

# Sick Again

By Greg Stolze

The player-characters are part of a quick-response group of doctors and other first-responders working in the American southwest. In addition to regular jobs, they make themselves available to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, getting on the scene to identify and deal with outbreaks of virulent diseases. Initially formed as a counter-germ-warfare initiative after the anthrax attacks of 2001, their mandate was broadened to address SARS and Bird Flu concerns.

Officially, they're the Fast Escalating Virulent Emergency Response Group. In casual conversation, 'FEVER.'

Their direct overseer is Dr. Stacy Marholm, an Associate Director for the Division of Preparedness and Emerging Infections (DPEI) under the National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infections (NCEZID). There's shared oversight from the Divisions of Vector-Borne Diseases (DVBD) and High-Consequence Pathogens and Pathology (DHCPP). In fact, characters who are primarily biologists may be on departmental loan from the DHCPP, while someone with an epidemiology specialty is likely to be from DVBD. If the players seem really interested in sniping across the org chart, let them, at least until they start dying in Hudson's Well.

For the 'Fast' element, the group has a dedicated pilot. If that player wants to be the token tough, it's not a bad idea to have a military pilot, possibly a leftover from the group's semi-military genesis.

When it comes to characteristics, Intelligence and Constitution are king and queen for medicos. High Power isn't uncommon among hard-charging, take-no-prisoner physicians who sign up for scary and uncertain circumstances.

The professions the players can consider are the following:

- **Physician.** You could do a party that's all physicians and use Bonus Points for piloting or the disaster-control aspects of the job. At least two MDs.
- **Pilot.** The pilot's Craft (Electronics) can be surprisingly useful. The helicopter used (an H175 Airbus) takes two pilots.
- **Scientist.** Biology, Botany and Chemistry are all good Science specialties.
- **Paramedic.**
- **Lawyer.** Likely the group's leader.

## Hudson's Well and Project WHITE HALL

The late Dr. Rosamund Keyert ineptly taught theoretical physics at CalTech and, in between mumbled lectures, did some interesting work on the curvature of space-time. In doing so, she stumbled into the invisible fallout of MAJESTIC's experiments with Tillinghast Resonator technology.

She had no connection to the program or its subsidiaries, and no real insight into their experiments, but she was the only one outside of their walls to notice odd, repetitive

“pops” in spacetime coming and going at regular—and predictable—intervals, marked as high-energy particle spikes of a very exotic nature. She spun her paper and its supporting experiments up into a grant from Sandia national labs to research the phenomenon. In the fall of 2012, Keyert took leave from CalTech and moved from Pasadena California to Arizona to begin her experiment.

She lucked out. A previous research outfit had used a played-out copper mine in Arizona from 2005 to 2009 as the site of a Main injector neutrino oscillation search station (MINOS), a very small cog in a very big project for Fermilab. The Sandia grant gave her and her team access to the closed MINOS site, and Keyert built her WHITE HALL project there. It was a series of high-energy coils, a capacitor, and UV lasers whose purpose was to redouble and amplify the odd signals she had detected in spacetime. Her grant was enough to also employ several assistants to help her in her work.

The nearest town is Hudson’s Well, Arizona, where she, her assistants and researchers lived. For months, the group toiled in the mine at 23 hour intervals, following each uptick and vanishing of the phantom signal, attempting to “boost” it.

On 12 JUN, 2012, Dr. Keyert’s greatest, and last experiment succeeded far beyond her wildest dreams.

To grasp what happened, it helps to ask the question “If time travel is possible, where are they all?” One scientist suggested that a time machine would need to work as a closed loop. You’d turn it on to create something like a beacon, or an anchor, for itself. Once it was on, you’d be able to energize the other end of it—the same device farther down the time stream—and bridge the gap between them. That’s exactly what MAJESTIC (and later DELTA GREEN did). On 12 JUN 2012 DELTA GREEN closed just such a loop opened onboard the destroyer escort U.S.S. Eldridge 28 OCT 1943, and Keyert, accidentally listening in, opened a second, smaller hole through spacetime.

Instead of the predictable chirp from her computer indicating that the mysterious signal had been received again, there was a flood of green sparks and, shoving past damaged metal, a visitor.

Before her death, Dr. Keyert estimated that the wormhole had stayed open for 2.21 seconds and had stretched to 1.17m in width. Her back-of-the-envelope calculations indicated that the power requirements for that were 22 billion Petawatts, a bit less than a tenth of the sun’s total output. She had no idea how that could even be vaguely possible. But then, of course, she had little time to consider it, because she was so ill.

## Thartha

The entity that emerged from the wormhole looked like a woman, a hypothesis confirmed by initial physiological examination and, later, blood tests. The subject had rudimentary English at best and seemed to be named ‘Thartha.’

Specifically, the visitor was 7’5” (2.29 m) tall, weighed 270 pounds (122 kg) and had AB+ blood. She had almond-shaped brown eyes, brown hair in a braid, and dark-tan skin. Her features were angular, with high cheek-bones, a pointed chin and a straight, long nose with narrow nostrils. She wore a fitted coverall that seemed to be of cotton canvas, no shoes, and no jewelry or ornamentation of any description. She seemed

taken aback to find herself in an experiment chamber, though not nearly as astonished as Dr. Keyert.

WHITE HALL had radiation isolation protocols in place, and Dr. Keyert and the base administrator, Brad Stusser, suited up and got the Thartha into a decontamination chamber, where they attempted communication. (The digital record of this interview was later transcribed and labeled—optimistically—“THARTHA INTERVIEW #1”.)

## Day By Day

Unsure what else to do, Stusser and Keyert swore all the other witnesses to secrecy, locked the door on the decon chamber, and went to bed. That was Day One.

(To the outside world, “Day One” was 12 JUN 2012).

Sometime very early in the predawn of Day Two, Thartha somehow got through the door and attempted to get out of WHITE HALL. In the process she encountered an assistant named Charles Davies, who vanished and was never found. Whatever happened to him, it happened while Stusser was listening in over the radio. Stusser and others returned with firearms and proceeded to shoot the would-be escapee, fatally wounding Thartha in the torso, head and leg. Day Two was spent in meeting after meeting, trying to (1) locate Charles Davies, (2) figure out how Thartha bypassed the door in the decontamination chamber (still locked) and (3) decide what to do with the corpse.

Brad Stusser and the others did not know that, like everyone at WHITE HALL, they’d been exposed to an illness that, eventually, gets named by the Agents. Despite their decontamination attempts, the illness (hereafter referred to as \_\_\_\_\_itis) was into the ventilation system within minutes of Thartha’s arrival. Keyert and Dr. Jeff Langzweil had both carried it off base and into Hudson’s Well.

By the end of Day Two, Brad Stusser had a sore throat and a headache. Other personnel at WHITE HALL began trickling into its infirmary.

On 13 JUN 2012, Liz Maurey knocked on Dr. Keyert’s door while soliciting pledges for a church fundraising drive, and was infected. Philippa Jones took her grandkids out for ice cream at a Baskin Robbins/Dunkin’ Donuts with a closed off drive-thru, standing in line behind Dr. Jeff Langzweil. They were all exposed, as was the kid behind the counter. As for Harudo Cortez, despite swearing off his liaison with Mrs. Emily Langzweil, they met for a tryst that very afternoon and slunk away a whole hour before her husband got home. She’d gotten infected the night before, and gave it to Cortez before even feeling a single symptom.

Brad Stusser died sometime in the early hours of Day Three (14 JUN 2012), but not before locking down the communications system. Dr. Jeff Langzweil checked in to the Hudson’s Well Catholic Hospital a few hours after noon. One of Dr. Keyert’s last actions was to set herself and her house on fire after sending a fragmented and delirious email to the Centers for Disease Control.

Cortez skipped work on 14 JUN 2012, feeling sick to his stomach, sick of his affair, and sick of the way his wife fluttered around trying to make him feel better. Liz Maurey came down with fever and searing head pain at the swimming pool and was taken to the hospital with an initial diagnosis of heat-stroke. Philippa’s daughter called when Philippa failed to show up on time, went to her condo when she didn’t answer her

phone, and found her passed out in a cold tub. Philippa died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

With Jeff Langzweil’s death early on Day Four (15 JUN 2012), the CDC gets a desperate call from Dr. Maya Paulden. It’s not just Langzweil that has her rattled: She has eight other cases of an unidentified, rapid-onset infection (Liz Maurey and her two sisters Francesca and Julie; Harudo Cortez and his wife Henrietta; Langzweil’s wife Emily and one of her co-workers, Steven Embry; and a donut-store clerk named Amad Malouf.)

Enter the Agents.

## “\_\_\_\_\_itis”?

The Agents get to name the illness. Before they isolate it (probably in Scene Three), their bosses refer to it as “the unidentified syndrome” and the doctors on the scene call it “the mystery infection.” But once the illness is pulled out and defined, the character who makes the Medicine or Science roll gets to name it.

Some options to suggest if they get stuck are: A formal Latin name (like *Velox Febris*, meaning ‘quick fever’ or *Divisa Caput* meaning ‘split head’), an acronym (such as RONI for ‘Rapid Onset Neuralgic Infection’ or SCOF for ‘Sudden Contagious Occipital Fever’) or simply a description (“Hudson’s Well Syndrome” or “Langzweil’s Disease”).

Whatever the Agent names it, that becomes its official, published, formal, acknowledged name—so veto anything silly and have their boss or some other authority on the scene start calling it Paulden’s Fever. Later on, the fact that they named it can be a big lever, proving that this illness did, in fact, travel back in time to infect them.

## SCENE ONE: Scramble

The Agents begin by pulling their cars in to a small airstrip on the outskirts of the Phoenix metropolitan area. At this point, all they know is that FEVER is being activated for an emergency insert. The pilot gets there first and is directed to an airstrip to the north of Hudson’s Well, a small town on the Mogollon Plateau about 170 miles northeast of their location. It’s just about midmorning and already hot.

The Agents’ vehicle is a H175 Airbus is a helicopter, which can carry 12 with an effective operational range of 780 nautical miles before refueling.

As the other characters arrive, let them interact in character a little bit to establish some ground-states of relationship, then hand them the mission briefing from page xx.

With that in hand, describe the thunderheads cruising in as the Agents clamber onboard the copter. The pilot will need to make a hard choice—fly through or around.

Everyone on the copter can take actions during the trip (see “In Transit” on page xx). They may throw you a curve by coming up with something you hadn’t considered (in which case you have to wing it, bluff or put them off), or they may not have ideas about what to do. A harsh Handler could simply decree that Agents who can’t think of a productive use for their time sit in the helicopter being deafened and nauseated by the buffeting of the wind on their tiny craft. A generous Handler may suggest some of the following options. Or if you’re middle-of-the-road, you can permit each player an INTx5 roll. Let them discuss things a bit over the headsets and figure out what they want to try.

But before they do anything that involves phones or internet, the pilot has to battle the storm.

Just before takeoff, however, one of the airfield controllers runs up with two pages fresh off the fax. One is the email from Dr. Keyert (page xx). The other is the timeline overview from Dr. Strickland (page xx).

## Riding the Storm Out

After the takeoff, the pilot has a very stark choice, and it's entirely up to him or her. The choice is: Bore straight through the outskirts of the oncoming thunderstorm and get to Hudson's Well as soon as possible, or push to the north, outrun the front, and come in along its northern fringe. Going straight through is the shortest, fastest option, but it's riskier: Storms run on heat, and an Arizona summer has a lot of it. On the other hand, going around is going to double the transit time.

Sensory description is essential here. Everyone should feel imperiled. The pilot should feel the weight of having everyone's lives. The passengers should worry that their lives could end instantly, and there's nothing they can do about it. So get in the helicopter lurches, the inner-ear pops, the sputter of the engines, the momentary brilliance of lightning and the roar of thunder and rain.

## Straight In

The storm is a wall of water in front of them, it looks like they're about to Kamikazi-dive a black Niagara Falls... closer... they get a sudden strong gust that bats the helicopter to the side, tilting it 20 degrees for a second before it recovers... and then they hit it.

Instantly the copter starts to vibrate on a second level. It was already thrumming with the spin of its engine, but now the pelting of hundreds of gallons, coming down and across in bullet-sized drops, is rattling everything as well. Give a Pilot roll.

**Fumble:** There's a brief, incendiary moment as lightning courses through the plane. Everyone is temporarily blind and momentarily deaf. Visibility is zero. No pressure breach, but losing altitude. Get the players sweating and then... the craft recovers! But all electronic communications (including the headsets the Agents communicate with) are out.

**Fail:** There's a bright pop and a squall over the radio, and those in the back compartment would later swear that a grapefruit-sized ball of lightning went straight through the cabin. But the copter recovers, charting a stable course through the wind and rain. Electronic communication is down though: For the rest of this flight, any of the "In Transit" tasks that rely on Wi-Fi, Internet, cell connections or radio are off the table.

**Success:** It's only water. The copter surges through, shaking and swaying, but confident on its course. The Wi-Fi doesn't even go down!

**Crit:** The H175 is a graceful leaf, dancing, dancing on the wind. Have a bonus SAN point, pilot. You'll need it, later.

If the pilot made that first roll, the other characters can each take one of the actions described under “In Transit” on page xx. After that, another no further rolls are required and the plane lands at a small commercial airstrip near Hudson’s Well.

### **Duck, Weave and Dodge**

The more conservative course is to get out in front of the storm system and try to get around it, coming back towards Hudson’s Well from an easier approach. Pilots who take this option get +20% to their Pilot roll to make, but no matter how well they do, they inevitably take a lot more time to arrive. This means that when they get to Scene Three, it’s too late for Option #1: Emily Langzweil, the last two Maurey sisters and the Cortezes are all dead. Moreover, if they attempt to contain the outbreak (Option #2), their rolls are at -20%.

A Pilot roll is still needed en route, to adapt the Osprey to the torrents of wind and rain.

**Fumble:** First, there are the effects of a simple failure. Then, because of the fried electrics, it’s impossible to get a decent read on the landing pad. There are lights, but they’re hard to see through the driving rain. As the H175 comes in for a landing, there’s a sudden, hard gust of wind just as the wheels are starting to grip the ground. The helicopter spins, the landing gear shears, and everyone inside suffers 1d4 damage. The engine and frame is OK, but it’s not flying out for a couple days, minimum.

**Fail:** The helicopter is skating along the front curtain of the thunderstorm system’s wind when a freak bolt of lightning hits it. There’s a sound like a balloon the size of planet Earth popping, every hair on every Agent’s body stands out for a moment, including nose hairs and eyelashes. Everyone takes a point of damage. Then it’s over, except that the helicopters’ electronics are in bad shape. The instrumentation is still adequate, but forget about trying to get any kind of cell signal, the wi-fi is down... even the radio is unresponsive. Anything the Agents were planning to accomplish in transit can only be done without contacting the outside world.

**Any Success:** There are a few dramatic plummets that end with teeth-shaking shocks, and the helicopter sways back and forth like a drunk trying to walk home from a three-day bender, but ultimately the H175 breaks free of the clouds and sets down at the airstrip, unharmed.

Because the trip is unusually long, each Agent may attempt two of the investigative tasks listed under “In Transit” below—unless, of course, the pilot rolled a fail or fumble, in which case all they can do is consult one another and get airsick.

## **In Transit**

Flying through a thunderstorm has some drawbacks, but the Agents didn’t get their jobs by punking out when the going gets tough, so they can buckle down, make some calls, or boot up their impact-resistant laptops. Even before reaching Hudson’s Well, each

character can try to gather some information or request some gear. Assuming, of course, that they didn't get lightning-bolted and have retained connectivity.

