

MEDICAL BAY THREE GM'S PACK

A science fiction
medical drama game
by Nick Wedig

EPISODE ONE: THE WALKING VOLCANO

I don't have rules for making your own patients and Quade diagrams yet, but I might develop those if the game works pretty well in playtest. In general, you want to make sure that a mix of investigative skills are useful in play, and that each symptom or pair of symptoms can be matched to multiple illnesses.

When GMing the game, you should give the players honest answers as they discover clues. Don't try to hide clues from players that use the proper skills to investigate. The real mystery is figuring out what the clues mean and how they all fit together.

Take note: the players don't know what they're looking for, so if they're in the right vicinity using the right skill but asking the wrong thing, or using the wrong skill to investigate, then you can give them an answer that directs them toward the answers they are seeking. E.g., if the player is looking at the hind legs using **Orthopedics** to investigate broken bones but the real issue is a vitamin deficiency, you might say "no, nothing is broken or misplaced, but you notice that there are some nodules or growths coming from the bones.". Then it is up to the player to notice that 'unusual bone growths' is connected to 'vitamin deficiency' on the Quade diagram.

EPISODE ONE: THE WALKING VOLCANO

A lumbering creature comes into the ER acting erratically. It fits and start, sometimes at nothing, it seems to be in pain and having difficulty moving. It seeks help from medical staff if it can. Its temperature is 165 degrees Fahrenheit (73 Celsius).

If the doctors can identify the species and configure the translator, then they can talk to the patient. The files indicate that the bristle worms have two languages. Which language they use will make a difference on what answers they get. The fezznak is stupid and scared, but wants to help. It doesn't understand most of what is going on. It says that it is scared. It cannot speak to itself clearly any more. The bristle worm is smarter, but it is hallucinating and fading fast. Soon it won't be able to communicate clearly.

If the doctors don't help within a few hours, the bristle worm will lose all consciousness, leaving only a terrified fezznak in their ER. A day and a half after entering the ER, the fezznak suffocates and dies. The bristle worm dies shortly thereafter.

THE FACTS ARE THESE:

- Patient is Catalexis, a bristle worm/fezznak symbiote. The bristle worm survives as a parasite on the fezznak, and the two share a single circulatory system.
- Catalexis was working on the docks, unloading and loading equipment with a few other fezznaks in the employ of a Nargathi merchant named Icterine. (*Icterine referred her to Zaffre the Nargathi doctor for the surgery*).
- Patient has no ID, but there is a credit chip implanted in its shell near the ear from Icterine's Jumentous Quaestuary Oporopolist. Credit chips are a common way to pay employees, so it is likely that the patient works there. A quick scan can identify the employee ID number (*actually a recursive mathematical function that produces an infinite but unique series of numbers. But it works as a unique identifier for the employee.*)
- Another employee, a Yamondlol, convinced the bristle worm that the hierarchy of the bristle worm caste system was immoral and unfair.
- The patient went to Zaffre, an unlicensed Nargathi doctor. The patient desired to have noise making nodules added to its bristles. Patient was of the worker caste, which have no ability to communicate except via the simplistic 'Outer Language' that the fezznak can produce. It wanted to speak the horribly grating (but rich and complex) scratching 'Inner Language' of the upper classes.
- This unlicensed surgery included some metal pins to hold the nodules onto the fibers of the bristle worm. This metal began to decay, due to the sulfate content of the patient's ichorstream. The corroded metal turned into iron sulfide in the patient's ichorstream.
- The iron sulfide in the ichorstream messed up the fezznak's internal biochemistry, which caused the fezznak mount to have trouble respiring, leading to a slowing of their respiration cycle.
- Decreased respiration has caused the fezznak's body temperature to drop.

-Lower body temperature caused the bristle worm to lose its intelligence. Bristle worms are cold blooded, and rely on environmental heat to facilitate their mental faculties. Bristle worms need a very high environmental temperature to function. This is usually handled by the fezznak having an internal body temperature of 185 degrees Fahrenheit (85°C).

