

THE PLAGUE DOCTOR

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The Great Plague was one of the most devastating pandemics in human history, killing 25 million people and reshaping history in the process.

Only a small number of physicians were tasked with treating the diseased population...



ACT ONE

We OPEN ON...

A DANK ALLEY

In the poor part of town. Drunken LAUGHTER seeps out of overcrowded TAVERNS. Horse-drawn CARRIAGES thunder across cobblestone streets, slippery with animal dung.

A TITLE CARD reads:

LONDON, 1665

PARISH OF ST. CHARLES

Open drains carry waste along the winding streets. You get the gist: this place is a cesspool. There's no sanitation.

Which makes it the perfect environment for --

BLACK RATS

Rummaging through piles of rubbish, scavenging for food. One of them scampers away, scuttling across the muddy ground until it reaches...

A FRONT STOOP

Where DOROTHY (8) perches, gnawing on a piece of STALE BREAD. She notices the rodent, a gleam of EMPATHY in her eyes.

DOROTHY
(to the rat)
Here you go, little guy. You must
be starving.

She breaks off a piece of bread, offers it to the rat, unaware of the grave DANGER she's in.

The rat cautiously creeps towards her as we --

CUT TO:

A STRANGER'S POV

Through dusty GLASS OPENINGS inside a leather mask. Breathing slow, deep BREATHS as he wanders through cramped courtyards, taking in the --

SHANTYTOWN

Wooden shacks. Carts, horses and PEDESTRIANS crowded together. Among them are...

GEORGE PYE (36), the local BLACKSMITH, shaping a PADLOCK with his hammer. His son, JOSEPH (19) stocks the forge wagon.

WIDOW ANDREWS (31), a sturdy, strong-willed woman emptying her chamber pot into the street.

The walrus-mustached CONSTABLE (40s) and two thick-necked, ferocious-looking WATCHERS.

Upon seeing our STRANGER, everyone's face registers with gut-twisting FEAR. Like they're looking upon DEATH personified.

The STRANGER pays them no mind. Continues on his way...
PAUSES when his GAZE lands on --

DOROTHY

About to feed a breadcrumb to the rat, which is now dangerously close to her delicate hand.

DOROTHY
Take it. I don't bite.

DR. HATCHER (O.S.)
But he might.

Dorothy turns around, startled to see --

A SINISTER-LOOKING MAN

Backlit and ominous. He's wearing a LONG-NOSED MASK, shaped like a BIRD'S CURVED BEAK with glass openings for eyes, a long waxed leather COAT, wide-brimmed hat and gloves.

Meet Dr. JOHN HATCHER (35), a medieval PLAGUE DOCTOR.
Using his wooden CANE, he chases the rat away.

DR. HATCHER
They are nasty little beasts. You
shouldn't feed them.

Dorothy stares at him, terrified. Hatcher kneels, getting down to her eye level.

DR. HATCHER
Don't be frightened. It's just a
mask. It protects me from getting
sick when I see my patients.

DOROTHY
You're a doctor?

DR. HATCHER
I am.

Dorothy mulls this over. She has questions.

DOROTHY
If you're a doctor... why do you
have a beak like a bird?

DR. HATCHER
It's filled with flowers that keep
away foul odors. Like this one...

He removes a blooming LAVENDER SPRIG from his coat, when --

WILLIAM GAYLE (42), Dorothy's grizzled father, appears in the
doorframe. His eldest daughter, ANN (18), a rose that hasn't
reached its bloom yet, curiously peers over his shoulder.

WILLIAM
Dorothy, get inside.

She does as she's told. William regards Hatcher fearfully,
aware what his presence means:

The plague has arrived in his area.

DR. HATCHER
I'm looking for Guildhall.

WILLIAM
It's in the ward of Bassishaw. On
Gresham Street.

He indicates the direction.

WILLIAM
You best be on your way now. I
pray I won't see you here again.

DR. HATCHER
As do I, good Sir.

William watches him depart, rippled with ANXIETY.

EXT. GUILDHALL - LATER

Hatcher arrives at the intricate stone building -- the
ceremonial and administrative center of London. A few armed
GUARDS stand keeping watch.

They block Hatcher's path as he approaches the entrance.

GUARD

State your business.

