but he's done okay by it. (Always checks for an exit and an impromptu weapon when entering unfamiliar territory)

*Bennie Network*, 3 dice — Has built a global combine of Movers who swear secret fealty to the Blue Castle. Can find allies in unexpected places, marshal resources, and make

connections. (Scratches the left corner of his mouth when meeting new people; this is the sign of the Blue Castle)

*Chaos Chancer* — As we meet Elwood, he has already been dosed with Chaos Cancer by C. A. Radford's Pipe of Dreams. This is the same destabilizing condition Radford him/herself suffers from. Its effects on Elwood are described below. (Varied strangeness)

## **Backstory**

Here is what has happened offstage before the story begins:

Cardinal, traveling to the Ukraine, turned a general in the ex-Soviet, now Ukrainian, armed forces from Vornite allegiance to Blue Castle benniedom. Anxious to make himself useful to the Blue Castle, the general — whose name is Serhiy Stech — offered Elwood a prize no power addict could refuse: his very own nuclear weapon, an SS-20. Stech has promised to arrange for the missile's removal from Ukrainian soil and its concealment on a cargo vessel registered in Sierra Leone. Once the ship appears in Al Amarjan waters, the nuke is Cardinal's responsibility — he must arrange for its safe deposit and storage.

Elwood hasn't actually got any plans for the warhead yet, but he's sure it will come in handy at some point. Of all the places in the world where a missile would remain safe and secret, he figures Al Amarja is most suitable. It's close to the world's most interesting potential targets, and its government offers only minimal cooperation to nosy cloaks from NATO countries or similar busybodies. Accordingly, Elwood arrived in the Edge two weeks ago to begin logistical planning for receipt of the SS-20. Initially he was more than pleased — the place was crawling with fervent Blue Castlers, most of whom he's never even met before. His plan fell into place before he even knew he had one. Unfortunately, while correctly assessing the difficulties standard cloaks encounter in Al



Amarja, he has not bargained for the activity of its in-house conspiracies.

The first thing he failed to prepare for was the alert attention of a certain sandy-colored mutt as he discussed plans with a top bennie on an isolated park bench. Alarmed at what he heard, Andalusia called an emergency meeting of the Cut-Ups. They decided to use random determination to decide who would handle the case. As the target of the operation spoke with a Canadian accent, the group elected to toss hockey cards. C. A. Radford flicked his card (an old Dave Semenko from his days with the Oilers) the furthest, so he was put in charge of seeing that the Movers don't achieve nuclear capability.

Radford, incarnated at the time as an overly emotional Somali gas station attendant and scuba diver torn apart by his deviation from Scientologist doctrine, sought out Cardinal and tried to convince him to get back in touch with his inner child and follow his bliss. Cardinal put up with him for a while, thinking him a Dionysian Mover disinformation agent, someone he might be able to turn to his own purposes. The conversation ended badly. Overcome with frustration and remorse, Radford pulled out his Pipe of Dreams and blew its smoke all over Cardinal. He then fled in tears.

Since that moment, Cardinal has been mutating, infected with the early stages of the disorder that has made Radford an entirely mutable being. He's not taking it well. This makes the possibility of his controlling a nuclear missile even more alarming than before.

## Cardinal's Chaos Chancer

Elwood has been suffering from Chaos Chancer for two days when the PCs come on the scene. Eventually, if its progress is not somehow reversed, he will become as variable an entity as Radford.

For the moment, however, he's just facing small difficulties of a strange and random nature. His personality and lust for power are usually unaffected, and he still wants that warhead. However, as any true control freak would be, he's very deeply disturbed by the revolt of his own body.

You can determine the results of Elwood's condition by drawing cutups and applying them in odd ways to his physical or emotional state. For example, if you draw the word "devised" it might put you in mind of the word "device", which suggests something mechanical. So for a while one of Elwood's hands transforms into a dully metallic robot hand.

Because his condition hasn't advanced too far yet, none of these eruptions of the Chancer are completely crippling. Each should carry no more than a penalty die against certain actions. His robot hand, for example, might carry a penalty against attempts requiring fine manual dexterity.

Each eruption lasts roughly one to six hours. Roll a die to determine how long they last. They don't, however, change like clockwork on the hour — that would be too orderly. Instead, let the changes come when they're convenient to you or create interesting twists in the plot. Elwood never knows when the next shift is coming. At this point, they're often physically painful. Whenever possible he dashes to a private or secluded place to hide his shame and agony if he feels a biological shuffling coming on.

Here are some sample changes you can use if you don't want to come up with cutup resolutions as you go. As you use them, replace them on the random chart with cutup-inspired examples when you have time and creativity available. Unless otherwise specified, the penalty dice are applied against reactions from others. Roll two dice.

2 — Elwood's heart begins to faintly play hip-hop music. Most people in the area will assume that someone's playing a personal stereo so loudly that the sound is leaking from the earphones. But if you get close



enough, you'll hear NWA and the Disposable Heroes of Hiphopracry emanating from Elwood's left ventricle. He suffers a penalty on all hearing rolls.

- 3 — Elwood's back muscles begin to crawl and writhe, as if being scraped by invisible talons. Penalty die on actions requiring concentration.
- 4 — Elwood starts to weep copiously. The tears are maple syrup. Penalty die applied against his vision.
- 5 — When he looks at anyone, Elwood can't shake the thought that they might be good to eat, and starts to salivate uncontrollably.
- 6 — Elwood becomes completely symmetrical, his left side becoming a copy of his right (all of us have subtle differences between the sides of our faces and bodies.) This causes those who have known him previously to suspect that he has been replaced by an enemy robot or synthetic being.
- 7 — Elwood's voice sounds uncannily like that of former US president George Bush. Classic Bush phrases like "read my lips" and "thousand points of light" force their way into his conversations.
- 8 — A bullet hole appears spontaneously in Elwood's left temple, exposing brain tissue and leaking a steady flow of blood. Although this is incredibly painful as it happens, it seals up completely with no permanent damage once the next change comes.
- 9 — Elwood balloons to a weight of 120 kg. Suffers a penalty die on movement.
- 10 — Elwood is possessed by the irresistible urge to drop everything in order to rent *The Sound of Music* on videotape and watch it repeatedly.
- 11 — Elwood loses the ability to write Roman characters; whenever he tries to write something down the result comes out in Japanese ideograms, which he does not understand.
- 12 — Elwood suffers the delusion that he is a space trader from the future marooned on a primitive planet whose culture is a bizarre parody of 20th century America.

## Getting In

Although we can't anticipate the wide range of possible motivations for characters in an OTE series, we can present, as examples, reasons why some Al Amarjan conspiracies would want to get involved in this story. Use these as templates for groups not mentioned. It is entirely possible that your group contains PCs who are bennies to separate or even opposed groups, so that more than one motivation will be in play, and your players will be working at cross-purposes.

The list starts with the two most obvious groups; other examples are listed alphabetically.

**Cut-Ups:** Stage Andy's emergency meeting a session or two before you want to run "Meaningless Tissues", up to the point where Radford wins the hockey card draw and takes on the assignment. Then let them go back to other business. Later, when you wish to begin the adventure, they hear a familiar theme song issuing from a nearby TV set — in their room, a bar, or wherever they happen to be. It's the Tiffany Trilobite song. As informed Cut-Ups, they know to pay attention.

Tiffany pauses from her hilarious attempts to get a lion inside a fishbowl and turns to her comrades on the other side of the tube: "C. A. Radford's gone into retreat somewhere. He said something about coming to terms with his engrams or something like that. Anyway, he wants you to wrap up the Elwood Cardinal thing. Says it should be real easy — he's already dosed the guy with Chaos Chancer, so all you gotta do is find him, turn him, and stop the nuke from falling into the hands of Control."

The lion bursts from the glass bowl and nearly bites off Tiffany's plated head. "Oops, gotta run guys!" She turns back to the lion, beaming it with a conveniently-placed seismograph machine. She has returned to her regularly-scheduled episode.

The ideal result for the Cut-Ups is to arrange for the dismantling of the missile and the defection of Cardinal to the side of Chaos.

**Movers:** If PCs are the witting or unwitting agents of a Mover cell, their leaders will order them to approach Cardinal and volunteer any necessary assistance. At the outset of the story, local Movers are all convinced of the legitimacy of the Blue Castle and want to curry favor with the lofty Mr. Cardinal. If the PCs report back to their superiors after they've discovered that all is not well with Elwood, they'll move to cut Elwood out of the operation and grab the missile for their own particular cell, ordering the PCs to spearhead the caper.

(Things are different if there are no Mover-driven PCs. Two factions, one with Cardinal, and one against him, come into play. See p. 71.)

**Sir Arthur Compton:** PCs who are bennies to Compton will be loaned to his friend Monique D'Aubainne — see Government, below. On the surface, it's hard to believe she'd want nasty Comptonites when she has so many personal cloaks and goons at her disposal. The rationale Compton provides his henchfolk is this: Monique knows her forces are full of Mover moles and wants to use operatives whose loyalty is certain.

**Cheryl D'Aubainne:** If Cheryl is a PC patron, she hears of the government phone tap (see below) from a newly-converted Sommerite who works as a file clerk in the DBI offices. (The DBI is better at acquiring secrets than it is at keeping them.) Although espionage isn't her forte, she thinks it would be spiritually harmful for her mother or anyone else to get the nuke. She figures the least alarming option is for the Net to sell it so it'll at least end up far away from the island. Although she won't want her people to actively team with the Net, she'll want them to work behind the scenes to this end.

**Constance D'Aubainne:** See "The Net," below. Although a Dionysus Cell member, Constance's primary loyalty is to herself, and she's decided a little profit-taking is in order.

**Earthlings:** A particular duty to clear this problem up is felt by the Earthlings, since they gave the Soviets the bomb decades ago. Aside from the fact that an explosion of the

SS-20 would cause unimaginable suffering, the Earthlings feel an obligation to help clean up the new predicaments caused by their earlier success. (The problems brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Empire have been keeping their operatives very busy.) If the PCs are Earthlings, they'll be instructed to render the missile inoperative before its eventual owner — whoever that may be — gets ahold of it. They'll be given the special training needed to do so.

**Gangs:** Members of gangs, from Aries to the Glorious Lords, may be assigned to the case as a favor to their drug suppliers, the Net. For Net objectives, see below.

**Glugs:** Another member of the DBI wiretap team (see Government, below) is a glug. Although he can't blow his own cover, he'll try to recruit other glugs or friends of glugs (i.e. PCs) to make sure the missile doesn't blow up one of the last glug enclaves. If it doesn't go off in their bailiwick, they don't much care what the vicious mutant humans do with it.