### **Mobilize FEVER Resources**

The Agents are legitimate health authorities and they may want the researchers and accountants at HQ to do stuff for them. Some of the likely possibilities include: If there are more than four Agents, a 2008 Ford E-Series van is waiting at the airport. The H175 already contains a compact battery of diagnostic tests, as well as Level A and Level B Hazmat suits for all Agents (and two spares). Anything else they might require? Have them write up the request and hand it to you. If it sounds reasonable, give it to them. Otherwise, it's unavailable.

**Have Someone Else Research the Victims:** This essentially yields the results from 'Research the Victims,' below, only it's based on Bureaucracy.

**Consult Experts About the Symptoms:** There's not enough information for a virology expert to make any guesses yet. Sorry.

**Cyber-Stalk the Victims:** This is a good choice. Open-source information on the victims is the best way to find patterns to their positions and movements. Getting access depends on their HUMINT, SIGINT, or Computer Science skill

**Less than 40%:** Dropped the signal. The Agents can't get back in touch with their research partners back at the CDC. Looks like an error with the network.

**40%+:** There are a lot of people named Maurey in that region of Arizona. No one named 'Langsweil' or 'Stusser.'

**60%+:** Hand out the Victim Map handout from page xx.

**80%+:** In addition to the Victim Map, put a spot close to the Maurey residence, a house that caught fire and belonged to one Rosamund Keyert, Ph.D. Hey, isn't that the woman who sent that email?

### **Interrogate Stacy Marholm**

Dr. Marholm is their boss, and at this point she doesn't know much more than they do. She's the one who wrote them the deployment memo, so her ass is in the sling if this turns into a fiasco, but she has confidence in the team. If anything is bothering her, it's just how ugly this situation could turn out to be. There were eleven victims at the time of their mobilization, including the E.R. doctor, and two fatalities. Those are not good numbers. She hasn't heard back from Dr. Strickland since his call, since he's probably got plenty on his plate at the moment.

In the role of Stacy, you can introduce the idea that the Agents may have a hellish decision to make. They can either treat this as a full-on deadly epidemic and lock down everyone with symptoms, which is the smart play if this really is a killer contagion, but which can backfire horrendously—panic, lawsuits, federal investigations and defunding—if it turns out to be a limited groundwater contamination or the like. On the other hand, they can stay calm, prevent terror and looting, and possibly let contagious, asymptomatic carriers ignorantly leave town to start the epidemic in Flagstaff or Tucson.

That's the right move if this is containable, but potentially a disaster if this really is something from outside the catalog and that spreads like warm peanut butter and kills within days.

The worst scenario is that this is a weaponized disease, the result of a deliberate biological attack. If that's the case, the abstract damage caused by announcing it could be tremendous and might not stop future outbreaks, depending on how organized and widespread the terrorist organization deploying it is.

Short version? There are two choices, each right for one circumstance and disastrous for the other. Waiting until they know what's actually happening could provide the right choice... or mean that it's too late to take either.

### **Call Dr. Strickland**

If this is one of the first things a character tries, Strickland answers on the second ring, sounding harried and afraid. He immediately wants to know if they've identified the disease, and if they haven't, then why the hell are they calling? Amad Malouf worked in a Dunkin' Donuts. Strickland has admitted three more patients since his last call to the CDC, all of whom bought food there while Malouf was on duty. The local sheriff has shut the place down and is trying to recover the records to determine just how many people were served during Malouf's eight-hour shift on 13 JUN 2012.

Also, there may be another fatality: An elderly woman named Philippa Jones died on the 14th, in an ambulance on her way to the E.R. with a severe fever. Her grandkids remembered going to Dunkin' Donuts with her.

Strickland has, additionally, determined that the antiviral drugs Tamiflu and Relenza don't seem to do a damn bit of good either, so the Agents can add that to their theories. (Possessing this factoid gives a +20% bonus to treating \_\_\_\_\_itis.)

Calling Strickland later—meaning, the characters are taking the long way 'round—they get his voice mail, because he's already collapsed.

### **Research the Victims**

Finding out data about the infected from a helicopter in a rainstorm is a Bureaucracy check. What Agents find depends on who they look up. In any case, unskilled Bureaucrats find nothing new. Families can be researched in a single check.

**The Langzweils:** 40%+ indicates that Emily Langzweil works as an office manager at the local State Farm insurance concern, while her husband works for a CalTech research project. 80%+ reveals that Dr. Langzweil's doctorate is in theoretical physics. His doctoral thesis was "Fermionic Transformation as a Supersymmetrical Worldsheet Function."

**The Cortezes:** 40%+ Harudo Cortez is a real estate agent and his wife Henrietta teaches grade school. 80%+ indicates that Harudo sold the Langzweil's their house, and that his office is in the same building as the State Farm branch.

**Dr. Rosamund Keyert:** 60%+ shows that she was a professor at CalTech who was pursuing a research project on a grant from Sandia labs. 80%+ indicates that she had a doctorate in theoretical physics, thanks to a dissertation on "Gravitino Detection Using Chronal Topography: A Theoretical Approach."



**Amad Malouf:** 40%+, they learn he's 20 years old, went to the University of Arizona for a year but is on academic probation. Lives with his parents, Khalid and Brenda Rudel-Malouf, and his sister Yasmina. 80%+, they get that he's never been out of the country and can find a string of Facebook posts tediously chronicling his dull days of work, movies, and mystery novels. To all appearances, he hasn't left Hudson's Well in the last two months.

**The Maureys:** 40%+ yields basic information. Avram Maurey (age 38) maintains area water towers. His wife Ida (age 35) manages a local AM radio station. They have three daughters—Francesca (11), Liz (9) and Julie (7). 60%+ turns up the Keyert connection: She lives just three doors down from them, or did before Keyert's house burned.

**The Jones Family:** 40%+, they find that Philippa (age 69) retired nine years ago after teaching German for years at a university. She moved to Hudson's Well where her divorced daughter, Renee (37) is raising two sons, Davis (13) and Monroe (7). Philippa lives at 19 Pricklypear Drive, and Renee lives at #6 Bat Masterson Road.

**Brad Stusser:** Not at the hospital, but he was mentioned in that meandering email. 60%+, they find his application for a concealed carry permit from four years ago, listing a P.O. Box in Hudson's Well, even though there are no other records of him renting there, or owning property, or banking anywhere in the state. 80%+, there's an obscure item about First Lieutenant Brad Stusser winning a handgun marksmanship course at Lackland AFB in Texas in 2008, but nothing else indicating his service.

## FEVER Group's Gear

The entire idea of FEVER was that it could put down damn near anywhere in the American Southwest, fast, with what it needed to at least start combatting a virulent infection or bioterror attack. That's why they have an H175 helicopter. That's hardly the end of their equipment, however.

### Computers

Assume that everyone on the team has access to a toughened laptop computer with a satellite uplink. They've got titanium cases, so they provide Armor 5 if used as a shield... once. Don't expect them to run Minesweeper after stopping a bullet though. Each Agent also has a sat-phone, along with a high-end smartphone for personal use.

### Level A Hazmat Suits

A Level A Hazmat Suit completely covers you from head to foot and looks like a smurf-blue space-suit. Its air supply is entirely self-contained, so if you're wearing it you're either carrying a tank or you're connected to one nearby. It is essentially impossible for a pathogen to penetrate to the person inside, as long as the suit is uncompromised. Unfortunately, any time the character takes damage, the suit gets compromised. That doesn't have to mean torn (though it can)—a broken seal or jostled valve could let air from the outside in. These suits are overpressured, meaning that (1) they puff up around you when sealed and (2) if torn or gapped, the interior air supply blows out, pushing toxins away. So any time the suit is compromised, the character knows it right away.

More bad news, however: The air supply in a Level A is limited. Really limited. Standard Level A suits are good for 15 minutes of exertion. These are bleeding-edge

suits with rebreathers, so Agents who keep their heart rate and breathing under control can wear them for an hour before the tank runs dry. (You can't switch tanks without exposure: The whole point of a Level A suit is that nothing from the outside comes in once it's sealed, and unlike scuba diving, you don't have the buoyancy of water to make toting those tanks any easier.)

If the investigator is taking things very mellow, the suit has 60 minutes of air. For every Athletics or CON-based roll an Agent makes, take five minutes off that. After any STR-based roll, the character can either lose five minutes of air, or spend a point of Willpower to lower respiration by sheer bloody-mindedness.

It's possible that the character runs out of air and refuses to crack the helmet for fear of exposure. In that case, the Agent makes a CONx5 roll. If it succeeds, the Agent can take two more actions before passing out. On a fail, the Agent passes out right away but can be revived without damage if anyone gets them out of the suit and succeeds at Medicine within ten minutes. (On a crit, three actions. On a fumble, the Agent not only falls, they suffer from an embolism. Roll a die if that embolism turns up Odds, instant death. Evens, halve every Characteristic due to brain damage.)

To keep things simple, as long as an Agent's suit is all right, they won't get \_\_\_\_\_itis. But if a suit is removed in a danger zone, it doesn't do you any good, and it's also not much help once the tank hits zero. Most fumbled rolls in this scenario indicate a suit breach.

### **Level B Hazmat Suits**

Level B gear is nearly identical to Level A, except (1) it's colored schoolbus yellow instead of blue and (2) the air supply is external to the closed system. It works exactly like Level A stuff except you can change tanks when you run low, by making a DEXx5 roll. If that roll succeeds, you're fine. If it fails, and \_\_\_\_\_itis is present, the character is exposed, as described on page xx.

### **Portable Diagnostic Lab**

It's in several bulky, heavy black suitcases. It's equipped to perform real time conversion on cerebro-spinal fluid, protein electrophoresis, protein immunoblot and assorted blood culture tests. With a successful Medicine or Science (Biology) roll, these can tell whether symptoms are caused by (1) prions, (2) viruses, (3) bacteria, (4) fungus, (5) radiation or (6) chemical exposure.

### **Treatment Options**

A single large suitcase, this one's metal and weighty. Inside, it's packed with exotic and restricted pharmaceuticals, such as linezolid, amikacin and colistin. At the Handler's discretion, these permit 'do-overs' for failed Medicine rolls to treat illness or the effects of chemical weapons. It's nicknamed "the Doomsday Bag."

### **Guns?**

Well, they certainly aren't issued any by the CDC. A character who has the Firearms skill at 50%+ can opt to have a handgun on his or her person. Arizona's concealed-carry laws are extremely liberal: If you're over 21, you can pretty much carry a gun anywhere

other than a bar or into an area with a ‘no guns, please!’ sign. Though, note well, the hospital is exactly one of those gun-free zones.

## SCENE TWO: Touchdown

Upon touching down at the Hudson’s Well airstrip, the Agents are met by Danica Thomas, a sheriff’s deputy. She’s got her cruiser and offers a ride into town, or possibly a police escort once they have the Ford van (see page xx) ready to roll.

She knows her way around Hudson’s Well like the back of her hand, but all she knows about the current situation is that (1) people are sick at the Catholic Hospital and (2) doctors are coming in at the airstrip to help deal with it. She’s to get them to the hospital as quickly as possible. She wants to know if it’s terrorism (and looks skeptical if reassured) and if she should get one of those gas masks herself.

Deputy Thomas sticks with the doctors as long as she can, and she’s mostly there to provide information about the town. (If they ask questions that aren’t covered, make something up: It’s unlikely to be central to events if it’s not covered here.)

Mainly, Hudson’s Well is a small, quiet, unincorporated town of about 5,000 people. There’s some mining in the area, some light industry and farming. There’s talk about building one of those huge solar farms to the south, but it’s early days on that yet.

There’s no police department, just the sheriff, but crime rates are pretty low. Automotive stuff mostly, there was a stolen-car ring in the region up until last year... minor drug activity, it looks like there’s not enough population to sustain a dedicated criminal infrastructure for stuff like heroin or meth, so it’s mostly pot and black-market Oxycontin.

The town grew around a highway, and that highway’s two ends are the primary routes out of town. Every other way out is gravel or circuitous, so if the Agents can talk the Sheriff into closing off the highway, they can shut down the fast vehicular routes. The airstrip is small, used only for light aircraft—no jet without STOL (short-takeoff-and-landing) capability is going to set down there.

Deputy Thomas doesn’t know anything about Dr. Keyert personally, but she has basic details about the fire at her house: It was clearly arson. Looks like the woman dumped every accelerant she could find all along the perimeter of her house and garage. Weirdly, it looks like she went into her basement and shut down the gas lines. She clearly wanted everything to burn, but not explode.

### \_\_\_\_\_itis

\_\_\_\_\_itis is a disease from the future, and the fact that the time traveler Thartha (see page xx) was inoculated against it. In actual fact, Thartha was inoculated against what’s known in her time as \_\_\_\_\_itis ( $\lambda$ ), the really dangerous nano-weaponized strain. She was a passive carrier for \_\_\_\_\_itis ( $\mu$ ). It’s actually \_\_\_\_\_itis ( $\mu$ ) that Keyert, Langzweil and everyone else caught. It’s deadly to them because their systems are unprepared.

\_\_\_\_\_itis is a virus that attacks the commissural fibers between the hemispheres of the medulla oblongata in the brain. Upon infection, the fiber cells are broken down as the virus reproduces in them: The disconnection caused by loss of commissural fibers impairs the medulla, causing coughing and vomiting. But as a byproduct of its reproduction, the virus also discards misfolded proteins, or prions, into the bloodstream.

While these prions aren't, themselves, contagious, they are very dangerous to the host, altering the behavior of the hypothalamus in the brain and causing the fever. Even if the fever is suppressed, the patient could eventually die when the virus spreads from the commissural fibers and compromises the rest of the medulla oblongata.

The \_\_\_\_\_itis virus spreads most easily through inhalation or fluid exchange, but ingestion is also a risk. Any time someone is present and unsuited when anyone infected with \_\_\_\_\_itis coughs, that person risks exposure, as is anyone who handles a corpse that died of \_\_\_\_\_itis.

A person who's exposed rolls the CONx5 test right away. The illness has the following stats.

ROUTE: See above

SPEED: 1d6 hours

CON PENALTY: -20%

DAMAGE: 1d8

SYMPTOMS: Headache, nausea, cough, high fever

CURE: See page xx

### Description

Remember that full sense description is the key to immersing the players in their Agents' illness. It's not just a headache, it's a feeling like someone wedged a hatchet blade in their forehead and is gently rocking it back and forth, side to side. It's not just a 101° fever, it's distraction and sweats followed by chills and shivering and weakness and malaise. It's the tickle of a constantly running nose. It's the surprise of a painful, barking cough. It's a horrible deep itch pervading lungs, and throat, and behind the eyes. It's the stench of sweat and diarrhea and the ache deep in the joints. Use these descriptions and escalate them as the doctors soldier grimly on.

### Treatment

Because \_\_\_\_\_itis is brand new, sufferers don't even get the +20% bonus to their CONx5 roll for hospitalization until a doctor has made a successful Medicine or Pharmacy test, or until the treatment is found in Scene Three. But any doctor who gets a crit while treating one of the patients becomes a world-renowned \_\_\_\_\_itis expert afterward. If they survive, that is. On the other hand, anyone who rolls a fumble while providing the treatment has gotten infected as well.

## The Catholic Hospital

The state of the Hudson's Well Catholic Hospital depends on how much of a gut-check the pilot took and whether she got them there fast or... less fast.

**If the Agents flew straight through the storm** and got there early, they arrive when Dr. Strickland is just beginning to show symptoms. He looks like he's running on caffeine, determination and maybe a touch of medical-grade amphetamines.