Hatcher wordlessly produces a LETTER, baring the COAT OF ARMS of the CITY OF LONDON. The Guard signals to the others -- *let the man pass*. They step aside, allowing him to enter...

THE GREAT HALL

A vast ROTUNDA with a soaring, high-arched ceiling, containing a LIBRARY that stores all parish documents.

Hatcher has removed his mask -- we get our first close look at him: deep lines and weary eyes. The face of a man who was once happy. Even blessed. But that was a long time ago.

He takes a seat at a long table across from SIR THOMAS BLOODWORTH (48), the LORD MAYOR of LONDON and his 25 councillors, also known as ALDERMEN (all in their 50s).

We won't name them all, but some of them are WALBROOK, VINTRY, LANGBOURN and CORNHILL.

Due to their ornate scarlet robes we know they're among the upper echelons of London society -- a far cry from the poverty-ridden pedestrians we met earlier.

BLOODWORTH

We appreciate your swift arrival,
Dr. Hatcher. I hope your journey
has been comfortable.

But Hatcher doesn't have time for pleasantries, cuts right to the chase:

DR. HATCHER

How many plague cases have you had?

WALBROOK

Five. The first was recorded in
St. Giles-in-the-Fields, a parish
just outside London.

DR. HATCHER

And the cause was determined by a
physician?

VINTRY

It was not. Out of the four doctors we originally employed, only one remains. The others either fled the city or perished.

A risk all plague doctors must face when dealing with the infected.

BLOODWORTH

Which is why we've sent for you. I am aware how dangerous your profession is, of course. Which is why your pay will be given a month in advance.

Bloodworth slides a pouch across table, filled with SHILLINGS. Hatcher regards it, impassive. There are other reasons driving him to do this kind of work.

Reasons we have yet to understand.

DR. HATCHER

It's not the pay I'm after, Gentlemen. I have other interests.

BLOODWORTH

Well... what are they?

DR. HATCHER

I want to perform autopsies.

Shocked MURMURS among the assembled.

LANGBOURN

The church has forbidden the practice. It's an affront to God.

DR. HATCHER

Maybe so. But it could be the only chance we have to find a cure.

BLOODWORTH

Is that your only demand?

DR. HATCHER

Yes, Lord Mayor.

Bloodworth takes a moment to decide:

BLOODWORTH

Then it shall be granted.

The aldermen process this, their brows dip with disapproval.
Off Hatcher, smiling in TRIUMPH, we --

CUT TO:

THE DANK ALLEY

Back in the parish of St. Charles, where our story started.
The sun is about to set when William Gayle leaves his house.

He addresses Ann, who waits by the door.

WILLIAM

Look after your sister. I'll be
back by sunrise.

ANN

Yes, father.

She waits until he's out of sight. Then, she closes the door
and hurries down the street.

Trudging through the maze-like alleys, she arrives at --

THE BLACKSMITH'S SHOP

The door is open, the warm light of a FURNACE spilling out
from inside. Careful not to be seen, Ann pokes her head in.

Finds JOSEPH, placing chopped wood into the fire.

ANN

(a whisper)

Joseph.

Joseph turns, surprised to see her.

JOSEPH

Ann? What are you doing here?

He searches her eyes, sensing trouble.

JOSEPH

Is something wrong?

ANN

I saw a beak doctor passing through
today.

JOSEPH

So did I.

ANN

Father doesn't want me to leave the house. Too dangerous, he says.

JOSEPH

You should listen to him.

ANN

But I won't be able to see you anymore.

JOSEPH

(with a smile)

We have our whole lives ahead of us. Soon I'll have enough money for us to buy a farm in the countryside. And we'll go away from here. Together.

Ann smiles at the thought.

ANN

Do you promise?

JOSEPH

I do. Not even God himself can stop us.

Off the young couple, dreaming of a brighter future...

CUT TO:

THE PARISH OF ST. GILES-IN-THE-FIELD

Where the first plague deaths were recorded. Hatcher stands outside a house, staring at it for an ominous beat before he enters...

INSIDE THE HOUSE

The place is in complete disarray. Tables and chairs have been upturned. Rotting fruits and vegetables litter the floor. Hatcher scans the room, when --

He's startled by a SHUFFLING SOUND. Spins around to see --

A BLOODHOUND

Staring at him. It BARKS as if trying to tell him something. Hatcher follows the dog into...