**Lydia Goodman:** If Lydia is patron to a PC, Cheryl D'Aubainne will ask for her help in achieving her objectives. See above.

**Government:** To Monique D'Aubainne, the idea of a nuke on the island is appalling. Unless it's her nuke — then it would make a rather nice addition to her weaponry collection. The DBI has tapped the supposedly secure phone of a Matti Aaltonen, a low-level Hermetic, whom Elwood has deeply involved in the plan — see p. 71. The DBI knows there's an SS-20 heading to the island from an unknown destination, in an unknown manner. They know Cardinal's name and where he is staying. The PCs are to pose as Blue Castle bennies to get inside the operation, and tip off the Democratic Guard in time to intercept the missile when it arrives.

**Kergillians:** My, that DBI investigation is leaky. Another member, secretly addicted to MDA-Cubed, trades info about it to a Kergillian dealer in exchange for a month's supply. Nuclear weapons are primitive to a Kergillian, but that doesn't make them any less danger-

ous. If PCs are Kergillian-controlled, they'll be sent to attach an advanced device to the warhead which will transmute its plutonium into an inert element. To discourage further missile shipments to the island, they'll be instructed to execute Elwood and anyone else with him.

**Le Thuys:** If Tramh Le Thuy hears there's a loose nuke in international waters, he'll have a spontaneous orgasm on the spot. If you need to explain how he finds out, Rex (see p. 34) overhears a Vornite telling a buddy about the arrival of the Blue Castle leader. Le Thuy PCs are to get to the missile by any means necessary and detonate it. If possible, they should try to fire it at a major European city — Rome, Paris, or London. But if they're not able to aim it, Tramh doesn't even mind if he goes up in a mushroom cloud with the rest of the island. The honor of causing the first A-bomb dropped on an urban center since 1945 is worth dying for.

**The Net:** Constance D'Aubainne hears about the caper through Dionysus Cell contacts, and can taste a payoff already. Six different nonaligned nations have standing orders with the Net to purchase any nuclear weapons that become available on the black market. Net PCs are initially authorized to offer Cardinal 20 million dollars for the SS-20, which he will refuse. He likes money only as a means to power, and a nuke is much more powerful than any figure in a Swiss bank account. Once Elwood refuses, the PCs are told to rub him out and pay off the boat crew, buying the product directly from the distributor, as it were.

**Neutralizers:** Elwood Cardinal's Chaos Chancer creates a weird trace pattern on Islam Petri's magic detection equipment, and he sends Neutralizer PCs out to investigate. Although nuclear weapons aren't really up their alley, the group may wish to thwart him out of simple altruism once they find out what's up. (C. A. Radford's more advanced Chancer emits a different wave pattern, one they have long since learned to filter out.)

**Pharaohs:** Pharaohs get very edgy when the mutants start lugging unsecured weapons

of mass destruction about. But they trust Monique D'Aubainne to enjoy pride of ownership of the missile without actually using it. So quisling PCs will be assigned to help deliver it into the hands of the government — see above.

**Philosopher's Stone:** As Rambeau is a Mover, he assigns any PCs at his disposal to curry favor with the Blue Castle. See Movers, above.

**Dr. Seversen:** Similar to the Neutralizers, above; Elwood's incipient chancer is radiating waves which cause irritating audio feedback to squeal from Seversen Disruption Field generators. They send PCs out with a device to narrow in on the source of the emissions, with instructions to destroy it if inanimate and tell it to move along if sentient. The best way to get rid of Elwood is to bust his plans and turn him over to the Peace Force. If D'Aubainne gets ahold of him, she'll have him killed and deported — especially if he's messing up her psychic disruptors.

**Sommerites:** See Cheryl D'Aubainne, above.

## Who Else Gets In?

Not all of the above actually happens — unless you want to juggle the actions of a dozen GMC conspiracies. Of the groups cited above, only the Cut-Ups, Government, Movers, and Net will definitely get involved whether or not they have PCs at their disposal. This means that the DBI investigation isn't really as leaky as it would be if every group were involved in the caper. If no PCs are connected to the Philosopher's Stone, Rambeau either fails to hear of the Blue Castle visitor or is preoccupied with research projects, and so on.

Even with the cast narrowed down, this is not a linear scenario. To run it, keep in mind the capabilities and plans of each group involved, including Cardinal's Blue Castle. De-

cide how each one would react to the actions of the PCs. This adventure should be PC-driven — the manner in which they disrupt the equation determines what the other conspiracies do.

The following sections give guidelines on what the involved GMC groups will do in certain circumstances. Disregard this information when PCs represent a group.

## Cut-Ups

Radford goes into retreat, as described above. He sends a message to Tiffany Trilobite, asking her to get replacements to carry on his mission. Unfortunately, before she can read the message, her none-too-bright pal Peter Protozoan uses it to light his cigar. As a result, events tumble on without the active supervision of a qualified Cut-Up. If needed, a new incarnation of Radford can show up at the climax to either mess things up further or provide a *deus ex machina*, depending on your needs.

## Government

As described in the preceding section, the DBI wiretap picks up the conversation of Matti Aaltonen, a Hermetic Mover now working for Elwood's Blue Castle. They know that he's following orders from an Elwood Cardinal at the Bienvenidos Hotel, and that Cardinal is trying to smuggle an SS-20 from an unknown destination by unknown means to an unknown location on the island. Monique D'Aubainne personally assigns a trusted DBI officer, Isil Ziya, to find Cardinal and approach him, posing as a Mover wishing to switch from the Vornites to the Blue Castle. She's to seek his confidence and uses it to find out when the nuke is arriving so the Loyal Defenders can move in and grab it at the opportune moment.

## Isil Ziya

*DBI Cloak*

Isil Ziya specializes in cover operations in which the adoption of a false identity is necessary. She is very successful at this because she herself is a deeply boring person. Although intelligent, she has a hard time finding any pursuit that interests her. Coming up with interesting things to say in conversation is a trial for her, and she grows as quickly bored with people as with things or ideas. Isil leads a life a more passionate person would find unbearably lonely; when off duty she just sits in her drab apartment staring at the walls. She spends a great deal of time sleeping. She regards her work, which outsiders might view as deadly and glamorous, with no more dedication than a hamburger flipper in a dead-end food service job. It's a living, that's all. She'd kill herself, but she lacks the emotional commitment even for that.

Ironically, it's this lack of interest and dedication that makes her such a good officer. Her superiors can trust her absolutely, as she's incapable of getting interested enough in her surroundings to betray them for power or money. And because she's a cipher, her targets read onto her whatever traits they want to see. As she's not much attached to her own persona, she finds it trivially easy to play whatever role is expected of her.

Turkish woman, age 36, 163 cm, 64 kg, short black hair, dark jacket and skirt, white silk blouse, choker of fake pearls.

**Languages:** Turkish, English, Al Amarjan patois

**Attack:** 3 dice plus bonus, X5 (taser)

**Defense:** 3 dice plus bonus

**Hit Points:** 26 (works out to kill time)

### **Traits**

*Tabula Rasa*, 4 dice — Isil's stunted personality is a great advantage in her line of work, as people she meets tend to "write" personality traits they're expecting on her blank slate. She finds it tediously simple to live up to these expectations once they're presented. (Varies — in this case, taciturn and efficient)

*Combat Training*, 3 dice — Isil got the basic DBI defense training course, and keeps sharpening her skills in the absence of anything better to do. (Moves gracefully)

*Works Out*, bonus die — Hours in the DBI gym are also a great time waster. She gains a bonus die on combat and feats of strength. (Sturdy frame)

*Bored* — Isil's disengagement with life may one day trip her up; she suffers a penalty die on any tasks requiring willpower, passion or a burning desire to survive. (Never initiates conversation topics)

## **Movers**

There are two types of Movers on the island — those who want to jump on the Blue Castle bandwagon, and those who are threatened by his growing power. Elwood has found many Movers anxious to do his bidding, and is using his Bennie Networking trait to get all sorts of minor things done for him. His main assistant in the operation is a former Hermetic named Matti Aaltonen, who has gotten this much-desired access through the simple method of being the first to show up at Cardinal's doorstep. Cardinal is still a little too intoxicated with his sudden rise to world influence to know when to turn a potential servitor down. Aaltonen is not exactly the cream of the crop when it comes to Movers.

## **Matti Aaltonen**

### *Mover Loser*

Ever since he was a child growing up in a large family of raucous, brawling alcoholics, dreamy Matti Aaltonen has wanted to be a mighty sorcerer, rising above the physical laws that doom ordinary mortals to their pitiful, dingy lives. When his school friends were busy advancing their careers, Matti was attending every crackpot mystical seminar in Helsinki, hoping to stumble across the path to true occult power. Finally he went to a lecture staged

by a traveling Hermetic Mover in order to recruit a new bennie. Matti came up to him after the talk, and was soon offered a position in the man's organization. This entailed a move to the Mover's home base, the Edge.

Of late, Matti's superior has grown increasingly disenchanted with him, and has found a new, more competent servant. He hasn't cut Matti loose but leaves him to his own devices when there isn't a menial task to fulfill. Overhearing talk of the arrival of the Blue Castle leader from his master, Matti camped out at the Hotel Bienvenidos on his own initiative, and has been rewarded, probably mistakenly, with a position of trust.

Finnish man, age 28, 172 cm, 76 kg, droopy mustache, sandy hair greased back, leather vest, t-shirt, black jeans.

**Languages:** Finnish, English

**Psychic Pool:** 3 shots

#### **Traits**

*Occult Quackery*, 3 dice — Has filled his head with any and all material on magic and the paranormal he could get his hands on. Knows lots of stuff, but makes no separation between reliable information and utter nonsense. Primarily useful at baffling the uninitiated, though with an extra penalty die applied (he rolls three dice, this penalty die, and his general "loser" penalty die, below) he can come up with useful answers to mystical questions. If he fails, he believes the BS answer. (Wears pentagram, ankh, and crystal all strung on same necklace)

*Following Orders*, 4 dice — Can usually execute tasks which are clearly spelled out to him with complete instructions. (Nods his head reflexively when listening to someone)

*Third Eye*, 2 dice — Ironically, Matti does have an innate fringe power, but his indiscriminate wallowing in pseudomystical claptrap has confused his sense of focus, preventing him from developing it. His invisible third eye allows him to see the astral plane, but his visions are cloudy and diffuse. Usually when he

sees a disincorporate sorcerer or psychovore he thinks he's got some dust in his eye. (Blinks and rubs his eye in the presence of astral beings)

*Loser* — Matti isn't exactly stupid or weak-willed, but things he's involved with just seem to mess up. Maybe it's bad luck, or an unconscious need to confirm his family's contemptuous opinion of him by continually failing. Suffers a penalty die on all actions. (Hangdog expression)

Cardinal has brought one Mover ally with him to the island, his bodyguard:

## **Carlos Esquer**

### *Cardinal's Bodyguard*

Carlos is a very disciplined man who pursues his duties with focus and determination. He was loaned to Cardinal by a Hermetic from Denmark, who used him for years as his protection on the physical plane. A withdrawn man when he's not cracking skulls, Carlos says little and refuses to let strangers draw him out.