Considering that it's now about 09:00 and he's only been on duty four hours, he looks more wrung-out than he ought. Though maybe he's more used to the car-wrecks and bathroom slips of a small rural town than dealing with a deadly and unidentified illness.

In any event, he seems tightly-wound and sweat-drenched. He does not believe he is infected, just tired and stressed. If the Agents force him to submit to having his temperature taken, it's at an even 101°. If they sit him down and show him the thermometer, he pales.

He realizes instantly he's been exposed and infected. He warns the Agents to watch themselves, whatever it is is highly contagious, he wore gloves and took reasonable precautions. He decides he needs to put himself in isolation.

They can then proceed to gather information. It's raining hard outside, but the phone lines and power are fine at the hospital. Anything they could do on the plane with Wi-Fi, they can now do reliably with ground wires. This works just like it would in Scene Two, only without the risk of dropped signals.

**If the Agents went around the storm**, they get there an hour later and the weather's nicer, but a lot happened in that time. Dr. Strickland has collapsed, no one's in charge, and there's another dozen patients in the E.R. Moreover, the people of Hudson's Well have realized that there's some kind of bad shit going down at the hospital. Some have barricaded themselves in their homes. Some are fleeing. Some are demanding entrance to the hospital. Some are avoiding the hospital, despite showing symptoms, because they're afraid. But before taking any decisive action, the Agents need more information. Depending on how far along the epidemic is (meaning, how fast the pilot flew) they may be able to learn more, or less.

One way or the other, their objectives are (1) identify the illness, (2) set a treatment plan, (3) evaluate the need for containment and (4) locate the source of the infection. This scene covers the first two of those. Scene Three handles the third, and the rest of the adventure arises from pursuing the fourth. Avenues of action are listed below, along with the outcomes possible with assorted skills.

### **Save An Individual Life**

Helping an infected patient is a Medicine or Pharmacy roll, as described under "Treatment" on page xx. It might buy the patient more time, but it does not teach the doctor anything new, and make sure they know that. Give them the tough choice: They can help this one suffering little girl, or learn about enough to keep hundreds of little girls from getting sick. Or try to do both (and fail), of course.

### **Examine the Victims**

The Agents are likely to investigate the victims from several different angles, trying to determine how they came by the illness and what effects its having on them.

Medical examination is a matter for Medicine. A doctor who examines one of the patients (one of the Maurey sisters, one of the Cortezes, Steve Embry, or Emily Langzweil) can roll Medicine and use the following results.

**Fumble:** The character has breached his suit and is exposed to the illness. Guess he can observe it first hand, then. He does determine that the speed of onset argues against a prion illness.

**Fail:** He realizes that this is unlikely to be prion-based, since it comes on so fast.

**Success:** The doctor can rule out everything but viruses and bacteria.

**Crit:** In addition to the success result, the physician has given the patient a free success at their next CON roll to resist degenerating further.

Searching for personal, non-medical clues can be helpful. By treating the victim like a victim or suspect in a crime—checking their possessions, examining their circumstances, going through their phone and wallet and looking for clues—can yield unexpected information. Anyone who wants to look for hints and patterns in their persons and possessions, Sherlock-style, can roll Forensics.

A character using Forensics is looking over the infected people, going through their stuff, and trying to spot any clues, hints or patterns.

**Fumble:** The character has somehow exposed himself to \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Fail:** Mr. Harudo Cortez has a partially used package of condoms hidden behind his cell phone in its case. That same phone has suspicious texts (vague flirting, veiled arrangements to rendezvous) to Emily Langzweil. At the same time, Mrs. Henrietta Cortez has a receipt from a recently fulfilled Ortho-TriCyclen® prescription. That's an oral contraceptive.

**Success:** In addition to the Langzweil-Cortez connection implied by a Fail, the character also finds a business card for Dr. Rosamund Keyert (a professor of Theoretical Physics from CalTech) in Dr. Jeff Langzweil's wallet. Langzweil's the first one to come to the hospital and the first fatality. Keyert is the woman who sent the email and then burned her house down. Looks like Keyert and Langzweil got to the \_\_\_\_\_itis nice and early, then Langzweil gave it to his wife, who gave it to her lover, who gave it to his wife.

Langzweil's cell phone seems to be securely locked, but the Kindle in his briefcase isn't password protected. Most of its space is occupied by Applied Physics Letters, The Journal of Mathematical Physics, Physical Review, Nuclear Instruments and Methods in Physics Research and Classical and Quantum Gravity. Oh, there's also two issues of the International Journal of Computer and Telecommunications Networking, but they're over a year old.

**Crit:** Langzweil's phone is a password protected Motorola. But the hint is “nonlinear Schrödinger equation,” which is  $i\psi_t = -\frac{1}{2}\psi_{xx} + \kappa|\psi|^2\psi$ , as everyone with Wikipedia access or 20% in Science (Physics) knows.

In addition to emails back and forth with Dr. Keyert about ‘bosonic topography’ (and it looks like there's some heavy encryption on his email), he's been inadvertently tracking himself with the phone's GPS for the last three weeks. His trail indicates a daily commute out to somewhere in the middle of the desert.

Interviewing the ill, along with their families or other hospital personnel, could help source the disease. Agents who want to talk to people and get a sense of what happened when and how can roll HUMINT with the following results.

**Fumble:** The character gets the results of a Fail and, additionally, he's exposed.

**Fail:** Dunkin' Donuts was clearly a hub of contagion, via Amad Malouf. He's absolutely devastated by the thought that not only is he going to die, he might be the vehicle by which dozens of customers die too. He swears he washed his hands.

**Success:** As a Fail. Additionally, going over the names of other infectees provides some links. Steve Embry worked with Emily Langzweil, who was married to the first patient, Dr. Jeff Langzweil. Moreover, Steve admits that there was office gossip that Emily was seeing the guy who sold her and her husband their house. It's the work of a moment to find out that Harudo Cortez was an agent involved in that. So Langzweil seems to be towards the top of the chain. If confronted with this, Emily not only admits that she was sleeping with Harudo, she says that her husband's job was 'something weird—cutting edge physics...'

Additionally, Liz Maurey's mother breaks through her grief and terror to describe going door to door in the neighborhood soliciting funds for a church pledge drive. There weren't many people home, but one woman who answered the door and had a bit of a cough signed up. In fact, she still has the signup sheet in her purse: The Agents can contact the three people who pledged that day, except that one of them—Rosamund Keyert—is dead, having sent a desperate email to the CDC before burning herself to death in her home.

**Crit:** In addition to the elements of a success, the character meets a town gossip who recognizes the name 'Keyert' and says, "Oh yeah, she works at that goofy place out on County Route 5002, doesn't she? That CalTech experiment or something out at the mine? I think it used to be a silver mine."

Being experts, a CDC virologist might try to crunch the data. In addition to the stuff available on the helicopter, a character who starts sticking pins in maps to track the geographic spread of the illness through time can get a sense of its movement, progress and virulence. Use these results for any reasonable approach a player suggests that might get abstract information—using Science (Mathematics) to model the epidemic, for example. It can also be done with the Anthropology skill.

**Fumble:** How the hell did you expose yourself while doing the book-work? Well, you've breached your suit somehow, or were just careless in changing tanks or taking your mask off, or someone else was careless...

**Fail:** The speed of transmission rules out a prion disease. Man, whatever this is, it spreads fast and gets nasty fast. Best case scenario, this is a savage mutation of something that's already been catalogued. Worst case scenario, it's completely novel.

**Success:** All right, the first pin goes in for Langzweil, the earliest known case. He clearly infected his wife Emily, who passed it on to Embry. The other early case is Liz Maurey, who passed it to her sisters. What's the point of intersection between Maurey and Langzweil? Who gave it to Amad Marouf? Judging by the lag time between exposure and development of symptoms, this actually isn't a worst case scenario. We know exactly when Dr. Paulden got exposed, that was when Jeff Langzweil checked in...

By parsing all the math, the character gets something of an epidemiological outline of \_\_\_\_\_itis. While the time ranges are very rough, and there's no way of knowing what kind of outliers there might be for very long or very short times, it looks like people start demonstrating symptoms about six hours after exposure if they're active, but later if they rest. It also looks like the symptoms escalate rapidly until the patient is in grave danger 9-15 hours after their onset.

The bad news is, this sickness is deadly, unidentified, and highly contagious. The good news is, the 'lull' period in which the infected are contagious but have no severe symptoms looks extremely short. Unless Liz Maurey's mom is immune to the symptoms but capable of acting as a passive carrier.

**Crit:** As success, and moreover it makes sense to Danica Thomas, the sheriff's deputy from way back on page xx. This means that if the Agents try to get the Sheriff's help with halting the outbreak (see page xx), she explains it to him and the CDC gang doesn't take the usual -20% penalty for a Major expense.

### Examine the Infection

There are several ways doctors can go about finding out what the illness is and how it operates. They can look at what's happening in front of them. They can dig into what researchers have studied that similar. Or, best of all, they can do both to compare and contrast.

They are almost certain to do labwork, taking blood and tissue samples from the living and the dead, and then running them through every test they can get their hands on. It's a Science (Biology) roll. Finding the nature of \_\_\_\_\_itis is central to the scenario, so it pretty much happens. But the result of the roll determines if it happens quickly, or slow and with much fallout.

Note well that this is the roll after which the researcher gets to name \_\_\_\_\_itis. A crucial plot turn hinges on the PCs being the ones who discover and name the disease, so don't sell that short.

**Fumble:** You get the information from a Success after 12 hours, but in the process you expose yourself to the pathogen.

**Fail:** You get the information from a Success and don't get exposed in the process, but it takes you 24 full hours instead of 12, with only brief catnaps while waiting for all the agar plates to develop.

**Success:** After a mere 12 hours of intense intellectual effort, you figure it out. The disease is primarily virological, attacking the medulla oblongata and repurposing the cells of the commissural fibers. But the diabolical part is, it excretes prions as a byproduct of the conversion. The prions dupe the hypothalamus into triggering a fever, but even without the prion-based fever, the virus would eventually destroy the medulla, taking down cardiac and respiratory function.

Only after this insight has been reached can a treatment process better than "push fluids, cooling blanket and take shots in the dark" be developed, as described on page xx.

**Crit:** As success. When someone does try to create a treatment, that roll gets +20%... once.

The CDC team might try research. If an Agent gets online and on the phone demanding input and information from various databases, virologists and research facilities, she earns a Bureaucracy roll. Processing mounds of data to find something that resembles this fever means a lot of multitasking, not to mention running around between the lab (to check blood work for signs), the sick wards (to check for obscure symptoms that might have escaped notice, like discoloration of the fingernails or changes to the color of the



gums) the isolation areas (to ask questions of the family and friends to see if there's any common exposure vectors) and the morgue (to see if the coroner has found anything).

**Fumble:** The character is exposed. In addition, they get the results of a fail.

**Fail:** Breaking it down, this mystery infection does not fit the profile of any of the usual suspects. It's not Marburg—Marburg has a longer incubation period. Additionally, Marburg doesn't aerosolize, and this does. That rules out Ebola too. But like them, it might have a non-human reservoir animal, whose bites spread the illness to humans. (Marburg probably came from monkeys and also possibly bats, and similar simian vectors are suspected with Ebola.) Cholera can kill with the same speed, but (1) antibiotics would at least slow it down and (2) it spreads through fecal contamination of drinking water: Seems unlikely for Jeff Langzweil. This kind of resembles Dengue Fever, but again, that relies on an animal vector, in that case the mosquito. Like the deadly 1918 Spanish Flu, it could just be influenza mutated into Hulk form, but you'd think Tamiflu would have at least been a speed bump to it. This looks like something new.

**Success:** In addition to the results of a fail, the Agent moves fast enough to either interrogate a coroner or perform an external exam of the dead bodies herself. No bites on Langzweil, Jones or any one else. If there's a natural reservoir animal, it must have bitten Patient Zero, who then became active. Langzweil may be in the first generation of the exposed—certainly he's in an early iteration. The rapid onset of debilitating symptoms means that \_\_\_\_\_itis is likely to burn itself out before getting the momentum for a real sustained pandemic. But it's crucial to lock down the early-exposed before they create a wave of further infection. Getting it into a truck stop or airport would be particularly bad, as it could then spore outward at freeway speeds, with the edge of its infection running just ahead of symptom onset.

**Crit:** Even without a cure, you can heavily impede the spread of \_\_\_\_\_itis just by telling people to wash their hands, stay inside, and avoid contact with travelers for 48 hours. If most people exposed get symptoms, that reveals them with minimal contagion. Should the Agents decide to try to Halt the Outbreak (as described on page xx), they get +20% to their rolls.

## Containment

In Scene Three, the Agents achieve one of five possible degrees of containment, depending on whether they do nothing ('Zero Containment') or fumble at everything, or whether they roll a bunch of successes. This is a good end-note for the session after the characters confront the weirdness at WHITE HALL.

**ZERO CONTAINMENT:** The Agents didn't manage to improve containment by even a single level? Wow. Well, the wave of this initial exposure spreads to the following towns before burning out: Heber, Aripine, Overgaard, Clay Springs, Pinedale, Linden, Show Low, Taylor, Snowflake, Holbrook and Joseph City. Combined, they have a population around 30,400 souls. About 2,900 people get infected with \_\_\_\_\_itis, 762 die and another 817 have some form of permanent neurological damage or physical handicap. A small but persistent lunatic fringe considers the \_\_\_\_\_itis outbreak a germ warfare attack on American Indian populations, or possibly Mormons.

The mishandling of the Hudson's Well outbreak forces lengthy Senate hearings on the entire CDC, resulting in a lot of firings and restructuring. Dr. Marholm is publicly excoriated, and (if more than one Agent survives) Marholm makes sure to drag the FEVER Group down with her. One survivor just might come out of the bureaucratic shit-storm OK and even be considered for Delta Green clearance if her story is interesting and her actions were above reproach. But she still gets the stink-eye at the grocery store from people who remember her shame-walk out of the Senate hearing on CNN and FOX News.

About once a month for the next year, there are \_\_\_\_\_itis outbreaks, starting in the American Southwest, spreading through the US after half a year, and then through all the Americas by the one-year anniversary of Hudson's Well founding. Each flare-up kills around a hundred people (by that time it's gotten immunity to M2 ion channel inhibitors, right on schedule) and injures 20 more. The year after that, \_\_\_\_\_itis appears about every other month, but now it's global. In developed nations, the death toll is about 80-200, depending on population density. It's more like 300-400 in the developing world, but it's the in-between nations that really suck it, since their transport infrastructure tends to be better than their medical infrastructure. When those outbreaks happen, the death tolls lurk around the low four figures. Being responsible for this, especially if you were tasked to prevent it costs 1/1d4 SAN Helplessness.

**LOW CONTAINMENT:** This is the level of containment 1-2, what you'd get if the Agents only tried one or two things and did a C- job all around. Hudson's Well has a total of 504 cases of \_\_\_\_\_itis, out of which there are 45 deaths and an even 20 people with permanent debilities. Scattered cases throughout the county add up to another hundred, of whom five die and another couple are scarred for life. But outbreaks only happen every 3-4 months throughout the US for the next year, and throughout the Americas the year after that before settling on a steady rate of an outbreak every 6 months globally, with the fatality rates as described under Zero Containment.