-The bristle worm's people view Catalexis as taboo, having had unlicensed modifications to the worm itself. (Modifying your mount is normal, but modifying your wormself is an abomination to their way of life.) If they discover the unlicensed modification, then they will want nothing to do with her.

PLACES YOU CAN LEARN THINGS:

Most of the game will consist of taking the patient around from hospital office to hospital office for testing and stuff. So for the hospital, I'll list individual skills. For other locations, I'll describe the location and call out specific skills that might gain specific clues.

OPERATING ON THE PATIENT

Knowledgeable In Alien Cultures. If someone tries to identify the species, you can give them the bristle worm case file and tell them that they know the information contained within.

N-Ray Imaging. If the N-Ray is directed at the abdomen, brains or other organs, then there do not appear to be any unusual bodies present. Only if the N-rays specifically scan the bristles are the metal pins detected. Examining the exoskeleton near the ear locates a credit chip with a recursive algorithm used as unique identifier by Nargathi merchants, in this case tying the patient to Icterine's Jumentous Quaestuary Oporopolist, a fruit seller not far from the hospital.

Expert Surgeon. Cutting open the patient's abdomen or other body parts does not find anything. Only if they specifically go looking on the bristles do they find what they're looking for.

Bedside Manner. The fezznak/bristle worm are both terrified, and calming them down can get some more of the details out of them. The bristle worm

is hallucinating symptoms and will give false reports. **Bullshit Detector.** Neither is lying, though the bristle worm seems to shift its story every time you ask it what symptoms it is having. Catalexis will lie and evade questions about prior medical treatment, but not provide answers.

Guilt Trip. If Guilt Tripped into providing answers, the fezznak will claim it is all its fault that this is happening. The fezznak claims it was the big flea that made it want to be equal. The bristle worm can't coherently answer the guilt trip, instead telling a sad story about its life in the hatching chamber and how it didn't mean to cause its nestmate to bond onto the pet mlangour (*apparently a bit like a dog/spider hybrid*).

Biochemistry. If the blood is tested, the patient's Z-cell counts appear to be normal. There appears to be an unusually large amount of iron sulfide in the blood, though, if the doctor tests for anything else in the bloodstream. If the respiration system is checked, the sulfate levels are climbing.

Extraterrestrial Psychology. The two brains disagree with each other. One or the other is not functioning properly, which is causing the other to misinterpret their information and hallucinate.

Interplanetary News and Gossip. The bristle worms have a strict caste system, with the lowest rank being attached to fezznaks and the higher castes being attached to other mounts. The visiting diplomat to Earth recently ruined a state dinner by insisting on singing a classic ballad in their 'Inner Language' which is horribly grating. Luckily, the lower classes lack the vibration nodules to make those horrible noises.

Intimidate and Deception. Might be useful to get some answers from the bristle worm or fezznak, depending on how the player plays it out. The fezznak is confused and doesn't understand, but wants to help. The bristle worm is sliding into hallucinations and unconsciousness.

Cardiologist. The three hearts are all beating in sync with each other, which is good, but their ichor seems more green when it should be bright blue.

Epidemiologist. Your bacteriological scans detect nothing out of the ordinary.

Geneticist. With a sample, you can identify the fezznak and bristle worm species. The fezznak and bristle worm are a genetic match, both R-type genes. Neither shows a genetic predisposition to any problem.

Pharmacologist No common drugs are detected in a sample of ichor, though you lack the ability to scan for Koob Fruit. Addiction to Koob fruit has recently become common among many molluskoid species on the Sphere.

Immunologist. Z-cell counts are normal.

Endocrinologist. Hormones in acceptable ranges.