Peruvian man, age 27, 168 cm, 90 kg of solid muscle. Squarish head, barrel neck, crewcut, polo shirt stretched tight across his bulging muscles, gray cotton slacks, docksiders.

**Languages:** Spanish, English

**Attacks:** 4 dice, X1.5 damage (brass knuckles)

**Defense:** 4 dice

**Hit Points:** 38 (built like a brick waste disposal facility)

#### **Traits**

*Busting Heads*, 4 dice — Carlos' fighting technique is long on strength and speed and short on theory. (Enormous muscles)

*Spotting Trouble*, 3 dice — Keeps his eyes open, is a good judge of character, and has an intuitive sense for upcoming danger. (Always alert)

*Physically Intimidating*, 3 dice — His stance and confidence as well as his awesome physique make him very frightening to potential opponents. Anyone with less than 4 dice in combat must roll their willpower against this trait to summon up the courage to take him on. (Granite-like posture)

*Lonely* — Carlos would like to marry a nice girl and settle down, but he's too shy to even approach anyone he finds attractive. (Withdrawn, especially around women)

On the other side of the Mover fence, we have Mary Olekobaai (see p. 32) who also headed to Bienvenidos early on to meet the mysterious headman of the Blue Castle. Her unerring sense of Upward Mobility stood her in good stead — she realized immediately that there was less to Cardinal than met the eye, and that allying with him would be a terrible mistake. She's taken the case to her Vornite superiors, who are withholding judgment on the Blue Castle while she tries to expose Cardinal as a fraud.

## The Net

Constance D'Aubainne has personally assigned one of her most trusted and efficient bennies to arrange for the acquisition of the nuke.

## Sheila Haywood

### *Criminal Criminal Lawyer*

Sheila Haywood has chosen an unusual way of dealing with tragedy. Several years back, as she was distracted by an angry cellular phone conversation with a client, her Mercedes jumped a curb, hitting and killing a mother and child. Since then she has unconsciously chosen to slowly smother her conscience by falling in with the Net (she went to the university with Constance D'Aubainne)

and learning to do progressively more horrifying things without batting an eyelash. Her former hard-driving, anxious-to-impress demeanor has been slowly iced over by a calculating detachment in which each victory must be more appalling than the last. She's exhilarated by this mission — helping to get a nuclear missile into the hands of an untrustworthy dictatorship should finally close the coffin on the last remnants of her moral sense.

She's far from famous outside the inner circle of the Net and those who deal with it; the average observer won't recognize her or peg the identity of her employers.

Australian woman, age 55, 174 cm, 68 kg. Elegant features, soft skin, dyed blond hair with dark roots showing, smartly dressed.

**Languages:** English, Japanese

### **Traits**

*Negotiation*, 4 dice — Specializes in commercial transactions, erecting ironclad deals for the Net in both its criminal and legitimate spheres of business. Good at reading the desires of others and molding her approach to them. (Relaxed, positive presence)

*International Business Law*, 3 dice — Knows how to protect the Net's interests by manipulating the laws of many nations. (Speculates on progress of grain subsidy issue in ongoing GATT trade talks)

*Butt Protection*, 3 dice — Expert at maintaining her position in the Net hierarchy; if Constance were to disappear tomorrow all of her potential successors would need Sheila to carry on. (On first name basis with magnates and mobsters alike)

*Cold* — Although she gives a good first impression, most people who've dealt with her over an extended period find her unlikeable. She finds it hard to get what she wants from people outside of the business realm.

During this mission, Sheila may call on up to six Golden Knights should she need physical backup. Use the typical stats on p. 119 of OTE.



## Access to Elwood

Ever since he began to come down with his weird malady, Elwood has become a recluse in his hotel room. He won't allow anyone to see him; if he needs to give instructions to Matti or Carlos he opens the door a crack and whispers them to Carlos, who passes them on to Matti if necessary. His curtains are shut tight, and the lights are low or off — Elwood doesn't want to see himself in the mirror, or even in a chance reflection from a polished surface. When the Chaos Chancer strikes an extremity like an arm or leg, he wraps it up in a bedsheet so he doesn't have to look at it. His terror has aroused a psychosomatic reaction, and he's showing flu symptoms even though he isn't actually suffering from a virus. He's got the chills, which alternate with the sweats. He's also subject to sneezing jags and a runny nose. This bout of "flu" provides a convenient cover with Matti, who doesn't suspect the true reason for his new boss' erratic behavior. Carlos doesn't consider Elwood's sudden seclusion out of the ordinary either — his last employer would lock himself away for weeks summoning demons and sprites and so forth. This is all in a day's work for him. He stands in the hallway outside Elwood's room, arms crossed.

The day before play begins, hotel management phone Elwood's room to complain that Carlos' presence out in the hallway is intimidating the other patrons. Elwood responds by renting the rest of the rooms on his floor, the third. This gives Carlos the freedom to challenge anyone coming down the corridor. He politely turns away anyone who seeks to approach Elwood's room. He thumps on anyone who does not respond to this businesslike request.

Elwood has used his various Mover contacts to secure his temporary headquarters from unwanted intrusion. He has a white thought generator set up on top of the television, one that generates two dice worth of psychic interference. Another device is a gift from the Hermetic magician who loaned him Carlos.

It's an obsidian amulet carved into the shape of a circuit board. It prevents third parties from tapping in on the line — unauthorized listeners hear the conversation as translated into the mating language of crickets.

It is possible to get messages to Cardinal. The difficulty is in getting a response from him. He refuses to answer the phone when it rings, except at the times prearranged for calls from Stech. Matti picks up messages left for Elwood at the front desk at about 11 AM and 4 PM each day. Carlos also accepts written messages for Elwood; after the corridor is clear again he'll knock on the door and pass them through. Trained to be wary of magical attacks, he insists on examining each piece of paper to make sure no one's trying to get a written hex past him. The PCs don't know that Carlos would never pass on the contents of such a message, and may be concerned about this.

Elwood doesn't respond directly to any messages pertaining to the nuke. While he might have handled them with aplomb a week ago, now he's shaken enough that they just make him nervous and fearful. Such messages make him determined to make sure he isn't spotted or followed when he arranges the unloading of the missile, no more. He sends Matti to any proposed meetings, asking him to get as much information about the inquirer as possible, while giving nothing away about him or his goals. Matti, being a loser, may let information slip, especially to someone with the negotiating skills of Sheila Haywood — or perhaps a PC. But he knows no details about the timing of the shipment or the rendezvous point. If Matti is kidnapped, Elwood becomes more nervous but doesn't miss him enough to try to get him back.

If some of the PCs are Cut-Ups they'll have an edge over their competitors for Cardinal's attention — they know about the Chaos Chancer, which is the only thing on the man's mind at this point. A mention of his condition in a message, however oblique, gives Cardinal a straw of hope to clutch at. He agrees to meet

with anyone who seems to know about his illness or Radford.

If your PCs aren't Cut-Ups and have exhausted all possible ways of getting to Cardinal, you may wish to provide them with a way of learning about the Chancer. Perhaps they overhear a Tiffany Trilobite cartoon intended for Cut-Up ears only, or spy on the Cut-Ups in some other way.

Or they can interview patrons of the hotel, asking people if they've seen Cardinal leave his room. Lots of people in the hotel bar, restaurant, or lobby saw and spoke to him earlier in the week. They report that he seemed very friendly and interesting. Many of them took his business card, which has an Edmonton, Alberta phone number on it — these people chatted about business deals with him, or turned out to have mutual friends. None of these casual acquaintances Cardinal networked have anything negative or unusual to say about him. From these interviews, the PCs learn only that he seemed very gregarious, and an expert schmoozer. All encounters of this type will be three or more days old.

A couple of patrons, however, will have stranger stories to tell, from the day before yesterday. Let the PCs run through enough of the above interviews before they find these witnesses:

**Dominique Nahon**, who works at Vylaska's Party Favors, ran into him in the morning. "It was the most peculiar thing, I must say. This gentleman, this Mr. Cardinal, he seemed very upset the second time I met him, so I offered to sell him some uppers to make him happy once more. And then his face starts to ripple like a pond you have thrown a stone into, and then it changes color to bright pink, and he lets out this shriek, and fuzz, like you'd find on an angora sweater — it bursts out all over his face. He ran back towards the rooms, making this terrible sound."

**Andrew Rowland**, gold prospector, had chatted with Cardinal on his first day in the Edge about investment opportunities. He saw him again a few days later, several hours

after Ms. Nahon: "So I'm chattin' to the fellow, talkin' about the East Pine formation and how even a limited investment would pay off big, you know? Looks like he's had a bad day, he's all cut up, like he shaved real bad, you know? Except all of his face was cut, like he'd been shaving his forehead and ears and everything. So then he doubles right over, grabbing his gut, groanin' like he's gonna retch. And then he opens his mouth, and I get a look at his teeth. They're like risin' up out of his gums, falling out on the floor. And new teeth are coming in to replace them — sharp triangle teeth like sharks have. And these get pushed up and out by other teeth, made of what looks like limestone to me. He covers his mouth and rushes off. I would too in that situation, you know? I scooped up a bunch of the teeth, just out of curiosity, if you want some."

If the PCs are making good progress, rule that GMC attempts to get ahold of Elwood are unsuccessful. Sheila Haywood sends repeated messages to Cardinal requesting a big meeting and offering "\$\$\$" for his "merchandise." (Enterprising PCs might intercept some of these messages — Sheila tries leaving them at the front desk as well as passing them directly to Carlos.) The government relies on a DBI wiretap on the phone, not wanting to arrest him until they know the nuke is within reach — all they get though are cricket noises. Mary Olekobaai spends time in the hotel lobby and restaurant, but is just keeping an eye on the proceedings. She's already decided he's a fraud and has no interest in approaching him. None of them suspect that Elwood is unwell until the PCs do something about it.

