

= Exploding cigar =

An exploding cigar is a variety of cigar that explodes shortly after being lit . Such cigars are normally packed with a minute chemical explosive charge near the lighting end or with a non @-@ chemical device that ruptures the cigar when exposed to heat . The customary intended purpose of exploding cigars is as a form of hostile practical joke , rather than to cause lasting physical harm to the butt of the joke . Nevertheless , the high risk of unintended injuries from their use caused a decline in their manufacture and sale .

Although far rarer than their prank cousins , exploding cigars used as a means to kill or attempt to kill targets in real life has been claimed , and is well represented as a fictional plot device . The most famous case concerning the intentionally deadly variety was an alleged plot by the CIA of the US in the 1960s to assassinate Fidel Castro . Notable real @-@ life incidents involving the non @-@ lethal ilk include an exploding cigar purportedly given by Ulysses S. Grant to an acquaintance and a dust @-@ up between Turkish military officers and Ernest Hemingway after he pranked one of them with an exploding cigar .

= = Manufacture and decline = =

During the early- to mid @-@ 20th century , exploding cigars were a popular practical joke device , frequently advertised and mentioned in newspapers of the era . Despite their popularity , the history of the exploding cigar 's development is apparently not well documented , including how , where and when they first appeared . The largest manufacturer and purveyor of exploding cigars in the United States during the middle of the 20th century was the S. S. Adams Company , which , according to The Saturday Evening Post , made more exploding cigars and other gag novelty items as of 1946 than its next eleven competitors combined .

The company was founded by Soren Sorensen Adams , dubbed " king of the professional pranksters " , who invented and patented many common gag novelties such as sneezing powder , itching powder , the dribble glass and the joy buzzer . The largest New York ? based manufacturer of exploding cigars was Richard Appel , a German refugee from Nuremberg , who in or about 1940 opened a gag novelty factory on Manhattan 's Lower East Side .

By the time exploding cigars were being turned out by manufacturers such as Adams and Appel , the chemical explosive variety had fallen out of favor . According to Adams , the large @-@ scale switch to a non @-@ chemical device occurred in approximately 1915 in the aftermath of a death caused by a homemade exploding cigar rigged with dynamite . Though exploding cigars were not normally rigged with dynamite but with explosive caps using a less powerful incendiary , following the incident , a number of U.S. states banned the product altogether . The replacement for chemical explosives was a metal spring mechanism , bound with cord ? as the victim puffed away , the cord burned through , causing the device to spring open , thus rupturing the cigar 's end .

However , the decline in the use and advertisement of the exploding cigar was neither complete , nor permanent , and they can be obtained worldwide . In the United States , makers include Don Osvaldo and Hawkins Joke Shop . However , their availability in the USA is limited , as some states , such as Massachusetts , have banned their sale entirely .

Prank exploding cigars have caused many injuries over their history . For example , in 1902 one Edward Weinschreider sued a cigar shop for an exploding cigar which burned his hand so badly three of his fingers had to be amputated . As has been observed by one legal scholar , " [t] he utility of the exploding cigar is so low and the risk of injury so high as to warrant a conclusion that the cigar is defective and should not have been marketed at all . " Laws have been enacted banning the sale of exploding cigars entirely , such as Chapter 178 of Massachusetts ' Acts and Resolves , passed by its legislature in 1967 .

= = In fiction = =

Both prank and intentionally deadly exploding cigars have been featured in numerous works of

fiction , spanning many forms of media including literature , film , comics books , cartoons and others . A well @-@ known use of the exploding cigar in literature , for example , appears in Thomas Pynchon 's 1973 novel , *Gravity 's Rainbow* . In it , the character Etzel Ölsch symbolically betrays his death wish by eagerly smoking a cigar he knows to be of the prank explosive variety . Other book examples include Robert Coover 's 1977 novel , *The Public Burning* , where a fictionalized Richard Nixon hands an exploding cigar to Uncle Sam , and Sherburne James ' *Death 's Clenched Fist* (1982) , in which a Tammany Hall politico of the 1890s is murdered with an exploding cigar .

Film examples include Cecil B. DeMille 's 1921 romance *Fool 's Paradise* , wherein the main character is blinded by an exploding cigar ; Laurel and Hardy 's *Great Guns* (1941) , which features a gag in which tobacco is replaced by gunpowder ; the Elke Sommer vehicle , *Deadlier Than the Male* (1967) , where a murder by exploding cigar is a key plot element ; in The Beatles ' 1968 animated feature film , *Yellow Submarine* , where an exploding cigar is used to rebuff a psychedelic boxing monster ; the 1984 comedy *Top Secret !* , in which Omar Sharif 's British secret agent character is pranked with an exploding cigar by a blindman ; and in the 2005 film *V for Vendetta* , where the main antagonist 's cigar is swapped with an exploding one during a comedy skit .