Hudson's Well dominates the headlines for a few days, with one political party calling for the heads of everyone involved and the other decrying the first as witch-hunting partisans. Dr. Marholm is forced out of her job, but insists to the last that FEVER did what it could. A few FEVER Group alumni might get blacklisted from government service, if more than one survives the scenario. Being responsible for this, especially if you were tasked to prevent it costs 0/1 SAN Helplessness.

**MODERATE CONTAINMENT:** At containment 3-4, the death toll at Hudson's Well is 30, plus five cases with some degree of permanent lack of function. It looks like \_\_\_\_\_itis is extinct for a whole 18 months afterwards, until it pops up in Guam, of all places. It rattles around the Pacific Rim intermittently after that, cropping up every year or two, killing a hundred people in sparsely populated or primitive areas, a couple hundred in heavy urban areas. Ten years on, it's coming up steadily once a year, somewhere in the globe, but only killing 100-250 people even in optimum conditions.

Hudson's Well dominates the headlines for a week or so. Any survivor(s) might get interviewed for the big-budget documentary *The Devil in Hudson's Well*. Any comments about time-travel or amazons wind up on the cutting room floor, however.

Characters who survive are congratulated, and gain ten free percentiles to Bureaucracy... as long as no one starts talking about weird stuff out at WHITE HALL, Inc. Nobody wants to hear that crap. Seriously.

**HIGH CONTAINMENT:** With containment 5-6, only the patients in the hospital with full blown symptoms die. A single infectee must get out, since there's another outbreak eight months later in Mexico, killing 20 people before it's locked down. After that, there's an outbreak somewhere in the world about every year, but the UN puts together a pretty good task force on \_\_\_\_\_itis (possibly led by a FEVER survivor, if any, or by Dr. Marholm) and keeps fatalities around 10-100 people in sparsely populated environments, and around 20-500 in dense urban regions.

The press coverage is broad, but ends pretty quickly. A month or so after it all dies down, Dr. Marholm invites the survivor(s) to travel with her to Washington DC. The President wants to shake their hands, though presumably he's going to hit the sanitizer afterwards. Every surviving character gets a permanent +15% increase to Bureaucracy from sheer reputation.

**TOTAL CONTAINMENT:** Getting Containment higher than 6 is an incredible achievement. Unfortunately, the Agents do such a good job keeping a lid on things that few people outside the CDC understand just how awesome they were. They get some nice pay raises and commendations in their files, but \_\_\_\_\_itis becomes a trivia item.

The Agents are asked to downplay the dangers, especially since the only viable samples end up locked in a CDC vault.

## SCENE THREE: Making Choices

When the Agents arrive, circumstances are chaotic, but they're still the ones in control. The middle phase of the Hudson's Well segment is running around gathering facts and maybe getting sick. It can be brief or long and involved—make sure every Agent gets a chance to succeed or fail at one meaningful task. If everyone is interested in the investigation, give them room to roam, but be ready to move into Scene Three once the doctors (1) figure out that Langzweil and Keyert were close to the origin and (2) name the illness.

Scene Three is the point at which they can decide between option #1 (trying to deal with the infected at the hospital), option #2 (trying to seal up the town and isolate everyone exposed) or option #3 (searching for the disease's source). It's a good idea to present the options in just those ways, and if the Agents have some other wild agenda, handle that... but make sure they know that those three options are about the only things that fall within the parameters of their jobs, and doing anything else is a great way to get fired and maybe even lose their licenses to practice. If they want to try multiple tasks, that's fine, but they might take some penalties on the associated rolls. Options 1 and 2 are highly time sensitive. Option 3 is less so, though any detective will tell you that trails go cold fast, especially when witnesses are dying.

If they came straight through the storm, they can try both Options 1 and 2. But whatever they do second has an additional -20% penalty on top of any other deductions.

If they went around the storm, they can only do Option 2 or 3 first. (Although they have no way of knowing it, Option 3 can wait.) Option 2 is at -20% if they do it first in that case. If they put it off, it automatically defaults to Zero Containment.

## Option 1: Heroism at Hudson's Well Catholic Hospital

Note that if the pilot took the conservative route around the storm, this option is off the table: The Maurey girls are doomed, as are the Cortezes and Emily Langzweil. Things look bad for Steve Embry, Maya Paulden and Amad Marouf, too.

Trying to merely keep people alive is covered above, on page xx. If the players opt for this course, this means they're trying to develop a theory of treatment that goes beyond "stomp the symptoms and keep them comfortable."

The best doctor on the team (that is, the one with the highest Medicine skill) makes the roll. Group is helping with this, and there are at least three others, the roll gets +20%. The people on the ground—nurses, pathologists, lab techs and doctors at the hospital—can't add on to this roll. They're either too busy with the living or they're just not qualified enough.

If they take so much time that they don't have a chance to do Option #2, then they can get a +20% on the roll. Their equipment neither penalizes them or helps.

**Fumble:** The Agent is exposed. Also, anyone who helped you makes a Luck roll. If any of those fail, the lowest fail also were exposed. Also, the results of a standard failure apply.

**Fail:** The Cortezes die, the Maurey sisters die, Emily Langzweil dies and Maya Paulden dies. You are no closer to finding a treatment to this disease than you were when you went to bed last night. You failed. Dozens more die because of the time your failure wasted. If your colleagues are as useless as you are, that death toll will rise to hundreds or thousands. Have a 1/1d4 SAN Helplessness check.

**Success:** Wait a minute... M2 ion channel inhibitors! The antiviral drugs amantadine and rimantadine block viruses from taking over the host cell. Their use is largely discontinued because the M2 gene mutates so often, leading viruses to form resistant strains... but if this is completely new, it probably hasn't had time to acquire those resistances. Congratulations. Your treatment levels off the fever in the Maurey sisters, Steve Embry, Maya Paulden and Emily Langzweil. Amad Marouf and Harudo Cortez don't make it, but anyone else identified with the disease can be stabilized... until your small stores of amantadine and rimantadine run out.

**Crit:** In addition to the effects of success, you get a +20% to one roll if attempting to halt the outbreak (as described below). Note that if the doctor succeeds, Emily Langzweil is available during the search for Patient Zero. The FEVER's supply of M2 inhibitors is tiny, however. They all get used up in the attempt. The CDC can get them more... in 48 hours.

Have one or more Agents already gotten infected and started to show symptoms of \_\_\_\_\_itis? In that case, the primary doctor making the roll decides who among the Hudson's Well victims (the two Maureys, Emily Langzweil, Marouf, Embry, the two Cortezes and Dr. Paulden) gets excluded from the trials so that the FEVER Agent can

be treated instead. It's one for one: To treat two sick Agents, the doctor has to condemn two residents to (essentially) sink or swim (0/1 SAN Helplessness).

## Option 2: Halting the Outbreak

This is, after all, the whole *raison d'être* for the mission. Once the Agents have some kind of grip on the situation, they can attempt to control the area to prevent \_\_\_\_\_itis from spreading far beyond their control. There are essentially three approaches they can take with this—all three at once, if they want to go full-court press. Suggest one possibility to them if they ask, but don't describe all three unless they're already thinking along similar lines. If they think of anything else that sounds plausible, let them roll it and have it provide moves on the containment chart (on page xx) as usual.

While you, the Handler, know the ultimate outcome at this point, it's usually better to make a note of it, describe the short term actions now, but only give the Agents (or players, if no Agents survive) the long-term results at the end of the game.

### Call Out the National Guard

The Agents can call the governor, yell at an underling, yell at a secretary and (possibly) yell at the Governor to put choppers and planes in the air. If this works, the governor deploys the State Police, bottles up Hudson's Well with roadblocks, orders all planes from the airstrip to return to their point of origin, and intercepts anyone traveling away from it overland.

Unfortunately for the doctors, calling out the National Guard is the governor's job, and governors do not get elected on the strength of their grasp of prion-disease biology. Whoever makes the call makes a Persuade roll. If the doctor thinks to text a photo of the dead Maury sisters, it's only a CHAx5 roll if that's higher.

**Fumble:** When's a good day for your disciplinary inquest? How about two Thursdays out?

**Fail:** The Governor reluctantly rolls out a limp and anemic set of roadblocks, but won't mobilize the National Guard. There's an election coming out and people get spooked by gestures of Federal power in Arizona. Containment goes up one feeble point.

**Success:** The Governor sounds pretty spooked. Roadblocks are going into effect double quick, and the Air National Guard are being sent out to watch until the blocks are in place. Containment goes up two points.

**Crit:** Looks like the governor is a Walking Dead fan, you move up three points on the Containment chart. Not only the Air National Guard, but ground troops are rolling out in APCs to patrol the perimeter of the quarantine zone, along with every State Trooper available.

### Declare a County-Wide Quarantine

This requires a Bureaucracy roll directed at the local sheriff. If Deputy Thomas has grasped what's happening, she can remove the built-in -20% penalty for such a big effort. (She just asks for the phone and says, "Bill, it's Crawford in the warehouse all over again." Then she listens for a moment and hands the phone back. Now the sheriff is on board.)

**Fumble:** He's offended and panicky. He issues a shoot to kill order for anyone trying to leave town. This results in two deaths, and a lot of other people circumventing the roadblock. No improvement to Containment.

**Fail:** He agrees, but has little idea how to carry this out and the Agent offers no practical suggestions that the sheriff can understand or execute. A lot of people get the message, especially after the deputies start going door-to-door, but that does expose a couple deputies, who then expose a few more folks. That... could have been handled better. Containment goes up one point.

**Success:** In a brisk, no-nonsense call the Agents and sheriff sketch out a quarantine plan and immediately put it into effect. The big fire trucks—hook and ladder, and pumpers—go out to block the major thoroughfares, while deputies' cruisers head to the major intersections to redirect people back home. Ambulances pick up and isolate the definitely-infected, while fire rescue trucks take the possibly-exposed to individual locations for testing and observation. Add two to Containment.

**Crit:** It's a model of efficiency. The sheriff listens closely and has some excellent suggestions of his own. Add three to Containment.

### Direct Appeal to the Public

The Agents activate the Emergency Broadcast System, going on TV and radio to warn people directly. This is another Persuade roll, unless one of the Agents has CHA 16+. Agents with that much charm get to roll CHAx5.

**Fumble:** The doctors create as much panic as they relieve. No raise to Containment.

**Fail:** Some people hunker down, but a few run for it, and a few mob the hospital despite efforts to turn them away. By and large, though, it's marginally better than doing nothing. Containment goes up a point.

**Success:** The CDC Agents come across as serious, but also concerned and knowledgeable. They explain without sounding condescending or too technical. They do a nice job getting people to calm down without sugar-coating anything so much that folks dismiss it. Containment increases two points.

**Crit:** In addition to the fine speech of the Success, the Agents even get the Wireless Emergency Alert system to text-message everyone in the area instructions to take cover and report any symptoms. (WEA is supposed to be for weather only, but the local National Weather Service functionary decides to take the bull by the horns.) Containment increases by three points.

### Option 3: Looking For Patient Zero

If the Agents prioritize this above anything else, make sure they know that's unusual and not by the book for their job. Their mission is containment, and finding the first victim is only a part of that. If you explain it to them and they insist on ignoring the quarantine strategies, it means (1) those little Maurey girls die, along with all the other patients and (2) they get Zero Containment. No matter how many of them survive WHITE HALL, afterwards explain that their lives fall apart. There's a congressional inquiry into their dereliction of duty, which results in them losing their licenses (pilot, doctor's—anything short of fishing) and which puts their faces on TV, for weeks, as “the

derelict Federal officials responsible for hundreds of dead Arizonans.” Also, they get sued by Liz Maurey’s mother (Mary Maurey), and the jury finds the Agents liable to the tune of \$6.6 million dollars, which is more than pariahs like them could ever earn. But if you explain that all their training says “Establish a quarantine,” it’s unlikely that they’re bull-headed enough to not do that exact thing.

Depending on how much they learned beforehand, they may already know that the source is likely to be out at the CalTech experiment at the mine. Or they may have no clue. After all the hospital drama in the previous scenes, getting one shouldn’t be hard. One that protects their lives, on the other hand... that’s another matter. Some of the possible rolls, and their outcomes, are as follows.

### **Big Picture Data Crunching**

If the Agents haven’t already pegged Keyert and Langzweil as early infectees, more consulting timelines and pinning maps can direct their attentions in that direction.

Because directing the Agents to WHITE HALL is pretty essential, as soon as the Agents try to coordinate the information to find out who got sick first and where—using Bureaucracy, Anthropology or Forensics—they get a result based on the level of their skill.

**Less than 20%:** Gosh, if only there was some way to figure out who got sick first!

**20%+:** Okay, we’ve got the early email from the woman whose employer-of-record is that weird research project, and the first recorded death is from the man who works for the same place. Maybe... start there?

**80%+:** As success, and additionally they stumble across a news item mentioning that a brownout on 12 JUNE in Hudson’s Well was traced to a power fluctuation at the substation owned by the CalTech project.

### **Labwork, Again**

Doing prion and antibody counts on the various corpses (and survivors), consulting epidemiological literature to see how plagues tend to progress, checking that against what’s known about the early victims... all that could provide insight about the point of origin. Because this involves heading into the lab with deadly \_\_\_\_\_itis, it’s a roll, but it could be Science (Biology) or Medicine.

**Fumble:** You let your guard down for just a moment while handling a plague-corpse, and look what happens. You get exposed. But you also get the results of a Fail.

**Fail:** A lot of emerging diseases come from species in the wild that serve as reservoirs for the virus. The virus may be harmless to (say) bats and live in generations of them until someone gets bitten. Once the virus is in a human host, the rules are completely different. So where might one find bats in this area? Well, the CalTech experiment—something about charged particles—is in an old copper mine, and two of the early infectees worked there. Good place to start.

**Success:** Everyone who caught this can be tracked back to the CalTech experiment, or to someone who had contact with an employee. Moreover, no one’s answering the phone out there. In fact, there don’t seem to be many employees of record listed—a few

engineers, but... no, the only workers living in Hudson's Well are Keyert and Jeff Langzweil.

**Crit:** In addition to everything under success, the Agents find write ups about Keyert's Sandia grant proposal, which talks about using a high energy laser to "amplify or resonate repeating ghost particle timed-transmissions".

### Grey-Hat Hacking

What are the laws regarding hacking into people's cell phones and emails and social media accounts? When facing the possibility of another outbreak, do the characters even care? Assuming they don't give a rip, or that they feel they have sufficient bureaucratic obscurity, or that the ends justify the means, this is what they can learn by combing through people's cyber-laundry. The Agents' Computer Science percentiles determine what they get.

**40%+:** The privacy protections on Drs. Keyert and Langzweil's are pretty significant, likely due to their involvement with Sandia labs. The Cortezes, Emily Langzweil and Amad Marouf are far easier to penetrate, but reveal little except that Emily was carrying on with Haroudo and Henrietta didn't have a clue.

**60%+:** You get the results of a crit from "Forensics" back on page xx., meaning you access Jeff Langzweil's phone and get his GPS clues.

**80%+:** In addition to the results of a success, you find that a lot of Dr. Keyert's emails (which you can't read, because of their encryption) sometimes go to sites behind familiar firewalls: Government firewalls.

### Interviewing Emily Langzweil

If Emily Langzweil survived, Agents could just talk to her. In fact, if she's alive, HUMINT or Persuade rolls to get her to talk are at +20%, since she's well aware that the Agents probably saved her from a horrifying demise.

**Fumble:** She's still contagious, isn't she? You're exposed.

**Fail:** "Jeff got it... must have. From that hole out in the desert. I'm sorry, I'm still... still..." Then she passes out.