## Treatment for Elwood

The one thing that gets the PCs a face-to-face with Cardinal is a message mentioning his malady and offering some kind of explanation or treatment of it. He invites them up to his room, where he sits in darkness with a blanket drawn up over his legs. He recounts the meeting with Radford if asked, and describes



his multiple symptoms. It takes considerable drawing out to get Cardinal to admit his current problem — his groin area has turned to granite.

Cardinal doesn't wish to discuss his reasons for being in Al Amarja, his relationship to the Movers, or the nature of the shipment he's expecting. To get the truth from him, they'll have to convince him of three things: that they know what's going on anyway, that they offer a promising treatment for his condition, and that they'll withhold that treatment until he spills the beans. Cardinal is quite desperate — he's willing to give up the nuke in exchange for a cure. After all, he didn't have specific plans for it anyway.

Cut-Up PCs need to persuade him that they can get him to Radford, who can probably reverse the condition. (Highly unlikely if not impossible: there's only a one in six

chance that Radford is currently incarnated with the Pipe of Dreams, and it's not all that cooperative when it comes to specific tasks.) Mover PCs can promise the services of the Philosopher's Stone in finding a cure. If they've reported Elwood's condition to their superiors, they're ordered to get him to Dr. Rambeau after securing the needed info on the arrival of the nuke. Government PCs can offer the services of Dr. Nusbaum in exchange for info on the nuke docking. The Net doesn't have any genius medical oppenheimers at its immediate disposal; PCs either have to lie convincingly or promise help from a contact of their own. The characters in your series might well know a sorcerer or faith healer from the mystic s— community, for example. PCs from other organizations similarly have to shift for themselves when it comes to offering a credible cure.

Whatever the true allegiance of the PCs, it would be clever of them to allow Elwood to think he's turned them to the Blue Castle. In his distraught state he's ready to entrust the details of the project to anyone he considers a competent bennie. Carlos is not leadership material, and Elwood is realizing that Matti is a loser. Elwood is sufficiently intoxicated with his meteoric rise to power to fall for this scam if it's well-acted.

Once the PCs manage to squeeze this agreement out of him, the next step is to get him to the treatment without being intercepted by their GMC rivals.

If the PCs get stumped and it looks like they're never going to get a meeting with Elwood or figure out the way to get him on their side, you can get the story moving again by having one of the GMC groups figure it out. The PCs, and their other GMC rivals, see them going to the meeting, and spot them smuggling Elwood out afterwards. In other words, run the following section with the PCs as chasers rather than chasees. If you have a split party on different sides of the scenario, some of them chase the others.

## Escape from Bienvenidos

The Bienvenidos lobby is now crammed with various cloaks. Management is very happy about this; it always drives up sales at the bar. The PCs, however, won't be so cheerful — it means that their adversaries all saw them going up to meet with Elwood, and are awaiting the results. It's pretty much impossible to get in or out of Elwood's third floor without being spotted by rival cloaks. Even if your group comes up with a great plan or is able to use some remarkable fringe power to elude notice on the way in, you should allow the rivals to successfully counter it in some way, in order to allow for an exciting chase sequence. Substitute the forces behind the goons in the follow-

ing incidents as necessary. The feeling is more important than the precise details given here.

Once Elwood thinks that a cure is possible, he won't want to wait to get there. He insists on leaving the hotel immediately. If PCs protest that he'll be seen, he starts to flip out, alternating sobs with hysterical laughter. "I need to go now!" is the basic gist of his crazed monologue.

Elwood agrees to tell the PCs what they want to know about the nuke when they get him to treatment. So they have to successfully shepherd him through the gauntlet of enemy cloaks to get the info.

Although PCs with different allegiances have varying distances to go to get Elwood to treatment, distances don't really matter in running the chase — if you keep it fast enough, no one will be calculating mileage. The PCs, with Carlos and Matti in tow, hustle Elwood out of the building. The Bienvenidos has two standard exits and another six emergency exits.

The main exit is through the lobby. If the PCs are silly enough to lug Cardinal through the front way, they see a bunch of people dash to their feet and rush to follow them. The back exit is also being watched: the PCs see at least one watcher in a car grab for his cell phone. The emergency exits are all attached to alarms; these go off loudly when the PC group charges through them. If the PCs try to disarm the alarms before they go, Elwood grows impatient and just barrels through the door. "I'm dying here, I'm croaking, I'm turning into a washing machine for @#\$\$'s sakes!"

Rival GMCs panic when they see a group hustling Elwood away. Before they can get to their vehicle (or hail a cab) a bunch of brawlers from Sad Mary's appear and try to surround them. They've been hired by Mary Olekobaai to stand by in case she needs any rough stuff done — one of them has a small cell phone on his belt in case anyone wonders how she contacted them so quickly. Each is a 3-dice fighter with 21 hit points and the personality of a towel dispenser. They wield lead pipes

or lengths of chain for X2 damage. There is one of them per PC and two for Carlos. They demand that the group come along with them. Elwood shrilly orders Carlos and the PCs to tackle them; Carlos goes for the nearest one, preventing the PCs from considering their offer. Neither Elwood nor Matti join the fight.

As soon as the melee gets boring, or a PC starts to take too much damage, the sound of gunfire echoes off the buildings of the Plaza of Flowers. A Peace Force squad is running towards the scene of the fight. Each of them has an MP5 submachinegun, 3 dice in firearm and unarmed combat, 1 die of armor, and 18 hit points. There are as many peace officers as PCs. One is firing into the air, ordering everyone in the fight to freeze.

The Sad Mary's fighters, obviously a little punch-drunk, decide instead to run for it. The cops start firing their MP5s at the rapidly dispersing mob. In true cinematic fashion, although bullet impacts rain all around them, actual hits occur only on the extras — Mary's goons. Describe them falling down in slow motion with blood squibs going off, make lots of cool gun noises, and so forth. A PC spots a Total Taxi with its "unoccupied" light on cruise around the corner. Let them dash for the cab with Elwood and get away from the cops. If they want to ditch Matti and/or Carlos at this point, they can do so.

If no PC has the \$200 surcharge Total Taxi levies for hot pursuit, Elwood coughs up the dough. The taxi rockets away, weaving in and out of traffic. For some reason, the normally congested streets of the Edge are empty enough to allow for a high speed chase today.

And here's the reason, up ahead — it's All Sexual Orientation Pride Day, an occasion for a big parade with elaborate floats. The taxi swerves through the parade, sending costumed revelers darting out of the way and upending a float with a giant sheep on it.

Once they've intersected the parade, a large green sedan pulls off a side street and into pursuit. It's full of Net gangsters, ordered by Sheila Haywood to drive the taxi off the

road and grab Elwood. They gain on the taxi, and lean out the window with what look like super-soaker squirt guns. Actually, they're paintball guns modified to look less illegal. They fire paintballs at the taxi, obscuring the driver's visibility by smearing his back and side windows and outside mirror with bright yellow liquid. The cabbie floors it, swerving into a row of market stalls, demolishing them. Clothes, live pigeons, pots, and the obligatory oranges go everywhere.

The cabbie announces that he's near a company garage and suggests a Chinese fire drill (OTE p. 108) but insists on extra payment to get the paint off his windows. The fire drill ditches the Net, and the PCs are able to proceed to their destination uneventfully. Or you can keep the pursuit going, as more Net, Mover, or government forces pursue. If PCs are chasing Elwood instead of protecting him, you'll have to adapt to circumstances — the key is to provide the same sort of movie-like chase with destroyed fruit stands and upended parade floats, and end up with the PCs in custody of Elwood, whether they started that way or not.

## The Nuke

The PCs drop Elwood off at whatever treatment facility they've hosed him into going to. He tells them that a cargo vessel is due to dock the next day at a smuggler's cove on the northwest corner of the island. He's arranged for a crew of Mover moles in the Net to be there to supervise the off loading and transportation to a warehouse in Traboc. He gives them the precise time of arrival, and the passwords to use to get both the ship's crew and the Net/Mover smugglers to accept the user's authority. If the PCs have convinced him they're loyal Blue Castlers, he expects them to accompany the smugglers to the warehouse and then report back for further assignments. If he's agreed to give up the nuke, he tells them to get the smugglers to take it wherever they want it.

He reveals that it's not an entire SS-20 he's due to receive, just the warhead. The entire missile is too hard to conceal, and it's the warhead that's the really valuable part. A missile to deliver it wouldn't be all that hard to construct.

That night, watching news reports of the chase on TV, the smugglers get cold feet. One is told by his Mover superior that the alliance with the Blue Castle is off, and he's to surrender the warhead to Mary Olekobaai. Another reveals the time and place of the rendezvous to his Net superior and is rubbed out for disloyalty. A third gives the info to a DBI cloak in exchange for a hit of Nightmare. So everybody knows, setting the stage for the big finish.

The various GMCs all decide to wait until the warhead is off loaded to make their moves, figuring that it's much simpler to seize it when it's nicely in its truck. This not only avoids the trouble of having to overpower the crew of the boat, but takes advantage of the smugglers to do the heavy work.

Keep the details of the handover tense. Emphasize the silence of the secluded cove, the waves lapping gently against the shore, the odd cry of a gull. Make the ship arrive a little late, as the smugglers voice the fear that it's been intercepted by a foreign government. After the boat arrives, the cargo — in a very large wooden container — is unloaded by crane. A gear slips, and the box free-falls for a moment. A smuggler faints dead away before the crane mechanism catches again.

Once the box is in the truck, the GMCs make their moves. A motorboat full of crossbow-toting Movers crashes up on shore. A gaggle of Golden Knights emerge from a secret compartment of the truck, with machineguns. A government helicopter touches down full of similarly armed Loyal Defenders. A standoff ensues, with everyone's weapons trained on everyone else, especially the PCs. Three black sedans pull up, bearing Mary Olekobaai, Isil Ziya, and Sheila Haywood. Negotiations for a resolution to the standoff begin. Nobody seems willing to give in. This is where your PCs come

in — perhaps they can broker an arrangement before a minor military engagement ensues.

If the negotiations are entertainingly tense and result in a decision you don't mind — i.e. if the disposition of the nuke doesn't upset your sense of campaign balance, you can end the scenario here. If they on the other hand lack a bit of drama, or if you want to dispose of the nuke, continue on to the following sequence:

## The Return of Elwood Cardinal

A furrow of earth suddenly appears, as if something is tunneling underground towards the truck. Like a famous cartoon rabbit we all know and love, Elwood Cardinal pops out of the ground nibbling a carrot and says, "Ehh, I've come for my nuke, guys."