Comparative Anatomy and Orthopaedics. No signs of past injuries that you can see. Examining the exoskeleton near the ear locates a credit chip with a recursive algorithm used as unique identifier by Nargathi merchants, in this case tying the patient to *Icterine's Jumentous Quaestuary Oporopolist*, a fruit seller not far from the hospital.

Pulmonology. The fezznak is outputting less hydrogen sulfide than the bristle worm is 'exhaling' sulfate. This imbalance is only getting worse over time. Seals between the two respiration systems are intact, there is no leak.

Otolaryngology. Seals between the two respiration systems are intact, there is no leak. There is no yellowish gunk found in the ears. Examining the exoskeleton near the ear locates a credit chip with a recursive algorithm used as unique identifier by Nargathi merchants, in this case tying the patient to *Icterine's Jumentous Quaestuary Oporopolist*, a fruit seller not far from the hospital..

Neuroscience A brain scan shows that the two brain waves are badly out of sync with one another. Over time, the processing of the bristle worm brain appears to be slowing, and the signals from the fezznak brain are being distorted by the bristle worm brain.

THE BRISTLE WORM EMBASSY

Most of the employees here seem to be shrikes, the middle tier caste. Visiting doctors will be met with Archilochian, a low ranking diplomatic worm of the noble caste. Archilochian is of the Innermost caste, and has a mount that looks like a floating, flashing jellyfish, or maybe a small UFO with a fringe of tentacles. She explains that the bristle worm contingent on the Sphere is very small. They have no medical staff they they can spare for a lowly 'Outer Circle' worker. A successful use of interpersonal skill can convince them to send over medical notes to the hospital. Archilochian can't be **Intimidated** or **Guilt Tripped** into helping, but her secretary Hetrodyne can be easily manipulated.

If anyone in the embassy hears that Catalexis deliberately modified her bristles, they will be shocked and refuse to provide her any aid at all. To modify the mount is normal and acceptable, but to modify the bristle worm in any way is taboo. Any who do so are shunned from bristle worm society.

ICTERINE'S JUMENTOUS QUAESTUARY OPOROPOLIST

Icterine deals in a wide variety of unusual alien fruits and fruitlike objects. He imports items from across the galaxy, to sell to people here. Some sentients want to taste exotic foods of planets they've never been to. Some want to taste the fruits that they have back home to cure their homesickness. Icterine doesn't care. He just wants the money. Icterine employs Catalexis, and a Yamondlol to load and unload fruit and stock the shelves and clean up and stuff. Icterine does most of the selling himself, from a chair that looks a bit like a throne and a bit like a birdbath full of horse piss. He harangues passers-by with insults and untactful comments on their appearance, but he carries high quality fruit, so his business is reasonably good.

Icterine doesn't know what caused the problems with Catalexis, but he wants her back at work as soon as possible. Or a replacement worker, but that's a big hassle. He's losing money, since he had to turn down a half price deal on a crate of Branglebix Berries because he couldn't get them shipped and uncrated and sold before they spoiled.

Icterine doesn't see any reason to help the doctors, though, unless they convince him via interpersonal skills. If convinced, Icterine can tell the doctors that he saw Catalexis talking to the Yamondlol a week or so ago, much more than normal. The next day, Catalexis asked Icterine for help finding a doctor for a special treatment. Catalexis didn't say what it wanted, but it was shady, so Icterine referred her to Zaffre, a Nargathi 'doctor' that specialized in off-the-record treatments.

Icterine insists that he would never traffic in Koob fruit. Nargathi don't care that Koob fruit are illegal, but they do always looking out for themselves. Even smelling a Koob fruit can put a Nargathi in a coma. (**Biochemistry, Alien Cultures, Pharmacology and other skills can confirm this.**)

If they question the Yamondlol, they learn that the Yamondlol is not the same Yamondlol that spoke to Catalexis before. The Yamondlol are a religion that preaches radical equality. They place their bodies in stasis chambers, then remotely control bodies. Each day, the life they will live is randomly assigned to them, so every day it is a different Yamondlol in there. (Icterine doesn't care, as long as they can unload the fruit.) This artificial construct looks a bit like a giant flea crosse with a forklift. This Yamondlol isn't very talkative, and instead tells the doctors to visit the Yamondlol church for more information.