**Success:** Emily reveals that the WHITE HALL project was a joint research project between CalTech and Sandia national laboratories to research repeating "ghost-particle" emissions that seemed to come at timed intervals. Jeff was working on particles and "expressions of timespace". They needed to do it in a mine to keep out active particles from space, and they used some sort of coils and a big laser. Characters who wish to equip themselves with radiation exposure patches can easily get them from the Osprey's stores, or from the hospital's radiology unit.

**Crit:** In addition to the Success results, Emily gives them directions to where she thinks the research facility is.

### A Final Matter

As they start investigating the path to the source, make sure to add in a throwaway description of the weather. It's getting nasty again, another round of thunderstorms that



blow in, provide thunderbolts at dramatic times, and hiss on the roof like it's raining snakes. But when they start driving out to the WHITE HALL research project site, the rain peters out, though the heavy cloud cover remains.

## **SCENE FOUR: Welcome to WHITE HALL**

WHITE HALL is housed in the shell of the Milk Valley Mine, named for the salty white color of the stone that was stripped out to create an artificial, tiered valley. It's dusty and pale and looks like an irregular, inverted ziggurat was pressed into the ground. It's about ten miles out from Hudson's Well, and maybe fifteen miles from anywhere else settled. A ten-foot tall fence, topped with razor wire, surrounds the perimeter of the pit about a mile out. It has prominent "No Trespassing!" signs every thousand feet or so, but the gate shows signs of being left open most of the time. It's visible as a big white hole in the ground on Google Earth. If asked, Danica Thomas shrugs and says it's a mine that went out of business "before her time." Most people in the town know it has been used over and over again as a research facility; but few know more.

A second fence surrounds the rim of the declivity. That one's twice as high, strung between metal posts as thick as telephone poles, it's topped with razor wire and lined with plastic privacy strips to block lines of sight down into it. Not that there's much to see: At the base of the hole there's a parking lot and a low, white, windowless building. That inner fence, however, does have a guard post and a serious, closed gate. It is all very quiet.

### **The Outer Fence**

As the Agents pull up to the outer fence, which abuts a tiny dirt road, they see a fenced in array of wires, gray boxes and electrical transformers on the opposite side of the road. The power lines pass through it, but aren't strung over and into the mine. There's nothing else around, so that substation must be dedicated to WHITE HALL by way of conduit underground.

As soon as they get to the WHITE HALL outer fence, their cell phone reception conks out, even though their displays indicate full bars. (Satellite phones and data are still okay, for the moment.) As it happens, WHITE HALL has its own phone cell, and phones use the strongest signal. It's just that the nice strong WHITE HALL signal is set to communications blackout, denying all incoming and outgoing calls. If the Agents cut the power, they get cell contact back until they go into the building and progress to any level other than the top. At that point, both cell and satellite links are down, due to depth.

### **Cutting the Power**

WHITE HALL has its own capacitor battery bank, which fills over time, with failsafes built in. Since the shutdown, the battery is full, but in shutdown mode. WHITE HALL only has electricity coming from the outside through the substation. Anyone with a Craft (electrician) skill over 50% can shut down the electricity to WHITE HALL from within the substation without even bothering to roll. (Low skilled electricians roll without modifications.) Otherwise, someone with Bureaucracy at 60%+ has to make a sternly-worded call to the power company.

## The Inner Fence

The closed gate by the inner fence is unmanned, with the door on the far side hanging free. Everyone in Security Management is dead and the gate is locked from the inside.

The obstacles in front of the characters are getting through the gate, or through the fence, or over. There are several approaches they might take.

### Cut the Power

Did the Agents notice the power station? Once that's down, the lock on the gate is disabled.

### Cut the Fence

With the correct tools, this can be done without a roll.

### Ram the Gate

All it takes is a Drive roll at +20%.

**Fumble:** Lethality 10% for everyone in the car, and it no longer functions. Also, the gate is still intact. (This assumes they had seat belts on. No seat belts? Lethality 15%.)

**Fail:** The gate cracks open, but so do the Agents. Lethality 10% for everyone in the car or, again, 15% if they didn't have seat belts.

**Success:** Gate's down, car's dinged up but driveable, driver's unhurt.

**Crit:** As a success, plus the fence is (somehow) knocked off the tracks leaving a gaping hole.

### Climb the Fence

It's a simple STRx5 roll to scale it and either cut the razor-wire, or throw a blanket over it, or otherwise circumvent it. If it's not deactivated, the roll is at -20%.

**Fumble:** Slashed by razor-wire, 1d4 damage. The Agent falls back on the same side that they started.

**Fail:** The Agent gets stuck on the razor-wire but manages to free themselves, but only at the cost of getting cut and falling off the fence. The Agent suffers 1d6 damage, but lands inside the fence.

**Any Success:** The Agent is inside the perimeter, and it's an easy matter to open the gate, using the clearly-labeled switch inside the guard-box. (Unless the power's out.) Once the characters have bypassed the gate and fence system somehow, they have the option of searching the guard shack, but there's little of interest in there.

### Fly Over It

Remember the helicopter? It's on the outskirts of town so... a ten minute drive? If they call ahead and it's not damaged, they can drive back there, endure a short wait for refueling and pre-flight checks, then just fly it down into the mine and land it in the parking lot or even on top of the building itself.

On the other hand, low air-circulation environments like this close, artificial valley requires a Pilot roll, and any failure means a crash landing that does Lethality 10% to everyone on board.

## The Building At The Bottom

Once they reach the bottom, you can point out to them that (1) there are no other tracks on the road, indicating that no one has left or arrived since they came through that storm and (2) that the vehicles parked by the building look freshly rained-on. The building itself is a windowless, flat white box. It's not very big—about the size of a one story-three bedroom house. It looks new and cheaply made.

## Powerless!

Cutting off the power back at the station disables some obstacles while creating some others. With the power cut, the only way to get electricity back on in WHITE HALL is by reactivating the battery bank or restoring the power connection. Until that happens, the following issues are in play.

- 1) The elevator is immobilized.
- 2) Any door that runs off a keycard is locked unless opened with a Craft roll. (Fumbles and fails both compromise suits, but after the first success, any future doors can be opened automatically by the Agent who forced the door.)
- 3) The lights are off, and the building has no windows. It's very dark inside (all sight, aiming or detection rolls are at -20%).
- 4) All desktop computers are powerless, so those clues are unavailable unless the Agents haul them back up to where the outlets still function. (Laptop computers still have battery power.)
- 5) As long as the Agents are on the top level, they can still make contact with radios or satellite phones. Once they're on the lower levels, however, the depth of soil prevents communication.

## The Entry Door (Top Level)

The front door is thick, metal, windowless and unlabeled. A camera lens glares down from above it and there's a keypad next to it. This door is also ajar.

This is a good point to take a break and ask the Agents how they're preparing to go inside, and what they're taking with them.

Normally, the rules don't bother much with encumbrance rules or carrying limits, but in this case, it makes a very big difference whether they bring one air tank or three. So before they go in, explain the following rules.

- 1) They can go in "lightly burdened" or "heavily burdened." It's assumed that they're wearing a blue Level A suit or a yellow Level B suit (see page xx.) If they choose to go

unsuited, they can carry another object if they're going light, or two more objects if they're going heavy.

2) If they're lightly burdened, they can carry one fairly large object—like a rifle, an air tank, a backup Hazmat suit, one of the cases from the mobile test suite, or a suitcase with a laptop and flashlight and a couple other obviously useful tools in it—for every five points of Strength they have, or fraction thereof. STR 15 and you can carry three such objects in addition to your Hazmat suit without penalties. Every tank provides air for 60 minutes.

3) Heavily burdened people can carry an object for every three points of Strength, or fraction thereof. So the same guy with STR 15 can carry five objects in addition to the suit. However, carrying that much more gear isn't easy. If you're heavily burdened, each tank provides air for 40 minutes.

Once they're tooled up, the Agents can enter a small reception area with a bland metal desk facing the door. Behind it hangs a US flag and a photograph of George W. Bush (a leftover from the MINOS project). It has no windows, but the fluorescent lights in the ceiling still glow, unless the power has been cut.

Lying on the floor is a smashed flat-screen computer, an HP Pavillion All-in-One. There's a cordless phone cradle on the desk, with the handset missing.

A set of muddy footprints leads to a pair of boots, lying on the floor, attached to a pair of legs that lead behind the desk surrounded by a cloud of flies.

Anyone who looks behind the desk finds a dead research assistant. He's wearing a t-shirt and jeans. He's holding a plastic keycard with a black and white photo of him burned into it, along with a number code and the name KIMMONS. He's holding the phone receiver clutched in his right hand. A quick Medicine or Forensics roll can gather a few clues from him.

**Fumble:** You're exposed to \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Fail:** Thick mucus puddle under the nose, no sign of injury or trauma, sweat-caked hair... the smart bet is, this guy died of \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Success:** As a fail and, moreover, rigor mortis is nearly complete, which means he's been dead six hours at the absolute minimum. It's hot out and it looks like he was working hard right before he died—those footprints are long and firm at the ball of the foot. He ran to pick up that phone, though from the twist of the mud-smear, it looks like he was stumbling as he did. He's in good shape so... ten-thirteen hours is more likely by that measure. Lividity—the bruise-like marks on the lower part of the body, where blood pools after the heartbeat stops—matches perfectly with where he's lying. It's fixed too, arguing that he's been dead at least eight hours. He's got some kind of security badge in his left hand. Says "KIMMONS" on it.

**Crit:** Checking the body temperature, though, he's still at 99° F. That's interesting. Normally, a body loses about 1.5° per hour, though if it's humid (like this) and hot out (also like this) that rate can go down. But assuming that was the rate, and he died eight hours ago just to spitball things, it would mean his temperature when he passed was... 103°. Yeah, that's about how hot people would get from \_\_\_\_\_itis if untreated. It all makes sense.

If anyone has a compromised suit, Kimmons is still contagious.

The phone is non-functional, even if there's power: there was a brief interruption of power before the electricity from the town grid kicked on. It was enough to derail the computer controlling the phone system. Normally, this would take about sixty seconds for one of the CS techs to repair, except they're dead.

There's a door to the right, an elevator beside the American flag behind the desk, and another door to the left. The left door goes to the mess hall. The right door goes to the conference room. The elevator? It only goes down.

## Conference Room (Top Level)

It's quite tidy, with a big computer screen taking up a long, low desk along most of one wall. Whatever clues might have been on that screen went 'poof' with the power.

In addition to a big conference table, there are also several couches pushed against the walls and a cabinet with a DVD player and several Xbox 360s linked in to a Bose brand sound system. Perhaps the conference room was also the rec room?

The garbage hasn't been taken out. There's a big empty box, the kind with a spout that's used to serve liquids. This one had a lot of coffee inside it (it's empty now) and still has a bunch of Dunkin' Donuts branding on the outside, matching the two empty Munchkin boxes keeping it company in the trash.

Agents who specifically say they're giving the room a thorough going-over find that one of the wall panels behind the big board is not like the others. It's more solidly attached and has no give to it. Spending a whole air tank (or unsuiting) and working it with a crowbar for ten or fifteen minutes breaks a latch and reveals a door. Behind the door there's a ladder along the side of the elevator shaft, providing maintenance access for the location's copious HVAC system. (No, none of the vents are big enough to crawl through.) From the ladder, one can access the other floors below.

## Mess Hall (Top Level)

This is a large area with the sort of fold-up dining tables found in schools throughout the nation. There's a ping-pong table and a pool table off in one corner, a bathroom for each gender, and a serving line and tray return area. It is a very dreary cafeteria. There has been no effort to decorate it.

On the other side of the serving counter is an industrial kitchen, all new fixtures, like the cafeteria of a tech startup. Nice coffee machine, big deep fryer, three-hole sink and so on. There's a walk-in freezer full of restaurant-sized grocery supplies.

The table farthest from the kitchen has five large oblongs on it, wrapped in tarps and leaking ice water onto more plastic sheets underneath. It takes very little effort to get one open and find four dead bodies, three male, one female. One of the men is naked. Two other bodies (one male, one female) are in normal outfits, and still have their ID in their pockets. The male is "Thomas Ramirez" and the female is "Sita Chandreskar." The final man is named "Christopher M. Bird."

There are no signs of trauma, except for Bird, who has a contusion on his forehead as if he bumped it on the underside of a table or got hit on the head with a blunt object. It's not killing blow, though—didn't break the skin, didn't break the skull. Given how

much ice is present, it's impossible to guess time of death from the temperature, but the rigor mortis has worn off, so they're not nearly as recent as Kimmons in the entryway. The freezing, however, has rendered the virus dormant. There's no infection risk from \_\_\_\_\_itis here.

## The Elevator (All Levels)

There's a card reader outside the elevator. Running Kimmons' ID card through it causes it to open (if it has power). If they haven't found Kimmons' card, they can attempt to hack it, using the Craft (electrician) skill.

**Fumble:** The door opens with surprising swiftness. The Agent falls in and compromises their suit, getting exposed to \_\_\_\_\_itis and taking 1d4 damage. But hey, now the doors accessing the ladder (see "Conference Room") are accessible.

**Fail:** It's not an elegant job, but the door opens and the system is compliant as long as the strung-together alligator clips and bypass hardware stay in place. Unfortunately for the Agents, they have no way of knowing that in 180 minutes, the poorly wired spontaneous workaround shorts out. This does two things. One, it starts a fire in the lobby. Two, it causes the elevator to stop working entirely.

**Any Success:** The elevator obeys! The Agents control the vertical. The lift is big enough for large pieces of equipment. In addition to the normal "Emergency Stop" buttons, this one has "Lobby," "Personnel," "Labs" and "MINOS Level."

If they get it going down, the next level is pretty deep, judging by the length and duration of the weight shift. Note that if the Agents can't get into the elevator or steps by normal means, they can attempt to pry the doors open. That's a STRx5 roll.

**Crit:** The door opens, and the elevator is way down there but... hey, what's that grimy panel on the back side of the wall, away from the badge scanner? When opened, there's a key in a lock switch. Judging from the grease and dust, it's been there since this was installed... it's turned to "SECURE," but there's an "OPEN" setting too. If the Agents turn the key, the keypads deactivate and the elevator opens to a simple button-push, if it's got power.

## Personnel Level Lobby (First Level Down)

Upon emerging from the elevator or the ladder, the first thing one notices is the blood. There's a fan of it on the far wall, next to a door labeled 'Bunks' and accompanied by a blood pool on the industrial carpet below, which turns into a smeary trail leading through the door, which is directly across from the elevator.

Facing the elevator, the first door to the left is labeled "Security." The first door to the right is unlabeled (and leads to the stairs paralleling the elevator shaft, ending upstairs behind the conference room). A second door to the right is labeled "Doc Box."

Another, much smaller trail of blood drops emerges from under the (closed) Security door and also leads off to the bunks. Even cursory examination shows a partial shoe-print in it, indicating that Security was the point of origin. A bit farther along, one can see a streak, where a caster or wheel of some sort hit a blood drop and dragged through. It leaves a dashed line towards the barracks.

The flies are buzzing.

## “Doc Box” (First Level Down)

This is the second door on the right of the elevator, as you face it. The infirmary area is a suite of four small private bedrooms branching off a central hallway and a tidy examination area. Upon first entering, the Agents find a man in a white lab coat sprawled, dead, in the chair behind the desk. Protruding from his left arm is a snapped off needle, with the chamber of the syringe in his right. As with Kimmons, a Medicine or Forensics roll can offer some clues.