Obviously attempts to cure Elwood have been unsuccessful — the Chancer has spread, so that he's now a spinning roulette wheel that lands on a new, outrageous fringe power every few seconds. His form shifts from a misshapen gopher thing to an iridescent insect man to a mass of seething twine to a yeti with buzz saws for hands. For this brief moment during the incubation of his Chaos Chancer, Cardinal has a 5 dice trait called "Rotating Plot Device Fringe Power." He steps into the truck to grab the box, tossing it about as if it were paper. Crossbow bolts and bullets fail to harm him — one minute they strike him to no effect, the next they melt into apple butter, the next they turn back and pursue the soldiers who fired them.

"Whahahhaa! Nuclear power!" he giggles, pulling the warhead from the crate. "Nuclear power is your friend — I am a powered boy, I have always wanted to be powdered, gunpowder changed civilization as we know it, I'm going to change the way we all know about civilization around here, I have become chaos, the mutator of worlds, and we're all going to

do the apocalypse!” His free hand glows bright red, and he reaches for the warhead. Suddenly everyone realizes that this is going to set off a very unwanted chain reaction.

The ideal solution is for the PCs to talk Elwood through this by convincing him to embrace chaos, whether they themselves subscribe to the Cut-Up cause or not. They can either do this logically, or distract him by tossing him free-associative words; he’ll gradually start to enjoy the nonsense contest, which brings about the final change of the Chaos Chancer, turning him into a benign follower of Chaos.

If the PCs succeed at either tactic, Elwood turns the warhead into a bouquet of waterlilies and toast, converts himself into a giant firework, and explodes into the sky. Actually, if the PCs don’t use this approach, he’ll still do this eventually on his own, as the Chaos Chancer infects his mind with good thoughts. But the players won’t feel like they’ve brought about victory this way.

## Follow-Up

Later the PCs read news stories about a strange person named Elwood Cardinal who does various strange things. But he is described differently every time — as a Turkish cruise ship director, a Spanish prosecuting attorney, an Israeli comedian. If they ever meet him again, he’s another mutable personality like C. A. Radford. He declines membership in the Cut-Ups, having sworn off the world of conspiracy. Instead he’s devoted himself to bringing little bits of lunacy and doubt into the lives of ordinary people. However, he might help out fellow devotees of Chaos if they’re really in a bind.

## Intersections

**Airwaves:** The hosts of “The Conspiracy Show” and “Meet the SMOCs” might have many mutually antagonistic speculations on the Blue Castle to share with their listeners.

**“The Bliss of Death”** (from the upcoming anthology, *The Myth of Self*): A blissed-out survivor of the Ralsius Group’s assault on the Plaza of Flowers could be shaken back to normality by proximity to Elwood, the extreme psychic confusion he’s generating being enough to cancel out the bliss effect. This could provide a clue to Elwood’s mental state.

**New Faces:** Dr. Alfonso Rodriguez is an example of a free-floating GMC who might be a credible treatment source for Elwood, if the PCs somehow managed to recruit him as a contact instead of killing him.

**Unauthorized Broadcast:** If PCs have a dose of Broadcast on hand, they can elude pursuers by slipping one to Elwood, whose tormented thoughts are so intense that they wreck the concentration of peace officers or Net soldiers with low willpower.

**Welcome to Sylvan Pines:** One place PCs might hustle Elwood off to for treatment is the Sylvan Pines facility; Dr. Klemp’s Ison neural treatment procedures might seem promising to Cardinal.

**Wildest Dreams:** A sandman, sensing torment on the third floor of the Bienvenidos, might hatch a plan to break into Elwood’s room and lay some Dreamweb on his forehead to catch his nightmares. This can provide a red herring if you need one. Or the sandman could tangle with and kill Carlos if you need him out of the way.

# the last Chance beginnings

“Great indeed is the sublimity of the Creative, to which all beings owe their beginning and which permeates all heaven.”

—*The I Ching*

No matter who your PCs are, whether they owe allegiance to Control, to Chaos, or to themselves only, they become the last chance for the universe when Chaos Boy turned Control Addict, the Koanhead, evicts a couple of retired Cut-Up elders from their communion with the Primal Chaos. Manifesting only as giant glowing brains, their return to Earth shatters every known paradigm and rule of physics — and paralyses the Cut-Ups themselves. A suddenly-contrite Koanhead enlists the PCs to return the Cut-Up brains to the Nirvanic Maelstrom.

**Note:** The following adventure contains a fair bit of what might seem like prepared text, particularly dialogue by the Koanhead. This is presented more as a style example for the GM than a script for you to read out verbatim. Paraphrase as much as you can — it’s the overall feel that’s important, not the particular words and punctuation.

## Assault of the Giant Brains

The Nirvanic Maelstrom is difficult to describe in words. Or, rather, it would be very

difficult for you were I to describe it in words. A simple fourteen-word English sentence actually sums it up perfectly, but this is dangerous. Exposure to this sentence among those who are not metaphysically fit can result in complete brain shutdown in the reader. In less devastating terms, the Nirvanic Maelstrom is the center of the universe — spiritually speaking — and the central paradox that prevents energy from collapsing into matter, matter collapsing into energy, and the plug being pulled in the cosmic bathtub. It is Chaos and Control melted down into ultimate harmony. Many Chaos Boys head to the Nirvanic Maelstrom when they achieve apotheosis, when they become so chaotic they run the risk of becoming Control.

Two such beings who are now one with the Maelstrom are Surazal Namchtud and Barry Wackerle, Cut-Ups who operated in Al Amarja in the heady days of the late forties and early fifties. In April of 1957 both of them experienced transcendence of the conventional boundaries between Control and Chaos during a bout of lovemaking. Their colleague Dr. Bacteria was able to route their impossible energies towards union with the Nirvanic Maelstrom before disaster ensued. If they were ever to return to our plane, the basic structures of reality couldn’t stand the strain and would either break apart or just dissolve into absence.

Unfortunately, the Koanhead (see p. 27) is just the being to do that. Trapped for several years of isolation in a sur-dimensional prison,



the Koanhead has been meditating nonstop on the concept of impossibility. Abruptly he came upon a thought he had never encountered before — “Impossibility is merely the outline of the possible.” This koan blasted him out of prison and onto a huge stairway of plexiglass hanging in space northwest of Jupiter. He walked up the stairway and found a doorway at its top. There was a buzzer installed beside the door, and he pushed the button. A distorted voice came through on the other side, asking who was demanding entry to the Nirvanic Maelstrom. Koanhead identified himself, and was told that it would not be his time for another decade. He then repeated his reality-blasting koan. The two nirvanically merged Chaos Boys closest to the sound of his voice, Wackerle and Namchtud, were fired out of the Maelstrom back to our reality, to the place they had called home years before.

It’s business as usual for your PCs on the day they return. Let them pursue their own agendas for a while, whether they’re pursuing their training, seeking vengeance on old adversaries, or making new contacts. Then the brains appear.

Everyone in the city looks up, even the blind. People indoors rush to the windows. Hovering over the city are two giant pulsing brains the size of dirigibles. The weak-minded collapse in fear. Others experience religious conversions, change their political stances, or grow unexpected facial hair. The same words begin to echo painfully through every sentient mind, in each individual’s mother tongue: “Turbulent. Terror. Original. Venerable. Babysitter. Instant. Shutdown.”

Then pretty much everything goes away.

## The Mud Puddle Explains

Although the PCs were probably in separate places when the brains arrived over Al

Amarja, they’re together now. They’re standing in a grassy clearing on a sunny day; the temperature is warm. A light breeze brushes PC faces. The air is cleaner than the Edge’s. On one edge of the clearing is a little brick church with a style of architecture suggesting it was built in a small town in North America at some point in the 1960s — if any PCs are that up on their buildings. Behind the PCs is a forest. Fifty feet to their right or left there is literally nothing — just blankness. A couple of hundred yards past the church there’s also nothing. If PCs thrash about in the trees, they almost fall over the edge into nothing.

Although it can’t be seen, the chirp of a robin is the only sound breaking the silence. Until: “Hey, over here, pathetic humans!”

The voice emanates from a mud puddle. Ask each player what his character would expect a talking mud puddle to look like; the face in the puddle is as far to the opposite of each person’s idea as you can describe. It is the Koanhead.

When they approach the puddle, the Koanhead asks them who they are. He then explains who he is, giving a rather slanted version of his history in which he is a misunderstood hero and the Cut-Ups a bunch of jealous amateurs afraid of the true implications of chaos. (PCs who hang out with the Cut-Ups know enough to be able to contradict his story if they choose to.) Then he rather sheepishly explains what’s going on, as best as he can:

“Shucks, I seem to have made a bit of a boo-boo, if you know what I mean. Any of you familiar with computers? Well, you know what an operating system is — it’s the basic program the computer uses to tell its chips and stuff that they’re part of a computer, right? And sometimes if you’re using the wrong kind of program it overwrites your operating system when it crashes? Well, it’s like the universe has just crashed and we have to put all the information on its hard drive back together in the right order again. Think of the universe as Humpty Dumpty. And I’m the king’s men, and you’re the king’s horses, and let’s hope we do a better job of it than in the fairy tale.”

He then stops for questions, if any. If pressed, he sheepishly gives them the story of how he scrambled the fundamental underpinnings of the universe by releasing Wackerle and Namchtud from the Nirvanic Maelstrom. He's trapped back in his sur-dimension again, and has no way of getting out if there's no universe to get back to. So he's willing to give the PCs the best information he can, as they're currently the only actual beings in the universe. Everyone else is on the "crashed hard drive." He can only communicate with reality, or what's left of it, by appearing in brown liquids, like the muddy water of this puddle.

What's left of the universe appears to be garble — bits and pieces of peoples' memories scattered around according to no particular rhyme or reason. Anyone else they meet won't be real — they're just memory shadows. At this point Koanhead has no idea why these few beings are still left operating, but he's going to meditate on it and get back to them.

"For example, this particular hunk of memory is from one of the billions of people scrambled on the universe's hard disk," Koanhead begins.

## The Monster Under the Rock

"It's a church where this person, back when he was, like ten or eleven years old, used to go one summer for a day camp. The day camp was run by this counselor who turned out to be a bit of a con artist — he skipped out at the end of the summer and stole a bunch of stuff from the church. There was an outhouse back behind a big rock back of the church — you can see it there."