'DR.' ZAFFRE'S

Zaffre's medical clinic is every bit as dingy and distasteful looking as you would expect from an unlicensed doctor's office that doesn't care at all about appearances.

Zaffre definitely doesn't want to tell the doctors anything, unless convinced. With some Deception or Intimidation, though, the doctors can convince him to spill the beans. Zaffre worked on the bristle worm to implant vibration nodules on the bristles. But that shouldn't affect any of the fezznak at all. (Zaffre used metal staples to attach the nodules to the bristles, but doesn't think to mention that unless specifically asked about it. He didn't realize that the bristle worm biochemistry would corrode the metal in the staples.)

THE YAMONDLOL CHURCH

The Yamondlol are a religious order, not a race. They each have their bodies put into suspended animation and then remotely control synthesized robot forms. Yamondlol believe in radical equality, to the point where each one awakes each morning and is assigned randomly their role for the day and the plastic body that they will wear for the day (which is usually suited for the task.) Each has a holographic 'face' projected above it that changes to match the species it is talking to, to greater facilitate interactions. (Yamondlol also run a mechanical turk style translation service for its members, so they can get around language barriers better than most species can.) All Yamondlol only answer to the name 'Yamondlol', which is also the name of its original prophet.

The Yamondlol that greets the doctors wants to help, but isn't sure how they can do so. (It is, after all, his first day on the job of helping researchers.) Intimidation isn't likely to work here. Bureaucracy, Research and Guilt Trip are the best ways of dealing with the Yamondlol church members to find any records. The identification of who gets which bodies are supposed to be wiped every day, but if the doctors are persuasive, they can see the notes that the Yamondlol leave for the next Yamondlol to occupy that body/life. A week ago, one Yamondlol left a long discursive journal entry concerning unfairness of bristle worm society, and how he had really made a connection with a fezznak coworker at the fruit stand. The fezznak had explained about Inner and Outer languages and how lower caste members couldn't even speak the Inner Language at all due to a lack of vibration nodules. The Yamondlol's entry ends by suggesting that the bristle worm find a way to get its own bristles, so that it might be the equal of any Inner caste worms.

HOSPITAL RECORDS LIBRARY

From here, you can get in formation on the fezznaks and bristle worms, using *Bureaucracy* or possibly using an interpersonal skill on a librarian.

Another check using the same skills can tell you that Catalexis hadn't been to any licensed doctor on the Sphere recently.

TREATMENT

Depending on what treatments the doctors choose, the patient's outcomes could be very different. When a doctor attempts one of the following treatments, describe the outcomes listed below. If they try something else, you'll have to improvise based on the information given about the bristle worms and fezznaks.

3D Print New Exoskeleton and Artificially Trigger Moulting: This won't solve the problems with the iron sulfide in the ichorstream, so the problems will continue.

Surgery to remove object in abdomen: There is no object found in abdomen. Ichor lost during surgery accelerates patient's deterioration.

Surgery to remove metal pins in bristles: That's one part of the solution. This will stop the situation getting worse, but you also need to flush the patient's blood to remove iron sulfid already in the ichorstream.

Drain and replace blood with cloned duplicate blood: This will help for a short time, but the patient will return ten days later with the same symptoms if the metal pins in bristles have not been removed.

Separate bristle worm from fezznak via surgery: This requires a surgery action to perform successfully, and even then you have to choose to either leave the worm alive or the fezznak. You can't save both. Either one must be returned to the embassy to implant with a new symbiote, and will require years of treatment to deal with the traumatic separation (assuming they ever recover). Won't solve the iron sulfide problem, and bristle worm embassy won't take the worm symbiote back, as she is an abomination.