**Fumble:** Agent is exposed to \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Fail:** Based on the lividity patterns, he died right here in this chair. The knocked-over bottle on his desk is Ciprofloaxin. Clearly, it wasn't much use against \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Success:** From rigor and temperature, it looks like he died before Kimmons, probably 12-14 hours ago. He's got one of those barcode badges labeled "DRABRANKOVITCH". Also, give the players the handout "Medical Log" from page xx.

**Crit:** As a success. Also, locked in the bottom of Dr. Abrankovitch's desk (though easily forced by anyone determined) are the barcode security badges from John Pahabi, Brad Stusser and Dylan O'Dell.

Note well that the whole room is just rancid with \_\_\_\_\_itis. Being here with a compromised suit is definitely exposure.

The first private chamber has a dead woman in the bed, wearing a hospital gown and, in an incongruous touch, rainbow-striped socks. She's curled in a fetal position, clutching a romance novel. Her chart is for "Nell Buchar" and describes \_\_\_\_\_itis symptoms, only quite slow in onset. Skill rolls make no difference in trying to figure out why Nell held out so long before eventually succumbing.

The room across from Buchar has a dead man, also in a hospital gown, but this one's wrapped in plastic tarps and mostly frozen, even though the ice has melted to slush and soaked the sheets. His chart says "Pahabi" and no time of death is noted.

The back room on the right has a freshly-made bed and reeks of disinfectant. Still dangerous to be unsuited here, though.

The final room has the body of Dylan O'Dell, and it's going to take an autopsy to determine whether he died of \_\_\_\_\_itis or a Codeine overdose. (If the Agents actually perform the autopsy, it was the Codeine, and the log is incorrect about the dose. Dr. Abrankovitch administered over 800mg, which is well in excess of a safe dose.) He's wearing a hospital gown and little else. A M9 pistol, unholstered, rests on the seat. The unholstered pistol has flecks of blood on the barrel.

## Security (First Level Down)

Agents who follow the smaller blood trail from the lobby towards its origin enter the exterior chamber of Security, which has a console on one wall covered with small, black and white TV screens. One simple office chair faces it. The opposite wall has a heavy-duty locked steel vault set into it. Inside is a rack for 8 long guns and 15 pistols. All are missing.

If the power's on, the left bank of screens show periodic views from cameras around the perimeter of the exterior fence, the interior fence, and the rim of the mine valley. The right bank shows the view from the front door camera, the elevator, the lobby (where Kimmons died), the mess hall, the clean room (where Thartha's body lies, though its scale is not readily apparent), and the empty Power Control station.

Anyone who wants to mess with the console can make a Craft (electronics) roll at -10% or Computer Science at -30%. Assuming, of course, that the power is on.

**Fumble:** Exposed to \_\_\_\_\_itis. Also, you get the effects of a Fail.

**Fail:** The console locks itself down. The screens go black and the switches turn dead. No further actions function on it.

**Success:** The neat thing about cutting-edge 1980s technology is that it's impervious to a lot of hacks that affect later generation operating systems. The other neat thing is that important chunks get declassified. You can open or close doors. Turn on or off lights in certain areas and more.

**Crit:** Oh wow, WHITE HALL has its own phone cell and it's run through this console with semi-modern technology. You can now restore contact to the outside world, including cell communication underground.

Passing through the door directly opposite the entry (again, following the blood trail to its origin) takes one into Brad Stusser's office. There's a desk with a nameplate and another HP Pavillion computer. There's blood all over the desk and wall. There's gray matter in there too, so... gunshot to the head.

If the power hasn't been interrupted, or if they switch it on, the computer is powered up but on a screen saver with a password. The Agents' options are to search the room, or to hack the computer. Either option takes about forty minutes.

Note that Stusser was infected, and that with the blood and gore scattered about, anyone who gets exposed to the atmosphere here is at risk of catching \_\_\_\_\_itis.

If they roll Search, here's what they get.

**Fumble:** Oh, you found the letter opener in the shape of a samurai sword he kept in his desk drawer. In addition to cutting your fingertips for no significant damage, there's the small matter of \_\_\_\_\_itis exposure.

**Fail:** There's the bullet hole in the wall, right where the blood spatter would lead you to expect it. The chair behind the desk, though, is the same kind as the one outside in the surveillance suite. It has four wheels. The dents in the rug indicate a five-wheel chair.

**Success:** That filing cabinet isn't really all that sturdy, being made to resist snoopy secretaries and not investigators with crowbars. Inside are security evaluations of all the personnel at WHITE HALL cc'd to the Department of Energy and Department of Defense. On his desk, you find a draft of the 'event report' covering the last four days. Hand out the "Stusser Report," the "Staff List" and the "Staff Profile Précis" props.

**Crit:** Hm, the pill bottle in the top left hand drawer (next to a half-full bottle of Glen Grant cellar reserve scotch and a crystal glass matching the one tipped over on the desk) is labeled "Captopril 25 mg," but the pills inside aren't square and orange, they're round and yellow with "OG" on one side. You recognize them as 40 mg OxyContin pills—they're a powerful, addictive painkiller. There are exactly four left in the bottle.



### Calling Out

If the Agents get the phones up and running again (or simply go up to the top to use sat-phones) Dr. Marholm promises that she's going to start making some serious calls to find out whose in charge of WHITE HALL. She tells them that the absolutely most important task is to identify and contain vectors by which \_\_\_\_\_itis could get out into the general populace. She emphasizes the need to find 'Patient Zero' and suggests that if they can get a complete roster of everyone who was at WHITE HALL, and account for everyone who was exposed there, that's essential.

### Stusser's Computer

Attempting to access Stusser's terminal yields the following. It requires Computer Science to attempt to circumvent the security programs.

**Fumble:** Blue screen. It's borked for eternity. You can actually hear the "hrunk hrunk hrunk" sounds as some automated security program formats the hard drive.

**Fail:** You can derail the login process and check over his file-folder structure, but you can't get in to any actual files. Still, he's got an organized system, and you can guess what the "Personnel" folder is for even if you can't open the sub-folders "KeyertB" or LangzweilJ." You get the "Staff List" prop.

**Success:** In addition to the staff list, you can find his most recently edited file, which is the "Stusser Report." Moreover, while he securely deleted the writeup "THARTHA INTERVIEW #1," he did not empty it out of his laser-printer cache. They can get that transcript from page xx.

**Crit:** On top of Success stuff, you can open the confidential files about the personnel, getting the "Staff Profile Précis" prop. You also find out that Stusser sends reports to General Jan Hammond and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives named [[SOMEONE FROM THE DELTA GREEN BOOK]].

### "Bunks" (First Level Down)

Across from the elevator is a door in the center of the wall, with the blood-drip trail from Security leading to it. The door is ajar. It opens to a hallway with a men's bathroom on the left and a women's bathroom on the right. Beyond them, there's a door labeled 'Gentlemen's Quarters' on the left and 'Ladies' Quarters' on the right. The drip-trail of blood leads to the women's bathroom.

Inside that bathroom there are two sinks with mirrors, and four stalls—two for showers, two for toilets. The two blood trails converge leading to the rightmost shower stall, which contains two dead bodies. One's a male with "STUSSER" on his badge. He's wearing a button down white shirt and pressed pants, but no shoes. If the Agents have already been to his office, this was the guy in the pictures on the wall. It's clear he died from a point-blank gunshot wound to the mouth. In fact, there's powder-burn tattooing in the back of his throat. Stusser is sitting in a five-wheel desk chair, which was apparently used as a makeshift stretcher to move his corpse. Lividity patterns indicate he died in it.

The second body is a young woman with a tightly-patterned trio of entry wounds in her chest. The larger blood trail from the lobby leads right to her. Everything indicates that she was shot out there, then dragged in here. She's wearing only a t-shirt and panties. Her badge reads "CRAY."

The men's bathroom has the same layout, only it's about five feet longer to accommodate a urinal trough and another mirror. Also, it has no corpses.

The women's barracks is pretty stripped-down and utilitarian. There are four bunk beds in immaculate, bounce-a-quarter-off-the-taut-sheets condition. It's impossible to tell which was unused. The three foot lockers for Chandreskar, Buchar and Cray contain nothing informative. There's a large bookshelf with a broad variety of interests represented. There's a lot of popular histories of the 20th century, a few texts on particle physics, about thirty romance novels and maybe fifty paperback mysteries.

The men's barracks is larger and even less personal, though relatively clean if you ignore the big bloodstain drying on the wall and the underside of one bunk. There are ten bunk beds and ten foot lockers, and one four-foot-high poster of a sweating, glistening, golden mug of icy cold beer. The bookshelf has a few somber tomes of literary fiction ("Ulysses," three huge volumes of Dostoyevsky, the complete works of Ernest Hemingway) but a much larger spread of science fiction.

That's less compelling, of course, than the slumped and semi-headless body in the second bunk from the left. He's a tall black man in workout gear, with a shotgun lying beside him and his right big toe wedged in the trigger guard. His name tag says "WILLERT" and all the evidence is consistent with a gunshot suicide sometime late in the morning of the 12th, or maybe early afternoon.

Clutched in his left hand is a note. The prop version of this is on page xx.

## **Lobby (Second Level Down)**

Unlike the gore-spattered 'Personnel' level, the lobby of the 'Labs' floor is in good shape. There are four doors, set in each of its four walls. The door alongside the elevator leads to the ladder, up all the way to the conference room. The door across the way is a unisex lavatory. To the right is "Fermionic Particle Lab" and to the left "Bosonic Topography Lab." MINOS lettering has been removed from the wall across from the elevator, leaving whiter marks of slightly brighter paint.

## **Fermionic Particle Lab (Second Level Down)**

Dr. Langzweil's lab is a suite of three rooms. There's a room with one glass wall, into which the door opens. It looks into a large equipment room, with a counter along one wall holding a computer, a comfortable office chair set beside it. A door behind the chair opens to Langzweil's office.

The observation area seems unused. The keys on the computer (another HP Pavillion) aren't even dirty. The lab itself has a lot of unused equipment as well. The scanning tunneling electron microscope looks neglected, as does the equipment for angle-resolved photoemission spectroscopy. The machinery that looks more frequently used (based on being actually plugged in and not folded up out of the way) looks purpose-built and exotic.

Anyone with a Craft (electronics) skill at 40%+ can establish that it has dangerously powerful electromagnets (like those in an MRI machine, or even a bit burlier) and the kind of cooling circuitry you need to create superconductors. For all the Agents know, Langzweil could have been tinkering with Bose-Einstein condensates in there. All the equipment is plated with Sandia national lab markings, and Department of Energy serial numbers.

His office is all dark wood and, unlike every other room in WHITE HALL, it has wood paneling with chair rails and crown molding. There's a nice Persian rug on top of the industrial carpeting, a handsome mahogany bookshelf in which mathematics prizes and awards for theory break up collections of physics reference books. The desk has a marble top and a Tiffany-style brass lamp.

Again, the key skills for gathering what data can be found here are Search and Computer Science. Additionally, Science (Physics) has some yield, so let's start with that. Because this room isn't infected, just having the skill at a set level is sufficient.

**Less than 40%:** This guy was definitely a physicist.

**40%+:** 'Fermions' are subatomic particles, the kind described by Fermi and Dirac. But Langzweil seems well beyond the basics of half-integral spin description.

**60%+:** Langzweil's broad thesis is that, since topography dictates a particle's type, moving the particle along a 'route' that would alter or invert its position relative to itself—what he calls a 'transformational localized sundersheet'—would change its nature, either becoming a boson, a different type of fermion, or even changing it into exotic supersymmetrical particles that are currently theorized in one branch of string theory, but which have yet to be observed.

**80%+:** As success, and moreover—wow. The practical applications of a functioning, human-scaled 'sundersheet' would be mind-boggling, even if one was just changing fermions into different fermions. Even separate from any unique physical properties that might arise from their composition, it would be possible to create structures that were defect-free even down to the subatomic level. Defect-free tin might, theoretically, be stronger than normal titanium.

An attempt with Computer Science can check the hard drive on his computer.

**Less than 40%:** The computer is now auto-formatting its hard drive.

**40%+:** The Agent gets access to piles and piles of exotic data that he or she has absolutely no way of interpreting. It's spreadsheet after spreadsheet with gnomonic headings like "fermt. k" and "subinst" and "charge delpha." Anyone with Science (Physics) 50%+ can grasp just enough to understand that this is private, rough data and the headers probably make personal sense to him, just the way that the idiosyncratic folder names on someone's hard drive make sense to them. It would be the work of days to make anything sensible out of these.

**60%+:** Ah, there's an unemptied email trash folder! There are drafts in which he tries to explain his work in words of no more than three syllables. What he's promising is a revolution in the transformation of matter and energy, of creating substances that are the equivalent of 'matter lasers.' What he's delivering is the good news that his first guesses have proven wrong, so he must be closing in on the right one through the

process of elimination. Statistical analysis of his particle yields indicate a 62% chance that a few actual transformations occurred! Additionally, although he doesn't appear in the video "THARTHA INTERVIEW #1," he captured it remotely through a laptop and edited the video for clarity on this console. It can be viewed here or downloaded onto a portable device. (See page xx. for a description and transcript of that video.)

**80%+:** Well now, he wrote a draft letter and then deleted it unsend with no recipient. It implies they likely need more money.

As for Search, here's what that turns up.

**Less than 60%:** Huh, his hardback copy of Anne Tyler's "Breathing Lessons" is signed to him by name.

**60%+:** The doodles on this guy's phone pad are really weird. They look like M.C. Escher shapes or Möbius strips. They show up again, in different forms, in his notebook. The notebook falls open on its own to a diagram that show particles labeled "e-" (meaning 'electron') entering one of these swirls or vortexes and emerging as " $\nu\mu$ " (meaning 'muon neutrino'). Then the muon neutrino goes through the same spiral diagram, only reversed left-to-right, and emerges as a "Y" or photon. It's followed by a large, elaborate question mark.

**80%+:** Judging by his handwriting on the phone notes in his trash can, and the comments in his notebook about Keyert's work, he's equal parts envious and admiring of her successes and talent.

Note that, since nobody infected died here, the chances of exposure are minimal if people change tanks or even take their suits off.

## Bosonic Topography Lab (Second Level Down)

This is where Dr. Keyert worked, and its layout is a mirror image of the Fermionic Particle Lab. The observation area is clear, with a desktop computer is switched off on its table.

The lab has its tables along the back and rightmost walls, covered with partly-disassembled exotic devices. Occupying most of the left wall is a metal machine with a round aperture in the middle, numerous wires, lenses, antennae and probes pointing at it, along with a camera. The aperture is clearly damaged, with much of its delicate instrumentation thrust out of the way, as if something forced its way outward from the wall behind (which, in fact, Thartha did).

Dr. Keyert's office has another computer, a wall lined with physics texts and strange, wriggling tubes of stone. (Anyone with Science (geology) recognizes them as fulgurites, formed when lightning strikes sand. They have nothing to do with Keyert's work, she just thinks they're neat.) There's a cabinet and, surprisingly, an electric typewriter. Inside the cabinet are lab reports that were clearly (judging by the way the letters are pressed into the page, with occasional corrections using blobs of white material) typed, rather than printed out. They are completely incomprehensible to anyone without a firm grasp of bleeding-edge physics.

There are clues to be found here. A Search roll is available for anyone who tosses the lab.

**Fumble:** If the character is wearing a contamination suit, he has torn a hole in its back on one of the jagged bits of metal pressed out by Thartha’s arrival. Exposure is immediate, of course. But it’s clear that something projected a fair amount of force outward from the aperture on the machine, and that the machine was not built to handle the forces to which it was subjected. Behind the machine is an unblemished wall, to which it is attached. The damage to the device is clearly more recent than its connection to the wall—the edges of the broken metal are still shiny, while the screws in the wall have a tiny bit of grime on them.