THE BEDROOM

Where Hatcher finds a DEAD MAN on a straw-filled mattress.
The dog WHIMPERS, lamenting his master's fate.

Using his cane, Hatcher pulls off the blanket, exposing the
victim's hands: the fingertips are BLACK with NECROSIS.
Next, he inspects his armpits, finding apple-sized TUMORS
(called BUBOES) bulging beneath the skin.

Both are tell-tale symptoms of the plague. Hatcher takes out
his LEATHER JOURNAL, starts scribbling into it.

DR. HATCHER (V.O.)
January 7th, 1665. The presence of
black fingertips and tumors on the
patient's body confirms my deepest
fear... the great dying has reached
the city of London.

STAY ON Hatcher, writing into his notebook next to the plague
victim's body, until... ever so slowly...

The image begins to FREEZE and TURNS into a CHARCOAL SKETCH.
The kind you'd find in a HISTORY BOOK.

Over this, we hear a WOMAN'S VOICE:

TAHMINA (V.O.)
Dr. John Hatcher: the first
medieval plague doctor to theorize
the true cause of the outbreak.
Even though he couldn't cure most
of his patients, his journals
proved to be an irreplaceable tool
for modern scientists...

WIDE TO REVEAL the sketch is being projected against a wall.
And WIDER still, until we realize we're inside --

A MODERN LECTURE HALL

The blinds are shut. The sleek auditorium is jam-packed with
curious, slightly nerdy-looking STUDENTS. Listening intently
to an unseen FEMALE SPEAKER. A CHYRON reads:

WASHINGTON D.C., 2019

MILKEN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Speaker ENTERS FRAME, backlit by the flickering glare of
the projector.

This is TAHMINA SHAH (39, of Indian descent) -- associate Professor of Epidemiology and researcher at the Institute of Infectious Diseases. A true powerhouse.

TAHMINA

They served to record a count of the dying for demographic purposes and made it possible for us to locate the plague pits centuries later to track the spread of the bacterium that causes the plague, *Yersinia Pestis*, across the Eastern hemisphere, tracing it all the way back to its ancestral home...

CLICK! The slide projector changes over to --

A MAP OF CENTRAL ASIA

Its regions are highlighted in different colors. Arrows indicate the expansion of the pathogen.

TAHMINA

The highlands of China.

CLICK! A microscopic view of the ORIENTAL RAT FLEA is shown.

TAHMINA

Using the rat flea as a primary vector, the bacterium hitched a ride along the Silk Road and spread globally. But what was its evolutionary precursor?

The students trade clueless looks.

TAHMINA

Thanks to DNA samples my team and I recovered from several mass graves, we were able to isolate the genome. This is the first time a human pathogen more than a century old has been fully sequenced...

CLICK! We see a DIAGRAM of the bacterium's circular GENOME. The students look at it, riveted, none of them noticing --

The SUITED MAN entering from the back.

MARK EMERY (41) looks every inch the career bureaucrat that he is: well-groomed and handsome, inspiring confidence at a glance. His steel blue eyes remain FIXATED on --

TAHMINA

Our findings show that *Yersinia Pestis* was harmless in its original form: *Yersinia Pseudotuberculosis*, whose greatest threat is that it causes mild diarrhea.

CHUCKLES among the students.

TAHMINA

So how could a bacterium barely capable of causing a minor gastrointestinal annoyance turn into one of the deadliest microbes in the world?

A HAND shoots up.

STUDENT #1

Mutation?

TAHMINA

Correct. A chance mutation altered one amino acid in the bacterium and increased its virulence. The new *Yersinia* can kill you in 36 hours and only a few small changes were required to make this switch: an altered protein here, a mutated gene there -- can transform a relatively innocuous stomach bug into a pandemic, capable of killing off an entire continent.

A chilling reminder that the next major pandemic may be only a few mutations away. An anxious STUDENT has a question:

STUDENT #2

Is there any danger of the plague spreading again? Nowadays, I mean?

TAHMINA

It's still active in parts of Africa and South East Asia today. A few cases have even been reported in California but thanks to modern medicine, it's easily contained.

STUDENT #2

What if the bacterium mutates again?