Class 3 quarantine entire Sphere: You stop all vessels from entering or exiting Sphere space while the coalition of planets negotiates which medical groups will oversee a full wipe. Everyone is terrified of Fractal Parasites, as the last outbreak destroyed three entire civilizations and left a quarter of the galaxy devoid of spacefaring life. Patient continues to deteriorate, but the worse news is that the

Hongu are planning to simply destroy the sphere as a whole, by knocking it into the black hole. Unless definitive proof is provided that the Sphere is clean, an interstellar war breaks out around the Sphere.

Perform Heart transplant: It will take three days to clone a new heart, and the patient dies in less than two. Difficult to find a donor on the Sphere, as there are only a hundred or so bristle worms total here. Fezznaks have two hearts, so a replacement could be found with some effort. No bristle worm replacements can be found, though. Even if surgery is successful, it doesn't solve anything.

Stimulants to boost metabolism: Accelerates the problem, causing the patient's bloodstream to fill with more iron sulfide, causing the respiration to fail faster and body temperature to drop. Patient dies in four hours, instead of two days.

Environmental room: The bristle worm can survive if you put it into a hot room full of hydrogen sulfide gas, but that won't help the fezznak's failing metabolism and dropping body temperature. All it will do is slow it down, keeping the bristle worm alive and conscious longer. Eventually, the iron sulfide in the ichorstream will kill the fezznak unless something is done.

FILE: BRISTLE WORMS AND FEZZNAKS

Bristle worms are an interesting specimen of differential evolution dependant upon unusual environments. The bristle worms and fezznaks are actually two species, one fully sentient and one semi-sentient, that form a symbiotic relationship. The bristle worm home planet was tidally locked to its sun, leaving one side extremely hot and constantly sun drenched while the other side was cold and dark at all times. The bristle worm evolved on the sunlit side of the planet, and therefore evolved eyes to detect the visible light spectrum, a need for an environmental temperature of at least 80 Celsius for mental functioning and a respiration system that transformed hydrogen sulfide from nearby volcanoes into sulfate. The fezznak, on the other hand, evolved on the night side of the planet, and therefore evolved a body temperature of 82 Celsius subsonic echolocation abilities instead of eyes, and a respiration system that took in sulfate and exhaled hydrogen sulfide. The fezznak developed a strong, tough protective hide for defense, whereas the bristle worm developed the ability to parasitically attach itself to hosts and take control of their actions. When the two species met, they discovered that each had features useful to the other one, and a mutually beneficial relationship was formed. The large mass of the fezznak was useful for protecting the small, fragile bristle worm. The intelligence of the bristle worm was superior to the limited abilities of the fezznak. The resilience of each allowed the pairing to venture across the globe and beyond. Indeed, once the respiration systems merged together, the fezznak/bristle worm pair could survive in any atmosphere, as the bristle worm breathes in the exhalations of the fezznak, and vice versa.

In the past several millennia, the bristle worms have evolved a complex caste system, which can be summarized (albeit by oversimplifying) thusly: the bristle worms are separated into three basic castes. -The highest 'Circle' of worms are those with blue-green vibration nodules on their bristles, which the upper castes rub together to speak the 'Inner Language', much like a cricket produces its song by rubbing its legs together. These highest caste worms each create their own unique genetically engineered 'mounts' to symbiotically bond to,

designed by the bristle worm while still a hatchling. These artificial hosts can take a myriad of forms and are no two are quite the same. (The only common feature is that Inner Circle mounts are typically designed to be unable to physically speak the fezznak language, see below). The Inner Circle members control the most powerful jobs in government, religion and business among the bristle worm population.

