

MEDICAL BAY THREE

A science fiction
medical drama game
by Nick Wedig

“Four years of pre-med, four years of medical school, one year of residency, years of professional experience back on Earth and all the memory downloads about extraterrestrial culture have all taught you this: you don’t know anything about what you’re doing. Not here, anyway. On the Sphere, everything is weird and different.

The Sphere is one of the wonders of the galaxy, an enormous construct of unknown material, built centuries ago by an unknown race to draw power from the black hole V616 Monocerotis. No one knows what the Sphere does with all the energy it draws from the hole, but sentients have managed to syphon off some for their own use on the surface of the Sphere. Now, sentient spacefaring races use it as neutral territory, a place where sentients of all species can meet as equals and trade ideas and goods and negotiate contracts and treaties. The sphere swarms with more races than you can count, each stranger than the last.

Each race with a major presence on the Sphere handles its own medical care, but many races from further away have only a minor foothold on the Sphere. For these races, they have to go to what doctors they can. Which is where you come in: you’re a doctor in Medical Bay Three, the insane ward. Medical Bays One and Two are filled with humans from the human contingent to the Sphere. Bay Three handles all the nonhumans that enter the human areas, seeking medical assistance. Every week, you’re treating some new species that you’ve never heard of. You have to figure out what is normal for this race, what is wrong with this specific patient and how to treat them. Treating these patients is as much about being a detective as it is about being a doctor: you have to learn everything you can about every aspect of the patient’s life to find the ultimate cause of their illness and how to treat it. You’ll have to venture forth beyond the hospital into the Sphere at large to get some of the answers, if you want to save your dying patient.

All the doctors in Medical Bay Three have to work together to get the mystery solved and the patient treated. Living three thousand light years from home and working in an hospital for extraterrestrials is stressful, though, and that sometimes causes conflicts among the doctors. Can you keep your cool long enough to find the cause of the disease and treat the patient? Or will the infighting among the doctors lead to the unfortunate demise of an innocent sentient from beyond the stars?”

Medical Bay Three is a science fiction medical drama game, for three to five players plus one gamemaster. The game is divided up into individual episodes, like a serialized television drama. Each episode will take a few hours to play out, maybe two to four. At the start of each episode, players will add details to their player characters by drafting some cards. For the first episode, you will create the character entirely. In later episodes, you’ll add a few details to your character, as we come to know them better.



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FIRST, DRAFT ASPECTS OF YOUR CHARACTER

We create characters using a deck of cards. Some cards have personality traits, which allow you to shuffle Stress between players. Most skills allow you to discover details about the Patient of the Week's illness, thereby getting you closer to the mystery. A few skills are useful for non-investigative purposes (*these are marked with an asterisk*). These skills may or may not be useful, but won't help much in finding answers about the patient's illness.

All the cards have one Fate question on them. Don't answer the Fate questions yet. Those are looming events that you can foreshadow; they won't come true until the Stress gets to be too much for you. When you attempt to investigate the mystery while under stress, you will have to answer one or more of these questions (*thereby making the events of the Fate question come true*). Eventually, you'll be faced with a final question that takes you out of the game.

Place all the personalities face up in front of the players. Starting from the GM's left, go clockwise around the table, choosing one of the traits for their character. Once each player selects a trait, you go back around the table in counter-clockwise order. Each player must select one 'positive' and one 'negative' trait.

Shuffle the skill deck and deal it out evenly to all players. (*If you have four players, you should have two cards left over. Discard those extras.*) Each player chooses one of those cards to be true about their character, then passes the rest of the hand to their left. Then you choose again, and pass again until you have a hand with only one card. At that point, you choose one card and discard the other one. (*If you only have three players, discard the last two cards instead of the last card.*)

Every player also gets a card that simply has one additional Fate question: "*How is your character finally removed from the game? Do you die somehow? Are you permanently barred from practicing medicine again? Are you arrested and taken to some alien prison?*"

Each player is also given one Stress token and a **You Are Mortal** card to start with.

DOING THINGS

Medical Bay Three is structured with a single mystery at the core of each session, then a series of vignettes and secondary story lines sprinkled along the sides. As a player, your goal is to solve the mystery of the Patient of the Week and to keep the Stress of the job from destroying you.

The game begins with the players introducing their characters. Each player gives a brief vignette showing what their doctor does on a typical day, either how they treat patients or how they interact with other hospital staff. This is to give each player a sense of the other characters, and also to potentially shuffle Stress around. If a player is stuck for ideas, they can opt for a very brief introduction that just tells everyone what their character's name and skills and such are. But if you want some more interaction, go right ahead. After each player has a turn introducing themselves, the GM introduces the Patient of the Week. That's going to be your central mystery for this session. If the PCs can solve the mystery of the illness, they can save the patient's life. If they can't discover the true cause of the illness, then their treatments are likely to kill the patient. But your entire professional career doesn't focus on just that one patient: you have a myriad of other patients to treat and other complex situations to deal with in hospital life. Those other plot threads take the form of secondary scenes, which players can ask for at any time. If you checked a Fate question, then the next scene break, you have to frame a scene that answers the Fate question.

NON-INVESTIGATION ACTIONS

Non-investigative actions are simple: Some cards name things you can do well without problem. Any other external actions that you want to perform will present you with a decision. Either choose to succeed and gain one Stress, or you choose to fail and check one Fate question. This includes violence: either you gain a Stress to win the fight, or you lose the fight and check a question, your choice.

INVESTIGATION

To learn details about your patient's illness requires an investigative action. To do this, your player character has to be in a place where she could reasonably learn that information and then name an investigative ability that could reasonably discover the information. That's all, you just have to say "I'm studying the patient's hind legs using my **Orthopedics** skill to see if anything is broken or displaced.". Or you might say "I'm going to start yelling in this bureaucrat's face to **Intimidate** some answers out of her." Just identify the skill you're using and a general sense of the sort of information you're looking for. The GM will truthfully tell you any significant information that you can find using that information.

Investigation takes its toll on the PCs, though. Each character starts with one point of Stress, just from the long hours and weird environment of working on the Sphere. Stress makes doing your job harder: When you want to use a skill to find a clue, you have to check one Fate question for every point of Stress that you have. At the end of each scene, each player has to frame a vignette that answers each checked Fate question that they have. Once a question is answered, you cross it out permanently (*ie, you can no longer Check or Answer that question*).

If you want to perform an investigative action but don't have the skill, you can gain one Stress and then perform the skill (*thereby causing you to check at least one Fate question*).

TREATMENT

Technically, you can prescribe any treatment to the patient that seems reasonable to you. Sometimes, that may even tell you something useful about the patient's condition. Prescribing treatment without knowing the cause of the problem, though, can be dangerous. You might stumble onto the cure the patient needs, but you are more likely to cause the patient to get worse, or even die.

To simplify treatment of the alien species, the hospital records department provides what is called a Quade diagram for each species. The Quade diagram summarizes everything known about the biology of the extraterrestrial sentient, and lists likely diseases, their symptoms and their causes. This is used as a diagnostic tool for the doctors to identify and treat the patient. Each species has a unique Quade diagram, due to differing biology. Once you identify the species of the patient, the hospital can provide you with a Quade diagram for that sentient, summarizing all known treatment information.

Please note that the Quade diagrams for many species are incomplete and still be worked on. If you observe any additional details that should be added to a species Quade diagram, contact the hospital records department.