And indeed, the PCs see what Koanhead describes.

"To make sure the kids always went two-by-two to the outhouse, this wacko counselor invented a story about a vampire named John



Isidor. John Isidor was an all-powerful monster who was eventually buried under that rock, you see. And that surveying stake you see poking out with the red spraypaint on it is supposedly the one driven through Isidor's heart. The kids were warned to always be careful, or Isidor would charge out from under the rock and tear them to shreds.

"John Isidor haunted this kid's nightmares, even when he was on vacation with his family and far away from this loony counselor. When he got back to the day camp, the guy had changed his story, saying Isidor had been captured and imprisoned in this vault of meter-thick steel in Montreal. Other parents had complained during the vacation, see, and the guy cooled the vampire crap. But because the whole thing didn't get 'resolved' except when he was away, in the guy's unconscious decades later, John Isidor is still there."

"So. I got this theory and I'd like you to confirm it by pulling out that stake and killing John Isidor once and for all. Go ahead, and if I'm right I'll give you the whole poop. Go to it; I'll go off and meditate some more and get back to you when you're through."

Just as Koanhead says, the vampire will erupt out from under the rock — tossing this huge boulder up into the air like it's styrofoam — as soon as they pull the surveying stick out. He attacks the closest PC.

No other action in this memory realm causes any sort of reaction. PCs can't walk off the edge into the void; an invisible wall stops them. (The same wall is in the way if they try to toss Isidor over the edge, so to speak.) They can wander about in the abandoned church if they want, but won't find anything out of the ordinary there. They can try to wreck the church by burning it to the ground, but this won't get them out of here. Koanhead won't return until they deal with Isidor. There's nothing to do but eventually take on the monster.

## John Isidor

### *Imaginary Vampire*

Isidor, as an amateur folk creation, isn't very sophisticated as vampires go. He doesn't have much of a personality or range of behavior. He was turned into a monster back in the 1800s, and kills viciously and indiscriminately. That's about it. Isidor was invented to scare young children, so he's your basic unsubtle, unstoppable horror — he's more an incredibly potent bogeyman than a grand Stoker-inspired villain. PCs should figure this out after he kills them a couple of times.

Caucasian undead monster, age 123, 195 cm, 100 kg. Wears formal outfit of 1860s — moldy top coat, vest, off-white shirt, brown wool pants.

**Language:** English

**Attacks:** 4 dice, X2 (claws)

**Defense:** 4 dice

**Hit Points:** n/a

### **Traits**

*Vampire*, 4 dice — Isidor is good at killing unsuspecting people who pull the surveying stick out from under the rock. He's super-strong, capable of crushing a person's skull with his bare hands, or eviscerating someone with his 7 cm fingernails. And, like vampires of legend, he's pretty much invulnerable. Like the Dracula of the B-movies, even the old stake through the heart just puts him out of commission temporarily — his body doesn't decompose but instead just goes into stasis. (Hisses like a snake, baring 5 cm fangs)

*Imaginary*, flaw — Isidor is just an unresolved memory from somebody's past. Convincing him of this is the only way to destroy him permanently. (Narrow range of behavior)

Isidor suffers no damage from any sort of attack, fringe or otherwise. Anyone mindscanning him gets a distressing jolt of pure primal malice, with an underlying block of equally potent denial. (Deep down, Isidor knows he's just a subconscious projection, but won't admit

it to himself.) If the PCs get a cross from the church (sorry, it's Presbyterian, so there's no holy water) they can keep Isidor from coming within a meter of it. If they jab him through the heart with the stake, he goes back into suspended animation. Other kinds of damage might earn them a temporary respite — if, for example, they manage to decapitate him with a sheet of glass from the church and then keep the glass between head and torso, he's incapable of regenerating. But there's nothing to stop him from turning into mist and then reforming, more furious than ever. None of these actions resolves anything; the PCs remain trapped in this netherland of memory.

Because they're in this netherland, the PCs aren't exactly real either. Or at least, bad things that happen to them in this unreal place are impermanent. Isidor may be able to tear off their arms but can't permanently destroy their real physical presences — these are trapped along with all other matter in the collapsed universe. If all of them are slain, they immediately reappear again in the churchyard, in front of the mud puddle. The rock is back on top of the surveying stake. If they go back in the church, it is as it was before they first entered it.

"Mmp," says Koanhead, "looks like he gotcha, huh? Seems you don't get out of it that easy, though. Strange, I thought the vampire would be able to permanently wipe you out, but I guess we're all just stuck in this section of programming code — I mean, reality — till you work the bug out of it. Okay, gang, back at 'em. And try to do a less embarrassing job of it this time, huh?"

The only way to destroy Isidor is to get it to realize that it's just an imaginary projection. PCs can do this by hectoring it as they scamper out of its murderous path. Shouted taunts like "Where were you born?" "What was your mother's name?" "Who was president when you turned into a vampire?" will confuse it badly. Isidor wavers when confronted with his own unreality, becoming temporarily insubstantial if accused of being fictional. Then he attacks with renewed fury. This is

Isidor's dark secret, and he's rather vulnerable to it — reward the PCs with a sign of potential victory when they start to use it. Once argued into a corner on the subject, he screams in rage and frustration and vanish.

## Fifty Roads to China

Moments later the PCs find themselves sitting around a round marble table in an elegant dining room. The world around them is the luminous black and white of a late-thirties Hollywood movie. The walls of the dining room look like a stunning set; the diners at other tables, like charmingly unobtrusive extras. A band of oriental men in tuxedos plays Duke Ellington tunes with rip-roaring abandon.

In front of each PC is a steaming cup of coffee. The only color visible is the brown liquid the Koanhead speaks from.

"Okay, okay, done some more meditating, and I've come to some conclusions here. No applause, no applause, just doing my job as a hero of reality. Here's the deal — it turns out the universe is nothing but a consensus brewed in a psychic energy field all sentient and even partially sentient beings unknowingly contribute to with their dreams, desires, memories, and regrets. Got that? Good.

"The current problem with the universe is that the connections between all of these dreams and regrets *et cetera* have been erased by the appearance of the Giant Brains I accidentally released. Think of these connections as a wheel with spokes. The stuff that everybody agrees about, reality-wise, are at the hub of the wheel. You know: grass is green, the sky is up, knives are sharp, water is wet, the basic stuff. The further you go out on the wheel the more individual the memories get and the less they have to do with everybody's reality and just become individual reality. So, all the memories of everybody who's ever eaten

food are real close to the hub — a common thing. Everybody's who's eaten with a fork is a little further out. People who believe that they're being poked by demonic pitchforks are way out on the wheel, that's just not a part of most people's realities. Got it?" (Be prepared to ad-lib more similar metaphysical BS if characters ask him questions.)

"So furthest out on the wheel of connections are the intensely personal memories people have, or dreams or hallucinations, or whatever. Now, as far as I can tell, those connections aren't permanently shot, they're just kinda...dormant. If we — that is, you — go through enough of these far-out individual memories, the universe's hardware will be able to recognize what they are, reconstruct the connections, and shoot the brains back to where they belong."

If asked by the PCs why they're still functioning when no one else is, Koanhead says he's still meditating on that one.

"Anyway, I'm getting all kinds of psychic reverberations from this scene here. We're standing in the unresolved desires of an alien from Alpha Centauri. Her name's Galeia, and she's a scholar who specialized in interpreting TV signals emanating from Earth. She became obsessed with old movies, particularly the one we're in now, a forgotten thing called *Fifty Roads to China*. Anybody heard of it?"

The PCs haven't.

"Figures. It was an obscure spy thriller from 1938, starring Lita Lombard and Victor DeFore. It's about an American reporter in love with a White Russian singer in Japanese-occupied Manchuria. She loves him, too, but she's with this Japanese general because of some complicated misunderstandings, plus she's got this self-loathing thing and she thinks she doesn't deserve a good guy like him and he should go back to his nice American girlfriend.

"Anyway, this is an unresolved desire for the Alpha Centauran because the TV broadcast she picked up accidentally skipped a crucial reel, wrecking her whole thesis and her

academic career with it. Lita's about to start singing — her character is called Satin Flower — and in mid-number Victor, or should I say John Hazard — stumbles into the club, shot in the gut by the Japanese general's number one lackey. The Japanese burst in and announce that everyone in the place is under arrest.

"Then the reel abruptly ends, and next thing we see Lita, Victor, and his lovable companions are on a tramp steamer heading for San Francisco. Galeia is obsessed by this movie because she can't see how the plot could go from the arrest in the club to the tramp steamer. After that, there's this battle at sea with a Japanese cruiser chasing them, but she knows how that all goes. It's this break that keeps her up nights, and you've gotta fill it so we can get to the next stop in stitching the universe back together again."

Koanhead then tells them who they are. They're playing the character roles, as the eccentrics who hang around the club or Hazard's newspaper offices. Make up appropriate character-type roles for each PC. For example, if there's a mystic s— type, he's Count Zarou, the Hungarian stage magician whose act comes on after Satin Flower's. A combat-oriented PC becomes Traps Kessler, a world-weary mercenary with a heart of gold. One with shady connections becomes Ko Cheng, the local tong leader who helps Hazard to spite the Japanese. Anybody with medical skills becomes courageous old missionary Dr. Franzelhurst, and so on. Other possibilities include Willard Koenig, Hazard's hard-drinking mentor; Mikey Wexler, a young naïve sidekick; François Connart, a rakish gambler, or Dixie Frost, the self-sacrificing girlfriend who loves Hazard so much she wants him to be happy with Lita. PCs can play the role of another gender; none of the movie characters notice.

Once Koanhead has given the PCs their roles, Satin Flower takes the stage and begins to sing. Several verses in, Hazard stumbles in, shot. It's now up to the PCs to steer the narrative of the "movie" towards the embrace on the steamer. They do so by interacting with the movie characters, forcing or persuading them



along a course of action that gets Satin Flower and Hazard smuggled onto a boat being chased by the Japanese.

PCs can be hurt if they get into fights; if they die, they go in a big scene with dramatic last words and violins swelling on the soundtrack, only to reappear at the beginning of *Intersections*, p. 90. If they all get killed before getting Satin Flower and Hazard onto the boat, they reappear at the dinner club table and must start over again. PCs can also “write themselves out” of the storyline and thereby disappear until *Intersections*. For example, if a PC is a tong leader, it doesn’t make sense for him to get on the boat, so he might see them to a certain point and end his involvement in the story. He vanishes from reality till the reel is completed or re-started. If they get either Satin Flower or Hazard killed, they immediately reappear at the club and start over — after all, we know Satin Flower and Hazard survive to get on the boat. Koanhead taunts them mercilessly if this happens.