Appearance of exploding cigars in the Warner Bros. cartoon franchises , Merrie Melodies and Looney Tunes was fairly common , often coupled with the explosion resulting in the pranked character appearing in blackface . Some examples include : Bacall to Arms (1942) , wherein an animated Humphrey Bogart gets zapped by an exploding cigar leaving him in blackface , 1949 's *Mississippi Hare* , where the character , ' Colonel Shuffle ' likewise ends up in blackface after the explosion , 1952 's *Rabbit 's Kin* , in which Pete Puma offers Bugs Bunny an exploding cigar (true to form , Bugs Bunny turns the tables on the hapless feline , placing the cigar in Pete 's mouth after he is dazed and lighting it with expected results) , and 1964 's *Dr. Devil and Mr. Hare* , where the Tasmanian Devil successfully gets Bugs Bunny to smoke an exploding cigar .

Other media examples include television appearances such as when Peter Falk 's Columbo must solve an industrial magnate 's death by exploding cigar in the episode " *Short Fuse* " (1972) , in a season four episode of the United States television , CBS crime drama , *CSI : NY* titled " *Child 's Play* " , wherein the forensic team investigate the death of a man killed by an exploding cigar , and in a 1966 episode of *The Avengers* entitled " *A Touch of Brimstone* " ; in video games such as *Day of the Tentacle* where the player can offer George Washington an exploding cigar ; and as a stock device by the Joker in Batman comic books . For example , in *Batman # 251* (1973) entitled *The Joker 's Five @-@ way Revenge* , an exploding cigar is used by the Joker to decapitate a man .

= = In reality = =

= = = CIA plot to assassinate Castro = = =

In the late 1950s under Dwight D. Eisenhower 's presidential administration and in the early 1960s under John F. Kennedy 's , the CIA had been brainstorming and implementing plots to assassinate Fidel Castro , going as far as enlisting the help of mafia leaders such as Johnny Roselli and Santo Trafficante , Jr. to assist in carrying out their plans . Many assassination ideas were floated by the CIA in the covert operation which was dubbed " *Operation Mongoose* . " The most infamous was the CIA 's alleged plot to capitalize on Castro 's well known love of cigars by slipping into his supply a very real and lethal " exploding cigar . " A November 4 , 1967 *Saturday Evening Post* article reported that during Castro 's visit to the United Nations in 1966 a CIA agent approached New York City police chief inspector Michael J. Murphy with a plan to get Castro to smoke an exploding cigar .

While numerous sources state the exploding cigar plot as fact , at least one source asserts it to be simply a myth , and another , mere supermarket tabloid fodder . Another suggests that the story does have its origins in the CIA , but that it was never seriously proposed by them as a plot . Rather , the plot was made up by the CIA as an intentionally " silly " idea to feed to those questioning them about their plans for Castro , in order to deflect scrutiny from more serious areas of inquiry .

Whether true or not , the CIA 's exploding cigar assassination plot inspired the cover of the October 1963 issue (# 82) of Mad Magazine . The cover (pictured at right) bears the headline , " You 'll Get a BANG out of this issue of Mad Magazine " , and features a painting by Norman Mingo depicting Castro in the act of lighting a cigar wrapped with a cigar band on which is drawn Alfred E. Neuman with his fingers plugging his ears , awaiting the explosion . An exploding cigar is also featured on the poster for the Channel 4 British Documentary , 638 Ways to Kill Castro , which shows Castro with a cigar in his mouth that has a fuse projecting from the end and a lit match approaching . An exploding cigar was tested on a season 2 episode of Deadliest Warrior , KGB vs. CIA . The cigar completely destroyed the upper and lower jaw of a gel head but was determined to be very unreliable due to its timed fuse and small explosive payload .

= = = Ulysses S. Grant 's delayed gift = = =

According to a 1932 Associated Press story , U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant gave Horace Norton , the founder of a defunct college in Chicago , an exploding cigar soon after being introduced to him , but the " joke " wasn 't revealed until many years later .

According to the story , unaware of the nature of the gift , Norton saved the cigar , keeping it on display in his college 's museum . Years later , when the school was shutting its doors for good , the alumni thought it would be a fitting gesture to smoke the cigar at the college 's annual reunion . The honor was given to Winstead Norton , Horace 's grandson . During the sober speech he was presenting , Winstead lit the cigar , and after two puffs , it exploded . A 1952 news report contradicts one detail , holding that the explosion ultimately occurred at a family reunion rather than the alumni affair noted .

The tale of " Grant 's cigar " has unquestionably been embellished over time . The possibility exists that the tale is a hoax or urban legend or that the cigar was tampered with by someone after Grant 's purported presentation .

= = = Ernest Hemingway = = =

Reportedly , Ernest Hemingway , urged on by a group of journalists with whom he was drinking at the Palace Hotel bar in Rapallo , Italy , presented an exploding cigar to one of four bodyguards of Turkish general ?smet ?nönü . When the cigar " went off " , all four guards drew their guns and aimed at Hemingway . He apparently escaped without any grievous bodily injury .