**Fail:** As Fumble, only without the suit getting ripped.

**Success:** As Fail. Additionally, it’s clear that the layout of the lab used to be different—the tables have been moved to make room for the machine on the left. But they were moved long ago, probably 8-9 months based on how faded the streaks of them being moved are. The machine is too big to fit through the door, so it was probably built (or at least assembled) in place. The machines around it include a UV laser and a UV beam detector, as well as very sensitive electromagnetic and gravitic sensors.

**Crit:** As success, plus the Agent realizes that the laser and the UV detector are fixed facing one another, aligned so that the beam would pass right through the area that all the machinery seems to be directed around. It’s also clear that the machine was built to handle heavy power draws.

Anyone who searches the observation room finds nothing unless he turns on the computer. It’s a laptop, which means it still has battery power—even if the rest of the base is powered down, this computer is functional. Moreover, it’s not password secured.

It’s clear that this terminal was not meant to hold sensitive data, but rather to serve as a control center for the equipment of the lab. Poking around on that computer earns the investigator the video file of Thartha’s arrival. See “Thartha Video #1” on page xx in SCENE FIVE. Moreover, the agent reconstructs some of what the computer was monitoring. The character also finds that the UV laser was programmed to fire in a numeric pattern at timed intervals. Give them the handout “UV Laser Signal/Reception Side-by-Side.”

Inside Dr. Keyert’s office, the filing cabinet isn’t locked, and the files inside can, after perusal, provide insights via Science (Physics). The Agent’s skill is unpenalized for anyone who takes a full hour to read for comprehension. A -20% penalty falls on those who only take half an hour to skim. That’s the minimum time for any insight.

**Less than 40%:** Crap, this woman was trying to poke at some weirdness in spacetime.

**40%+:** It has something to do with dimensional topography—using high-energy, phased Bosonic particles to distort the shape of space. If it worked two non-simultaneous events would be causally connected.

**60%+:** This was an attempt to amplify strange particles that seemed to appear at timed intervals. Her last experiment did more, though she doesn’t know why—it opened a hole in spacetime.

**80%+:** As Success. Also, her math is brilliant. She’s cracked some of the essential conflicts of a Theory of Everything that explain why we remember the past and not the future. But the aperture she made was (1) tiny, only a bit bigger than the wavelength of a light beam and (2) brief, meant to stay open for only .0000000000008 seconds.

Rummaging through her office? Roll Search—there are live germs, so there’s risk.

**Fumble:** Those stones on her bookshelf are creepy. While examining one, an unseen jagged edge compromises the searcher’s biohazard suit (unless he’s too stupid to be wearing one). The character now has \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Fail:** She was a physicist who taught at CalTech, but her recent paychecks come from the Department of Energy, and all the business cards she have indicate that she’s a professor at CalTech.

**Success:** As Fail and, oh hey, there’s her computer password on a sticky note on the underside of her bottom left-hand drawer, above the half-full box of Cheez-Its. LogonID = rokeyert, Password = 7dm4XXoL.

**Crit:** In the trash, uncrumpled, is a piece of paper with a pizza place’s phone number jotted on it, but on the other side there’s a doodle showing the TARDIS from Dr. Who moving in a loop. At the point where the loop crosses, there’s a label saying “here and you can’t go farther back than this point, no matter what.”

Trying to get into her computer requires the Computer Science skill, unless you have the password. Agents with the password get the results of 80%+, no matter their skill

**Less than 40%:** Access denied.

**40%+:** You can see the directory names—ROOT, WHITE HALL—but not enter them.

**60%+:** The Agent finds “Thartha Video #1” from SCENE FIVE and receives “UV LASER SIGNAL/RECEPTION SIDE-BY-SIDE.”

**80%+:** In addition to all the Success stuff, there’s a personal journal that spells out, explicitly, her suspicion that a living time-traveler fed a supermassive power surge into her signal experiment in order to widen it and keep it open long enough to come through. What this person could want is beyond her imagining. She speculates that this could be, in one sense, the end of ‘free will’ as a meaningful concept.

### **Lobby (Fourth Level)**

The elevator drops a long time before coming to a rest. The ladder next to the shaft turns to steps—352 steps. Taking the stairs from the third level is a fifteen minute walk, descending.

Both elevator and ladder open to a small room with walls painted white, a tangle of white and silver pipes overhead, and three doors. Directly across from the elevator is “Power Control” to the left. “Clean Room” is on the right.

If the characters have procured a security badge, only one from Donovan, Pahabi or Stusser can open Power Control or the Clean Room. Agents who’ve already hacked their way past one security panel can bypass these without a roll, but if it’s their first, use Craft (electrician) with the following results.

**Fumble:** \_\_\_\_\_itis exposure, but on the plus side, opening any further doors requires no roll.

**Fail:** You got this one open, but you're going to have to roll again for the next one.

**Any Success:** You got the door open and can open any other keycard doors without rolling, as long as the power holds out.

## Power Control (Fourth Level)

This is the control chamber for the huge bank of capacitors that power the WHITE HALL UV lasers. It's also Phil Donovan's tomb. He was shot here, he's sprawled on the console, and his blood is all over it.

Rolling Craft (electrician) reveals the following:

**Fumble:** Good grief. You have no idea what to do here.

**Fail:** As far as you can tell, the batteries are filled and could run the facility for days, but you have no idea how to turn them on.

**Success:** You know for sure what the trouble is. The trouble is, the machine got shot and if several small battery components are stripped out, and it is restarted, the power can come back on.

**Crit:** Switching a few connectors you can isolate the damaged cells, if you want to restore the power to the facility. If you try that, you get a +20% to that roll.

Investigating Donovan's body yields no surprises. He still has his access badge. He was shot three times in the torso, kind of a wobbly grouping. Died right here, probably around supper time on 13 JUN.

## Clean Room (Fourth Level)

The station consists of two rooms, an antechamber and the decon space proper, and it was used to assemble delicate equipment or to store samples for later, uncontaminated study. The antechamber has a closet of positive air sealed suits, a switched-off video screen, and a small panel with switches marked 'VIEW' and 'SHOWER'. (It is, of course, absolutely impossible to wear both a positive air suit and a Hazmat suit.) Opposite the entry door is a portal with a pressure-wheel. A stout piece of metal pipe, about six feet long, leans in the corner.

Anyone who examines this room doesn't need to roll to notice that the pole is just the right size that, if laced through the wheel of the inner door, it could be jammed in the corner and prevent the door from unsealing. Looking in the corner, there are clear scratches on the floor and wall that fit the pipe's diameter exactly.

Opening the vault-like portal, one finds a small, cold room lined with white tile, about ten feet by seven. It has high-power shower-like nozzles high up on the opposite edges. The light bulb is behind heavy plastic, as is a lens directly over the door. If they push the 'VIEW' button on the exterior control panel, this camera switches on, giving a full fisheye view of the room. 'SHOWER' blasts water with painful, fire-hose force. But neither has been used on Thartha's corpse, which lies on the floor in a small pool of its own blood. Should a physician or investigator examine Thartha's body, the details can be unearthed as described on page xx, SCENE FIVE.

## SCENE FIVE: Thartha

There it is. The corpse of a 7'5" time traveler who, in passing, has been responsible for a devastating epidemic. Probably not what she had in mind. But what can we learn from Thartha? What clues did she leave about what is to come?

### “Thartha Video #1”

It's a high-def color digital video, shot by a camera in the Bosonic Topographic Lab, run by the computer in the lab's observation chamber. It begins with Dr. Keyert stepping into the frame in front of the machine with the round aperture in its center. She smiles tightly, then speaks.

**KEYERT:** Good afternoon. My name is Dr. Rosamund Keyert, it's, um, four o'clock in the afternoon, June 12, 2012. This is the third activation of, um, the Bosonic repeater experiment. Our goal today is to reinforce the signal by rotating a small space of... er, a small area of space into the temporal dimension, so to speak. We're going to measure this, um, recursion using the microwave laser here, and the receiver over... here. The goal is to spike the signal for eight picoseconds, and to hit it with the microwave laser so that we can, um, determine whether it's actually there. So. Here we go.

She steps out of the shot. The sound of a closing door is audible. All is still except for a buzzing noise, after which she returns to the frame and speaks again a bit self-consciously.

**KEYERT:** All right, the topography definitely didn't fold, but based on the power levels, we never even got past the first stage of synchronic infusion... This happened in the first test too, and that time we tracked the problem to the phasing array. If we didn't get anything phased, it wouldn't trigger the re-acceleration. So I'm going to adjust that and... see if we can't make something happen.

She then opens a panel on the machine and examines it before reaching in to affect a few repairs with a tiny screwdriver. Satisfied, she nods at the camera and steps aside.

Once again, the audio picks up the closing door. The buzzing resumes, building in intensity, and then suddenly the lenses and antennae are bent back and shoved out of the way as Thartha materializes from nowhere. One second, she's not there and the next she is. She falls forward onto the floor with a grunt, then stands. She speaks, looking around.

THARTHA: Ganta tanic? Tanic opropin? Zutha oprosot?

She shifts her look as the camera picks up the sound of the door, and her eyes widen. There's a brief exchange between her, and the voice of Dr. Keyert, before the door slams again.

THARTHA: Zurnep uglinican!



KEYERT: Holy fucking shit!

Thartha turns and examines the equipment behind her quizzically before the tape abruptly cuts out.

### “THARTHA INTERVIEW #1”

The video is pretty decent. It focussed on Thartha the whole time. She’s rather awkwardly perched on a chair that is (for her) tiny, and the recorder was sitting on another in front. The angle emphasizes the cramped space of the decontamination chamber. All it is, is her speaking in response to a man’s voice and a woman’s voice. (If the characters get the transcript, these voices are identified as Stusser and Keyert, respectively.) The substance of it is in the transcript on page xx.

## Examining the Corpse in Situ

Thartha’s body is in the Decontamination Chamber, lying on her back, remaining eye closed, hands folded over her chest, braid pulled around to lie over her left shoulder. A white towel is draped over her face, and another over her torso. Rigor Mortis has set in but is beginning to ease. Lividity in the lowest surfaces indicates that she’s been dead long enough for the blood to settle. She’s room temperature. No pulse.

Removing the towel from her body provides some clues to how she died, inasmuch as there are four bloodstained holes in her tan canvas jumpsuit. Two are small entry wounds, in the front, right lower torso and left thigh. They’re matched by larger rips in the back of her clothes. There’s a great deal of blood soaked in the cloth, but the skin underneath seems to have dime-sized knots of keloid flesh where the entry holes should be. The rear injuries have the same sort of white, wrinkled, glossy scar tissue, only in larger star shapes.

The facial towel is more gross, less mysterious. Her nose and mouth writhe with maggots, if the atmosphere is still enough, the agent leaning in can hear more of them eating their way through her nasal cavities, throat lining and soft palette. It sounds like Rice Krispies in milk.

Her right eye socket is empty under a smooth sheet of skin. It’s as if her eyelid was grafted down, or as if a plane of skin was melted onto her face, starting right under her eyebrow. Her left eyeball, under her closed left eyelid, is sunken, indicating that the pressure inside her skull altered. It’s consistent with the violent removal of her right eye.

There’s blood and clear fluid leaking out of her ears, as well.

All that stuff’s available without a roll, just for pulling off the towels. Learning more requires a Forensics roll.

**Fumble:** How the hell did the Agent manage to compromise his biohazard suit while examining Thartha? The agent is exposed to \_\_\_\_\_itis. Also—this corpse has no belly button!

**Fail:** Her bare feet are really weird. The big toe separates from the bulk of the foot much higher, and seems to have a highly developed joint—as if it’s partially prehensile. Moreover, the beds of her toenails start much farther forward, out at the tips of her toes. The nails themselves curl under her toes and are clearly very thick and tough.

Moreover, the soles of her feet are extremely leathery, as if she's walked barefoot outside and in, all her life. Her proportions are well within standard norms and she has no signs of acromegaly. Her amazonian stature doesn't appear to be the result of Marfan syndrome or pituitary gigantism—she's just a regular woman who's 7'5" tall. Oh, and she didn't shave her legs or armpits.

**Success:** No signs that she ever had pierced ears, no tan lines from rings, no jewelry. The thick canvas of her coveralls thins as it's handled—it takes little experimentation to realize it's temperature sensitive, becoming puffy and fluffy when cold, thin and loose-woven when warm. Her underwear is snug, unremarkable, close-fitting gray stuff: It doesn't change texture like her jumpsuit. It's your basic sports-bra and undershorts. Her hands are fairly rough. Not like her leathery feet, but like the hands of someone accustomed to labor.

Other than the entry and exit marks, and her eye, there are no other scars, tattoos or birth marks on her body. (Unless there are: See the "No Autopsy, Thanks" section on page xx.)

**Crit:** Her teeth don't have the roughness of typical adult teeth. Though they're full sized, they're like baby teeth. There are no fillings, and her bottom frontmost left tooth is visibly whiter than the rest, as is her left upper incisor.

## No Autopsy, Thanks

The big mind-twist is seeing the word "\_\_\_\_itis" printed on a time traveler from the future, so if your doctors don't seem like they're going to perform an autopsy, you can have all the inoculation dates tattooed on the underside of her left bicep.

## Autopsy

The Clean Chamber isn't the perfect place to do an autopsy, but it's not too bad. Ditto the infirmary. Someone who's willing to take a couple hours to incise Thartha can learn some very interesting things rolling Medicine. Regardless of the roll, some things become clear very, very quickly.

- 1) When her skin is cut, it gradually, but visibly, begins to knit itself back together. The incision closes at about a rate of 1mm per second. Realizing this is a 0/1d4 SAN check, or a 1/1d8 SAN check for anyone whose Medicine score is 70%+.
- 2) Parts of her skeleton aren't bone. Specifically, her skull and sternum are some kind of smooth, nonporous plastic or resin. A more extensive autopsy (requiring a dedicated lab and 8-12 hours) eventually determines that her metacarpals, ulnas, radiuses and tibias are made of the same material. Whatever this stuff is, it's non-ferrous but extremely tough. It can't be marked with anything short of a point-blank firearm shot, and even that is insufficient to do more than leave a shallow dent and a few grainy chips the size of sand.
- 3) The first incision of an autopsy is the Y cut to the front of the torso. When the acting coroner makes this cut, give him an Alertness roll. If he makes it, he notices that the skin over her artificial sternum begins to open ahead of his scalpel. Ask him what he does.

The round after the sternum is revealed, it discharges some form of energy. If the physician specifically got back really fast or said he was dodging or hitting the floor or anything panicky like that, he's OK. Otherwise, he gets a Dodge roll. If he succeeds, he's unharmed. If the Dodge roll fails, however, he is encased in some sort of spatial anomaly and is, before the stunned eyes of any onlookers, compressed out of our dimensions and disappears to... elsewhere. Witnessing this is a 1/1d8 SAN check. (If no one is standing near her, there's just a deafening pop as a large quantity of air is excised from reality. The sternum cannot be induced to repeat the effect.)

Should the dissector survive that misfire, the outcome of the structural examination depends on his Medicine roll.