Play this section by ear; if the players are really getting into the idea of playing their characters playing stock movie characters, draw out the storyline by throwing lots of obstacles in their paths. If you want to scoot them through this section, let them get Satin Flower and Hazard on the boat after a few tense scenes.

In portraying the characters, feel free to ham it up. Evoke the style of a creaky old movie, and use as much cliché dialogue as you can muster. Remember, everybody’s an actor playing a character, and the reality is that of a Hollywood studio. When describing a location, think of it as a set in glorious black-and-white. If the PCs make it to the ocean, the water behind them looks back-projected.

Descriptions of GMCs for this section include both the actor and the part in the script they’re playing.

## Lita Lombard/Satin Lotus

*Low-rent Dietrich / Tragic Bad Girl*

Lita Lombard is a corn-fed Indiana girl the studio men are trying to model into competition for Marlene Dietrich. Although they've given her Dietrich's clothes, look, and roles, her serious dedication to scenery chewing derails any attempt at Dietrich's iconic cool.

Satin Flower is a White Russian singer afraid to love John Hazard because she's sure she's no good. Although the Production Code doesn't allow anything more than hinting in this department, she's probably an expensive hooker as well as singer. She's the classic exotic beauty femme fatale, sure she's cursed by fate to suffer the things she's had to do to survive in a hostile world.

American woman made up as exotic Russian beauty, age 32, 167 cm, 63 kg. Elaborate gowns with shiny fabric, glowing features, shimmering short blonde hair.

**Languages:** English. (Although most of the characters in this world of international intrigue should speak a bunch of languages, the scriptwriter of *Fifty Roads to China* spoke only English, so the closest any of the characters get to another language is a bad accent.)

### Traits

*Alluring*, 4 dice — Satin has an hypnotic effect on any red-blooded male who looks upon her. Some men love her from afar — others would die to possess her. (Close-ups always impeccably lit)

*Tragic* — Thinks she deserves a rotten life for the things she's done; she'll need to be convinced to go on the boat with Johnny. (Tosses her head back and throws the back of her hand sorrowfully against her forehead)

## Victor DeFore/John Hazard

*Miscast Crooner / Square-Jawed American*

Victor DeFore had his big successes in frothy musicals as the All-American boy you'd be happy to have your daughter date. In the

late thirties, he was getting a little long in the tooth for these roles and tried to branch out into the tough guy realm. The director fought against the choice, and tried to cancel out his vacuous good looks by having him get beaten up and covered with dirt through most of the film's running time. John Hazard is a reporter who has kicked around the world's trouble spots and gotten kicked back. A little too quick with the booze, he was working on a downward spiral until he was enraptured by Satin Flower. He knows she's a scrapper just like him, and they have to grab each other like life rafts and hold on tight if there's any chance for happiness in this crazy old world.

US male, age 36, 175 cm, 72 kg, leather bomber jacket, two day's growth of beard, bandage on his left cheek.

**Attack:** 3 dice

**Defense:** 3 dice

### Traits

*Romantic Gloom*, 4 dice — John's air of grand self-pity is somehow attractive to others, who go out of their way to help him win the woman he wants and straighten out his troubled life. (Drinks alone)

*Fisticuffs*, 3 dice — John Hazard might not be the world's fastest man. Or the smartest. Or the strongest. But he wins the fights that matter. Because he's an American, dammit. (Scar on his chin, which migrates from side to side depending on how attentive the makeup guy was that morning)

*Dumb* — In order for the plot to work, the scriptwriter had to make John a little thick. The character actors/PCs have to do his thinking for him. (Refers to himself as "this mug")

## Gus Thulin/General Yuji-moto

*Ethnomorphic Character Actor / Insidious Yellow Peril*

Gus Thulin (real name: Gunnar Thulin) is a Swede who specializes in foreign character

roles. He was an evil vizier in *Sinbad and the Elephant's Graveyard*, a brave Sikh soldier in *Pass to Oblivion*, and dozens of Indian chiefs in dozens of backlot westerns. He's never played a Swede, though. His idea of sinister is squinting constantly and pursing his lips.

General Yujimoto is a one-dimensional Asian villain of the period, all leers and implied perversions. He speaks in weird proverbs: "Tiger whose tail is salted soon finds himself wet, John Hazard."

Swedish man made up as Japanese, age 54, 162 cm, 75 kg. Dressed in slightly inaccurate version of Japanese general's uniform, monocle, tiny demonic mustache.

**Attack:** 3 dice, Mauser pistol (X 4)

**Defense:** 2 dice

**Hit Points:** 14

#### **Traits**

*Command*, 4 dice — General Yujimoto's word is law in this backward (and largely fictional) corner of Manchuria. He can summon up as many uniform-clad rifle-toting extras as necessary to keep Satin Flower from escaping his stifling embrace. (Barks out orders in pseudo-Japanese)

*Pistol*, 3 dice — Unlike the good guys, Yujimoto is allowed to openly carry a sidearm at all times. He's not a bad shot with it. (Gun in side holster)

*Must Possess Satin Flower* — His personal life has taken over from his duties; he cares more about keeping his prize female than his duties. (Breathes heavily in Satin Flower's presence)

## **Japanese Army Extras**

Stony Korean, Chinese and Filipino immigrants play the Japanese army in exchange for a few bucks a day and some nasty sandwiches.

Yujimoto can summon up as many of these as he wants.

**Attack:** 2 dice, rifle with bayonet (X7 shot, X3 stab) **Defense:** 2 dice

**Hit Points:** 14

#### **Traits**

*Soldier*, 2 dice — These are typical nameless movie goons — they don't shoot too well, explaining why the hero can always get away despite the proverbial hail of gunfire. Their main strength is in numbers. (Uniformed, armed)

*Low Morale* — None of these guys are motivated enough to do more than a basic job of pursuit, especially as they know they're on a personal mission for Yujimoto instead of one for the greater glory of Japan. (Loll about when off-duty)

Hazard stumbles into the nightclub and falls to the floor, shot by the General just outside. The General, with a retinue of extras, enters shortly after and announces: "Like the dew is caught on the web of the spider, you are all under arrest."

Let the PCs' actions freeform a plot for you. Anything they do that would make sense in a badly-written corny old flick should work here. Describe any locations as sets. They might go along with the arrest and break out of a dingy prison set, or trick the stupid guards into releasing them. Or they could make a break for it with Satin Flower and the wounded Hazard in tow, leading to a blazing chase through a standard backlot made up to look like an unnamed Chinese city. They might persuade Satin Flower to use her wiles on Yujimoto so he'll leave them alone and let Hazard die. Put together, the three major characters are about as bright as a box of Q-tips, so the PCs have to do all the thinking and maneuvering. If they try to go anywhere or do anything that would violate the style of this kind of movie, or the Production Code that censored mature content, or require too high a budget, Yujimoto's guards come in and arrest them, throwing them in the clink or at least forcing a daring escape that changes their plans.



# Intersections

Once they've got Hazard and Satin Flower safely on the boat, the scene shifts without warning. The tone shifts, too, from ironic parody to personal nastiness. Think back to your group's past adventures, and come up with the worst mistake they ever made. They are now at the site of this terrible error, about fifteen minutes before it occurs.

For example, if in *Unauthorized Broadcast* they sold out to the wrong potential buyer, they find themselves where they were just before they entered the fateful negotiation.

If in "The Bliss of Death," they ran afoul of Sir Arthur Compton, causing casualties that prevented them from dealing properly with the Ralsius Fissure expedition, they find themselves fifteen minutes before the disastrous confrontation with him.

If they helped Arnold destroy Kralepok in *Airwaves* and now regret it, they find themselves given a chance to do the opposite. If they screwed up fights with the Proteans or Roentgen Operatives from *New Faces*, they get the chance to enter the battle again with benefit of hindsight. They might find themselves back in the storyline of *Welcome to Sylvan Pines*, able to prevent Melvin Peaks from killing Niko.

Or their worst mistake might well have occurred in an adventure or improvised session of your own design. You get the idea — they're fifteen minutes before the events leading to their disastrous error. Make sure they're in a position to pause and listen to Koanhead, below. If you figure the mistake was a particular blow in a fight against a Protean, start them fifteen minutes before entering the area where the fight took place, not fifteen minutes from the striking of the actual blow.

This sequence is therefore recommended for groups with a history in the series — this won't make much sense if this is their first adventure in Al Amarja.

The sole difference between this scene and the actual locale as it was before they stumbled into disaster is a wire display rack containing a dozen gleaming cans of Castrol premium-brand motor oil, and one of those puncture pour spouts mechanics use to put it into your engine. It stands directly in front of the PCs.

If they don't clue in, a muffled voice finally emanates from the first can in the rack.

"Let me out! Let me out!" it calls impatiently. (Clamp your hand over your mouth to deliver Koanhead's in-can dialogue.)

Assuming the PCs have the sense to open a can and pour it out on a non-porous surface, Koanhead explains, speaking to them from the spill: "Man, you don't know how difficult it was projecting this image here. Anyway, it looks like we're making progress here. This is one of your memories or regrets or whatever, am I correct? This means the universe is getting slightly more in order — the wheel is organizing itself around the psychic emanations it receives from you. A few more connections made and the whole thing will be good as new again and we'll all forget this ever happened.

"You do remember this, don't you? This is when you made one of your classic bonehead moves of all time. Now you get to correct it. If you're really lucky, you might even change it in the universe's memory banks so things'll be okay in real life. But don't count on it or anything."

(If you want the PCs to be able to really rectify their error, make it so. Otherwise, this is empty speculation on the Koanhead's part. If you're feeling especially tricky, you might give any monkeying they do with the past unforeseen repercussions, so they return to an unfamiliar timeline.)

If the PCs don't open up Koanhead's can, they'll go into the upcoming situation blindly, without his explanation of what's going on.

As with the other encounters, this one restarts if all the PCs are killed, or if they fail to achieve their objective — i.e. make the same mistake all over again, or don't identify the

mistake you intend them to correct. Slain PCs vanish from reality until a restart or the next encounter.

If you run a group of disparate PCs, each can appear in her own separate reality pocket, and you can alternate from pocket to pocket. Each runs into a display rack of Castrol, and so on... When characters solve their own dilemmas, they can either appear in the pocket of the other PC having the most trouble, or can vanish for a while, depending on what you think they'd prefer.