-The more common middle caste or 'Circle of the Second Crater' have yellow colored nodules that allow them to speak the 'Inner Language' but are seen as less valuable to society. They therefore are provided with a standard genetically created 'shrike' mount, which is smaller and more dexterous than a fezznak. The second tier caste fulfilled most bureaucratic and management roles in bristle worm society. Shrikes can speak via air bladders, much as fezznaks can, though their voices sound much higher than those of the fezznaks, and they lack the fezznak's echolocation abilities.

-The lowest and most common caste are those bristle worms without vibrational nodules on their bristles at all. Lacking the ability to speak the 'Inner Language' of the upper classes, these bristle worms have to communicate via the 'Outer Language' produced via fezznak air bladders. This language is much more limited in vocabulary than the Inner Language, but it serves the manual labor roles most Outer Circle bristle worms are assigned to. Only those of this lowest caste are attached to the original fezznak mounts.

Once bonded to a mount, the bristle worm and its mount become one complete being. For the first few weeks after implantation, the bristle worm extrudes tendrils into the mount's body. After a month or so has passed, the two are inextricably linked. The circulatory system and nervous systems of a bristle worm become intertwined with that of its host as well, leading to a single sentient race with two brains and three hearts all working in conjunction with one another. The bristle worm thinks of its mount as an extension of its own body and can feel the thoughts and feelings of its mount. Similarly, a fezznak or shrike mount can sense the thoughts and feelings of its bristle worm parasite, though the thoughts of a worm are typically too complex for the mount to fully comprehend.

COMMON NAMES FOR BRISTLE WORMS:

Bristle worms have a system of names that involves complex pieces of rhythm, as in poetry or song. Fezznaks, shrikes and special mounts take their names after their bristle worms.

Catalexis

Anacrusis

Antibacchius

Basiyt

Beher

Lekythion

Syzygy

Heterodyne

Archilochian

FILE: NARGATHI

Nargathi look like they are cute and trustworthy, a bit like hexapodal otters with no bones. They are covered in fluorescent color-changing fur, they have large, curious looking eyes and their six limbs end in friendly looking masses of tentacles. They prefer to spend their time soaking in ammonium hydroxide, but they can get out and interact with other creatures for upwards of half an hour before having to get back in the tank to breath. While in the liquid, nargathi are habitually fidgety, which can make them appear playful, as they are always grabbing objects and manipulating them in a variety of ways to keep their secondary and tertiary limbs occupied. (There are some very unfortunate degenerative diseases they suffer if their limbs are not active a majority of the time).

Don't be fooled by their appealing demeanor, though. Nargathi are cruel and ruthless, having no sense of morality as we understand it. Nargathi are not naturally social animals like apes, so they do not concern themselves with the emotions of others. Nargathi only cooperate with another being if it benefits them to do so. (Nargathi bury their eggs near underwater hot vents and then let the young fend for themselves.) A Nargathi will happily tell you to your face that you are only valuable to them so long as they profit. Indeed, though the Nargathi are unscrupulous, amoral and self-interested, they have never developed the ability to lie. They simply don't care about others enough to deceive them. (Nargathi don't trust anyone, either, because they assume all motives are purely for personal individual gain and claims of altruism or friendliness must be some sort of insanity.)

COMMON NAMES FOR NARGATHI:

Nargathi name themselves after colors, traditionally. But because they have seventeen distinct color receptors in their eyes, they are very picky and precise about what exact color it is. (Nargathi are picky about language and word choice in general, but especially this.) Because the Nargathi can see deep into the ultraviolet and infrared sections of the light spectrum, 37% of Nargathi names translate as Black, though some Nargathi insist on being called Ultraviolet or Nargathi words for colors humans cannot see.

Aureolin
Cerulean
Carmine
Carnelian
Celadon
Cinereous
Coquelicot
Cordovan
Fulvous
Gamboge
Glaucous
Grullo
Heliotrope
Icterine
Isabelline
Nyanza
Olivine
Purpureus
Sinopia
Skobeloff
Zaffre

FILE: THE YAMONDLOL

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