**Fumble:** The Agent's biohazard protections have failed him. He's exposed to \_\_\_\_\_itis.

**Fail:** Nothing beyond the automatic stuff.

**Success:** There's a flattened .45 shell inside her skull. Apparently some excellent (or lucky) marksman shot her through her right eye. The bullet, unable to penetrate her artificial skull, rattled around like a die in a cup, reducing her brain to something like pâté. Her skin closed over the injury postmortem, which is obviously very, very fucking weird. Gauging by the holes in her clothes and the marks on her leg and stomach, she was also shot in those two locations. It looks like a pair of clean shoot-throughs with, again, the skin knitting itself over the wounds. When the skin over those spots is opened, there's clear severing trauma to the leg muscle (though less than one would expect) and to the intestine.

More alarming is a series of tiny indentations on the frontal bone of the artificial skull. They're clearly tiny letters. The top three are in an unfamiliar alphabet that seems distantly related to English. Most words are gibberish, but the last word is clearly:

\_\_\_\_\_ITIS 2.17.25

That \_\_\_\_\_itis is the disease they named back in SCENE THREE. Realizing that this woman has a word written on her skull that they coined after she died and before they even knew about her is a 0/1d4 SAN check. If a player, on his own, suggests that the source of \_\_\_\_\_itis is this corpse, which traveled back through time and accidentally infected them, then there's no additional SAN loss. Otherwise, give everyone present an INTx5 roll. Those who succeed figure out that \_\_\_\_\_itis may have been spontaneously generated from a time loop, wherein Thartha was inoculated against it in the future, traveled back to the past, and accidentally spread it (probably a weakened strain, in fact!), creating some future epidemic severe enough that she was inoculated before traveling in time.

Succeeding at this Idea roll leaves the Agent's mind running until it turns into butter. It's a 1/1d8 SAN check.

**Crit:** The decay is less than one might expect, but if the skin is regenerating, that would keep out a lot of maggots and retard decay anywhere except in the throat and associated tracts—where it is, in fact, occurring.

## SCENE SIX: Debrief

The FEVER Group is ordered to set up a quarantine around WHITE HALL, and the National Guard sweeps in to surround the outer fence with APCs and tanks, while more CDC bio-containment experts show up to encase the whole building in plastic. (Unless, of course, the Agents managed to nuke the site, in which case it's a Nuclear Emergency Services Team.)

The CDC and National Guard are there for less than 24 hours, however, before an Air Force team arrives, led by General Jan Hammond. He insists on interrogating any survivors, directly. He's a ruddy weathered blond man with a hook nose and a massive, heavysset linebacker's frame. He's there to ask questions, not answer them, and he wants a complete chronology of what they did and what they think happened at WHITE HALL. When they tell him about Stusser's death, it doesn't take a Psychology or HUMINT roll to see that he's genuinely grieved.

**Fumble:** The Agent has alarmed the general deeply. Simply pass the player a note that says, "Your character was deniably wetworked within 72 hours of meeting General Hammond." Then turn to the other players and say, "Man, \_\_\_\_\_ here was apparently really affected by the events in Hudson's Well. Not two days later, he's involved in a deadly single-car crash. Maybe he was still so tired and stressed that he didn't pay attention. Hard to say. Did he seem suicidal to you?" If more than one Agent fumbles, have them roll Luck and only the highest result gets kacked. The other gets oblique, threatening phone calls, cyber-harassment, and the results of a Fail.

**Fail:** The Agent is completely discredited, despite Marholm's attempts at shielding. If the Agent is a doctor (or a pilot for that matter) they lose their license and takes a public share of the blame for anything bad that went down at Hudson's Well.

**Success:** The General gives the character the stink eye and strongly recommends that they not look any farther. The Agent has been tagged as a possible Delta Green recruit.

**Crit:** At the end of the Agent's narrative, the general sighs deeply and asks them if they're willing to swear themselves to secrecy. If they agree, he nods. They have definitely been tagged for Delta Green recruitment.

[[begin prop - it just looks like a very simple briefing sheet, with a CDC logo on it]]

DATE: July 13, 2012

TO: FEVER Group

FROM: Dr. Stacy Marholm, Assoc. Dir. DPEI

CC: Dr. Ambrosia Largo, Dir. NCEZID

Dr. Frank Teasdale, Dir. DPEI

Dr. Trey Klein, Assist. Dir. DVBD

Vaughn Hubbell, Assoc. Dir. DHCPP

REGARDING: Hudson's Well, AZ

At 08:00 hours today, DPEI received an emergency call from Dr. Fritz Strickland, Chief of Emergency Operations at Hudson's Well Catholic Hospital. In less than 24 hours, nine patients have been admitted with extremely suspect symptoms. High fever is universal, and intense headaches are also reported, along with coughing or nausea. As

of 08:45, two of those patients have died and the physician who oversaw their admittance, Dr. Maya Paulden, has begun exhibiting fever and nausea herself. Dr. Strickland has isolated the patients in the hospital's ICU and is requesting immediate assistance. All patients have, so far, proven resistant to Cefepime, Levequin and Vancomycin. Tylenol failed to reduce their fevers, and cooling blankets were only marginally effective.

FEVER Group is to proceed immediately to Hudson's Well Catholic Hospital, engage crisis-evaluation procedures, and advise on contagion and containment.

-SM, M.D.

[[end prop layout]]

[[BEGIN PROP LAYOUT - IT LOOKS LIKE A PRINTED-OUT EMAIL, DUH]]

FROM: Dr. Rosamund Keyert <rokeyert@CalTechMail.com>

SUBJECT: criical medical emergen y

DATE: July 12, 2012 10:51:04 AM MST

TO: CDC Emergency Contact <emcontact@cdc.gov>

I'm sick and this is not anything you have seen before. i don't

brad was the the got it . Brad stusser. he got it form her

I feel so tired. I'm sorry. I didnt want this none of us had any idea this could happen.

None ofus expected her to come through

We tried econtamination it didn't do any god and Davies is gone no one knows where he went.

Shes dead now but i don't know whats going to happen to Hudson wells. I exposed them. I did. I didn't know. The thermometer say s my temp is 103. I'm sorry. I didn't thik this could come throug h a closed lopp. my head hurrt s so bad. The power demand was incalculable where did it all come from/

it was an accident no one wanted this i'm sorry

ou have ot come to hudsons well

please its so fast it hurts so ch

[[END PROP LAYOUT]]

[[begin prop layout]]

Event Summary, Hudson's Well Emergency Room.

-June 12, 14:20 hours, Jeff Langzweil (age 43) checks in complaining of high fever, cough, headache, nausea.

-June 12, 16:30 hours, Liz Maurey (age 9), admitted for fever and headache.

-June 12, 19:20 hours, Francesca (age 11) and Julie (age 7) Maurey admitted with fever and headache.

-June 12, 20:00 hours, Dr. Fritz Strickland goes off duty, Dr. Maya Paulden comes on duty.

-June 12, 20:15 hours, Emily Langsweill (age 39) admitted for fever, headache and nausea.

- June 13, 01:17 hours, Jeff Langzweil undergoes Sudden Cardiac Arrest. Defibrillation restores functioning for 48 minutes. Therapeutic hypothermia attempted until second CA at 02:05. Time of death 02:15.
- June 13, 04:30 hours, Liz Maurey goes into SCA. Resuscitation fails. Time of death 04:41.
- June 13, 05:00 hours, Dr. Paulden calls Dr. Strickland to return to the E.R.
- June 13, 05:45 hours, Amad Malouf (age 20) admitted, complaining of fever, headache, cough.
- June 13, 06:10 hours, Dr. Paulden relieved of duty and admitted, suffering from low-grade fever and headache.
- June 13, 06:30 hours, Harudo (age 32) and Henrietta (age 33) Cortez admitted, complaining of fever and nausea.
- June 13 07:50 hours, Stephen Embry (age 28) admitted, complaining of fever and headache.
- June 13, 08:00 hours, CDC contacted, all suspected patients restricted to ICU, non-exposed ICU patient relocation begins, non-fever E.R. referrals redirected to Barnard Springs Hospital, possible new fever cases restricted to E.R.

[[end handout layout.]]

[[begin prop layout - it's a medical log]]

JUNE 11

16:00 Hrs. - No explanation of the alarms and excursions yesterday, but things appear serious. Meetings all day, Keyert & Langzweil arguing with Stusser about "containment." K & L clearly feel that K's experiment had some profound implications, but they are very guarded around me. S insists that 'security is the primary issue,' whatever that means. He's not kidding.

18:00 Hrs. - Craig Amberlin checked himself in complaining of mild nausea and severe headache. Temperature 99F. Prescribed Tylenol and ward rest.

19:00 Hrs. - Ramirez and Bird checked in, also complaining about fever and headache. Put them in ward rooms, gave Tylenol, also Z-packs to them and Amberlin. Amberlin's temp is up to 100F, as is Ramirez. Bird's at 99F.

Techs are getting nervous. I overheard Bird telling Ramirez that 'something came through' during Keyert's experiment. He said, rather melodramatically, that 'we broke space.' I told him to calm down.

20:00 Hrs. - Stusser looked flushed and sweaty when he announced the comms shutdown. Could he have this fever? Could it be affecting his judgment? I'd hate to have to invoke Article 11 on Stusser, he would never forgive me.

22:17 Hrs. - Amberlin is dead, and I can't get off-base advice on the fever because of Section 19. His temperature at time of death was 103F. I have stored his body in the mess hall temporarily, wrapped in plastic and covered in ice.

23:00 Hrs. - Aya Chandreskar, John Pahabi and Nell Buchar have all come to the infirmary. I barely had time to clear Amberlin's bed and sterilize it before I put John in it. They all have the same symptoms, localized pain in the occipital region and rising fever. Nothing has helped with Bird, who's now at 100F, nor with Ramirez, who's at 101F.

JUNE 12

2:17 - Chandreskar died, temperature 104F. Still no idea what's causing this. I don't even have a nurse, this would be a major outbreak in a real hospital and I'm stuck in here with no communication and no way to evacuate them. Stusser seems really paranoid, said that taking the sick out might be just what 'they' want. I want to give him a psych. eval. but I have three grievously ill patients, no help, no access to information and I don't trust myself to be objective. I need sleep and seem unlikely to get any soon. I shall ask Donovan to help me move C's body to the mess hall.

2:49 - Ramirez dead with 104F fever.

3:33 - O'Dell and Willert locked me in the infirmary at gunpoint. They claim Stusser is dead and that they're now "in charge" until they can figure out how to restore the comms and get help. Philip Donovan had volunteered to help in the clinic not long after Aya died and he insisted on staying inside with us.

Bird's slowly getting hotter (101F), despite my best efforts. No change in Buchar — maybe she stabilized at 99F? Pahabi, on the other hand, is burning up. In just the last half hour, he's risen from 101 to 102F. Even an ice-bath did little but torment him.

4:11 - Bird is dead.

4:18 - Pahabi is dead.

4:45 - Heard the sound of raised voices outside the ward door - I think it was probably Cray and O'Dell. I started hammering on the door demanding more ice when I heard Cray (?) refusing to go into the infirmary, and then the sound of a gunshot.

5:30 - I just took my own temperature, something I'd been afraid to do. I hoped my headache was psychosomatic, sympathetic... no. I'm at 99F. Donovan, however, has told me that if the core is unmanned, it will eventually go into failsafe mode, dropping the control rods automatically. When that happens, he thinks the doors unlock. He's bound surgical tubing to the door handle, so that as soon as it unseals, the handle will turn. I don't know what good he expects to do out there against O'Dell. Donovan isn't even armed.

7:40: O'Dell threatened me and demanded painkillers and amphetamines. Donovan is dead, O'Dell says he killed him. I slept for a bit and I guess the door opened like Donovan said it would and Donovan went out to get O'Dell but died instead.

Administered 40mg of Adderall and 400mg of Codeine. Taking Bird and Pahabi to the mess hall.

8:31: O'Dell is dead. Died with fever of 103F.

10:03: My fever is up to 102F I cant keep this up much longer i am going to try a few other things but i htink this is it for me. the only thing that gives me hope is that buchar is sitlll alive i think she may be resistant still at 100F

[[end prop layout]]

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STAFF

Charles Davies

Richard Ramirez

Dylan O'Dell

Tate Willert

Craig Amberlin

Aya Chandreskar

Orenthal Kimmons  
Nell Buchar

Phil Donovan, M.S., Physics and Nuclear Technician  
Delmar Bird, IT and Communications Technologies  
John Pahabi, PhD., Physics and Nuclear Technician  
Andrea Cray, M.S., IT and Physics  
Dr. Rosamund Keyert, PhD., Physics  
Dr. Jeff Langzweil, PhD., Physics  
Dr. David Abrankovitch, MD, staff physician  
Brad Stusser, Security  
[[end prop layout]]

[[begin prop layout for transcript]]

KEYERT: First off let me... welcome you to... here. This is WHITE LAIR, in the United States of America. The year is 2012.

THARTHA: Twelve?

KEYERT: Yes! That is the year! Do you speak English?

THARTHA: Engsish...

KEYERT: What is your name?

THARTHA: Name...

KEYERT: My name is Rosamund. Ro-sa-mund.

THARTHA: (gesturing at self) Thartha.

STUSSER: Your name is 'Thartha'?

THARTHA: Thartha.

STUSSER: Why are you here?

KEYERT: Don't yell at her Brad.

THARTHA: Two thousand twelve... Two. Tree. Fvor. Un.

STUSSER: Wait, are you telling me you're from the year 2341?

THARTHA: 2341, odom sacrilent.

KEYERT: We don't... we don't understand you?

THARTHA: Three hundred thirty nine yes?

STUSSER: Why now, why... why Thartha 2012?

THARTHA: Thartha. Ah-pen.

THARTHA: Open 2089 basan helic.

KEYERT: Yes! Helictical Bosonic topography creating a transchronal loop!

STUSSER: What is your purpose?

THARTHA: Thartha years back open.

STUSSER: Why Thartha open years?

THARTHA: No cathyuloh? Obvama.

STUSSER: The president. Obama, yes, you know Obama?

KEYERT: This is just unbelievable!

THARTHA: San chan yes, san chan no?

STUSSER: I don't understand you?

THARTHA: Nuculero abbadon! San chan orbit! San chan yoy gor!

STUSSER: I don't... we don't know those words. 'Nuculero'? Is that like nuclear?



KEYERT: We're sorry Thartha! We're trying, we're really trying... what language do you speak? What words Thartha words?

THARTHA: Thartha anglanto words, toltish. English 2012. Anglanto 2130? 2150? Post osbom.

STUSSER: What is 'nuculero'?

THARTHA: Energy... sun? Small, little sun? Little sun ground. Energy. Big energy.

STUSSER: Are you describing a nuclear weapon?

STUSSER: Where? Nuclearo where?

KEYERT: Brad...

STUSSER: When? When nucularo?

THARTHA: Years ago. Othoy. Othoy ang er.

STUSSER: I don't know what an 'othoy' is.

KEYERT: Look, are we... do people use, um, Bosonic helix travel in your time?

THARTHA: Yifyan. Yifyan years travel. Mot tion.

STUSSER: Are you the first person to travel back in time?

KEYERT: If this is the start of the loop, she can't go any farther back.

THARTHA: Yifyan motion far far years back go. Yoy gor non-isolate, non... worldsheet?

KEYERT: Oh my God, they still know about worldsheet theory in the twenty-fourth century!

THARTHA: Worldsheet is.

STUSSER: Look, we... we're going to go get you some food, okay? But let's be clear about one thing. If you come in peace, if you... tell the truth, be friend? Then the USA is friend to you.

THARTHA: You es ehj.

STUSSER: USA. You enemy to USA, then it will go badly for you. This country always... does right by, those who do right to us. Do you follow?

STUSSER: ...I'll just get you something to eat and drink.

[[end transcript prop layout]]