## The Dark Secret

As soon as the big mistake is rectified, the PCs find themselves in another scene from their past — or at least one of their pasts. Go over the various character sheets and decide which one's secret would make an interesting scene if reenacted. Preferably this is a secret that the character might want to prevent from

happening given what she knows now. Someone fleeing from the accidental deaths of family members might take the steps needed to save them. A character fleeing violent employers might avoid angering them in the first place. A dimensional being sent into exile might replead his case before the sentencing court. It doesn't matter if the PC has already made the secret obvious to the others — in fact, it helps if it's a secret the other PCs care about too, and would feel good about rectifying.

The other PCs can help the central one in changing his mistake. From this point on, they'll have to find a brown liquid if they want Koanhead's advice; he's exhausted his powers of imposition with the oil rack stunt:

"Excellent, my little potato bugs! We're getting even closer to reconstructing the universe's memory lattice. Another scene relating to one of you. Very good. Well, you're gonna have to figure out how to resolve this one. I'm busy — almost got cosmic external drive controllers back on line. By the way, you realize all this computer stuff is just metaphor



so your poor little minds can grasp it, right? Really it's more like pasting all the little seeds back on a strawberry, and — oh, never mind. Just go to it."

Many such dark secrets come with their own opposition — a criminal's former gang, the court of exile, or whatever. But if all a character has to do is fix an electrical fault to prevent a fire — or something equally simple — his Mental Regulators come into play.

Mental Regulators are figures from the unconscious who take advantage of the rewritten rules of reality to spring into solid being. They do their best to physically prevent the PCs from reaching their aim. The PC's mind has come to depend deeply on his dark secret as a bedrock of his identity, and is willing to send out agents to protect it.

Each Mental Regulator has the same traits and hit points as the central PC in this episode. There are as many identical Mental Regulators as there are PCs. They can choose when to materialize and may do so separately. Once slain, they can't be replaced, unless the scene replays.

As before, this scene replays until the secret is physically or symbolically counteracted. Slain PCs reappear at the beginning of a restart or the next encounter.

## A Taste of the Future

The PCs awaken in their regular beds, finally separated. Was it all a dream? Have they freed themselves from the cosmic tape backup? Not quite — soon they realize from the calendars on their walls that they're a decade into the future. And the news, whether on radio, TV, or in printed form, is quite different than it used to be.

It's Throckmorton News. All of the top stories are about the greatness of Clyde Throckmorton, delivered by eyebrow-less

anchorpeople. The growth of world GNP under the Throckmorton Economic Plan. Further successes in the rounding up and killing of the last few resisting homosexuals. Increased obedience of children in school, and so forth.

When the PCs look out the window, all they see are Throckmortonized citizens, going about their business with a stoned, unthinking air, their patent leather shoes polished and their eyebrows shaved clean.

This section of the adventure is provided as an opportunity for you to foreshadow the Throckmorton Device plot. Feel free to expand this if you wish.

When they seek out some brown liquid for Koanhead to manifest in, he explains: "Uh-oh, the reconnecting process has hit this snag, this devastating future event. For some reason, my meditational sensing abilities are blocked and I can't see what it is. Anyway, I figure you have to do something about it, even if it's a gesture or whatever, and that'll get it out of the way for now. If you manage to work through this blockage somehow, I reckon we can reboot the universe. Go to it, my tumbling tumbleweeds."

For the purposes of this adventure, all that is needed is for the PCs to each commit some futile gesture of defiance. They'll be set upon immediately by ordinary Throckmorton citizens and beaten to death, or seized by a Throckmorton Behavior Modification Squad and taken off to cells where torture and summary execution await.

Their obstacle in so doing is the Throckmorton Device, which is giving off radiation inducing them to conform. They must resist a 2-dice mental attack every hour or succumb to Throckmortonism. PCs who succumb vanish to temporary storage on the scrambled hard drive; if all succumb the scene restarts.

If you want to expand this into a full-fledged adventure of its own, you can let the PCs try to assassinate Clyde Throckmorton or commit some other act of gross entropic disturbance to give the Throckmortonized a chance to snap out of their Control-induced mental

slumber. Otherwise, getting wiped out in the name of freedom, instead of surrendering to the Device, gets the characters back to reality. The main purpose of this encounter from a thematic point of view is to give players a preliminary glimpse of the Orwellian horror of the Throckmorton future. If they're especially clever, they might try to gather some Throckmorton information before they return to reality.

When they've gotten out of this section to your satisfaction, they can continue on to episodes of your own invention, or to the Conclusion, below.

## What If Players Come and Go?

If your run of this adventure carries over from one session to the next, you might be faced with the eternal problem of what to do when a player whose character is an integral part of one session fails to show up for the next. Or a player shows up for the second but wasn't present for the first.

Since the PCs are supposed to be the only real people still active in what's left of the universe, sudden PC appearances or disappearances pose a bit of a problem. If a player doesn't show, his character suddenly vanishes into the scrambled hard drive of reality. PCs of latecomers abruptly pop into whatever scene is in progress.

The next time Koanhead appears, he'll be quiet puzzled by this, and offer up a series of conflicting hypotheses.

**If a PC has simply disappeared with no replacement, he says:** "Uh-oh, this is bad news. I think we need to work faster, if [name of vanished] has been sucked back into the corrupt hard drive. You'll all get scrambled into nothingness just like the rest of the universe if we don't straighten this out. Hell, even I

might get zapped into nowheresville! Get moving!"

**If a new PC has arrived, he says:** "Hmm, well, this is alarming, I thought I had a handle on what was going on here, but evidently — hmm, I certainly hope we don't have to go through one of these memory-solving things for everyone in the universe. Or even everyone in Al Amarja, that would be very time consuming, and there's lots of Al Amarjans I don't particularly care to run into again, even from the bottom of a teacup."

**If one or more PCs have been replaced by others, he continues:** "On the other hand, perhaps there's some kind of underlying mystic connectedness between [name of latecomer] and [name of disappeared] which makes you psychically equivalent or something."

**If PCs have simply appeared, he continues:** "On the other hand, this could be good news. This could mean that we're making progress and more and more people are being freed up from the hard drive in non-corrupt form."

In any case, Koanhead promises to meditate more fully on this but fails to come to any conclusions. If PCs keep popping up or disappearing, he comes up with more questionable theories to "explain" what's going on. He'll warn the PCs not to concentrate too much on the question, as it could collapse what remains of reality if they accidentally hit upon a too-potent paradox.

## Other Encounters

If you and your group are having fun with these unreal encounters, you can always slot more of them in. Or if you don't like the ones supplied, substitute your own. Here are some suggestions:

- The PCs regress to their physical states at age 7, but retain their mental faculties. They then have to defeat a gang of young

bullies — childhood versions of their current enemies on Al Amarja.

- The PCs find themselves in a possible future scene, now aged to the point of decrepitude. They must face down their enemies — who have survived the rigors of age slightly better than they — one final time.
- The PCs find themselves acting out the roles in a favorite children's book so that it comes out as written despite the appearance of vicious Le Thuy saboteurs.
- The group appears in the thick of things in the midst of a historical catastrophe — in the Enola Gay, on the Titanic, on the space shuttle before it explodes, with Custer immediately previous to his last stand, with Jim Jones as the cyanide is poured into the purple Kool-Aid. Are they supposed to make things come out better, or protect the integrity of the timeline by ensuring that the disasters decreed by history come off as usual?

## Conclusion

Once the PCs have resolved enough tricky memory chunks, they reappear at their original positions. Then the brains appear. Everyone in the city looks up, even the blind. People indoors rush to the windows. Hovering over the city are two giant pulsing brains the size of dirigibles. The same words begin to echo painfully through every sentient mind, in each individual's mother tongue: "Turbulent. Terror. Original. Venerable. Babysitter. Wrongness. Return."

The brains explode in a flash of rainbow light, suffusing every Al Amarjan with a

feeling of primal dread, which is followed by a rush of pleasure and relief. Shaking their heads, the residents of the Edge return to their prior activities. Within hours, it is nearly impossible to find anyone who remembers the brief appearance of the brains.

A few pamphlets describing the event later turn up on park benches, but these are written off as the ravings of lunatics. A few attuned minds recall the event, and ponder its meaning, privately.

## Aftermath

For all intents and purposes, the events in the adventure never really happened. Koanhead remains in his surdimensional prison, and reality is back where it was originally. Maybe there are echo events that have subtly changed things — a PC has expunged his dark secret, or a prominent GMC suddenly announces a change of sexual orientation. One of the fictional beings — Satin Flower or John Isidor — might have been released into reality and later appear to surprise or harass the group. If a PC gets a botch while trying to navigate the airport terminal unassisted, he might open a door and end up back in the encounter he found most troubling.

Most likely, the PCs finish this adventure with an image of Koanhead as a pesky but helpful fringe being. This could set them up for a fall later if Koanhead manages to free himself and once more try to assert Control over Al Amarja and the world, recruiting the PCs as patsies for his nefarious plans.

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# Weather The Cuckoo Likes

*"Dada was the theory;  
we are the practice."*

— *The Cut-Ups' Motto*

The Cut-Ups are the Al Amarjan wing of the Chaos Boys, an international (and interdimensional) group devoted to thwarting the plans of Control Addicts everywhere. If you know Al Amarja, you know it's *full* of Control Addicts!

The Cut-Ups don't so much attack the various conspiracies they oppose, as strike out instead at the very fabric of reality on which all of their insidious plans depend.

As an *Over the Edge*™ sourcebook, *Weather the Cuckoo Likes* will bring you along on the Cut-Ups' outrageous exploits.



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This sourcebook includes:

- Descriptions of individual Cut-Ups, from the Andalusia Dog to noted game designer Robert "Doc" Cross;
- Foes of the Cut-Ups, including the unfathomable Koanhead;
- "The Coatless Code," which guides the Chaos Boys (and also fits very nicely on a placemat);
- Optional Cut-Up Rules — a completely new approach to game mechanics for OTE or any other game;
- Cut-Up Technology, fringe devices from the Cut-Ups Machine itself to the Collective Unconscious Swizzle Stick;
- plus TWO COMPLETE ADVENTURES, to throw your player characters right into the zany fringes of Reality that the Cut-Ups call home!

*"This is the weather the cuckoo likes, armored division submissive to vernacular the world into a gambling birdhouse velocity."*

— *The Cut-Ups' alternate motto*