Solid question.

TAHMINA

It would take hundreds of years for
that to happen.

(with a smile)

For now you're safe.

Just then, the bell RINGS. The students gather their
belongings, start filing out.

TAHMINA

Make sure you read chapter six for
next week: cellular pathogenesis.

Mark smooths his wrinkled suit. Takes a deep breath,
mentally readying himself.

Then he marches up to Tahmina, who is shutting off the
projector, her back to him.

MARK

Nice lecture.

She turns, her smile vanishing as soon as she sees him.

There's RECOGNITION in her eyes along with a hint of
IRRITATION, which she masks quickly.

TAHMINA

Thanks.

She goes back to sorting slides into a box, IGNORING him.

An awkward beat passes.

Mark throws a glance at the golden WEDDING BAND on her
finger. Smiles through his annoyance:

MARK

Heard you got married.
Congratulations.

He gets no response.

MARK

Look, I didn't come here to catch
up. The CDC sent me.

TAHMINA

They have big-shots like you. What
do they need me for?

MARK

Your medical expertise.

She shoots him a quizzical look.

TAHMINA

I specialize in an ancient disease.

MARK

And this past week, eight cases of
plague have arrived in hospitals.
Here, in Washington.

Off Tahmina, stunned by this news...

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**EXT. MILKEN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC HEALTH - DAY**

Mark emerges from the building, leading Tahmina towards a BLACK SEDAN, parked out front.

TAHMINA

What kind of plague are we talking about? There are three: bubonic, pneumonic and septicemic. All have varying degrees of infectiousness.

MARK

We don't know yet.

They slide into the vehicle. Mark cranks the steering wheel, peels away from the curb.

INT. BLACK SEDAN (DRIVING) - DAY

Tahmina sits in the passenger's side seat, staring out the window. Avoiding eye contact with Mark.

MARK

The doctors are out of their depth. It's not an illness they've been trained to treat. By the time they diagnosed the cause and administered antibiotics, two of the patients had died. They need an expert. And you're the person who decoded the bacteria's genome.

TAHMINA

How old were the patients who died? Over fifty?

He shoots her a surprised look:

MARK

How did you know?

TAHMINA

The plague doesn't kill indiscriminately, it never did. It targeted the old and those already in poor health. Those who survived passed on stronger genes to their children, resulting in a hardier post-plague population.

(MORE)

TAHMINA (CONT'D)

In a way, it was a force of natural selection.

Mark scowls, irritated by her comment.

MARK

What are you saying? We shouldn't give a shit about people dying because they're old and sick anyway?

TAHMINA

I'm just stating a scientific fact.

MARK

How about some fucking empathy? Or is that not scientific enough for you?

TAHMINA

Actually, empathy is caused by mirror neurons in the brain.

MARK

Well, yours must have a serious mirror neuron deficit.

(with sarcasm)

That's why dating you was so much fun.

This is when we realize this is more than an ethical argument... some personal pain is involved. Tahmina is thrown by Mark's comment but chooses not to antagonize him.

EXT. SIBLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - DAY

An unassuming red brick building, surrounded by greenery. The SEDAN pulls up out front.

INT. SIBLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - HALLWAY - SOON AFTER

Tahmina and Mark march down the brightly lit corridor, approaching DR. RICHARD MCCARTHY, the CHIEF PHYSICIAN.

MARK

Tahmina, this is Dr. McCarthy, head of medical staff.

DR. MCCARTHY

Glad to have you here, Professor Shah.

He sticks out a hand. Tahmina shakes it.

TAHMINA
Are the patients in isolation?

DR. MCCARTHY
They are.

She and Mark fall into step with McCarthy, who hustles them down the hallway as he gives her a rundown:

DR. MCCARTHY
They all arrived earlier this week with similar symptoms: high fever, chills, headache, fatigue. Initially, we thought it's the flu. Then these started popping up.

He shows her a close-up PHOTOGRAPH of the patients' BUBOES, painful lesions in the armpits and necks.

DR. MCCARTHY
Didn't take long until their fingers and toes turned black and they started coughing up blood.

They reach a SECURITY KEY PAD by the door at the end of the hallway. McCarthy slides a KEY CARD through a slot.

BUZZ. The door opens.

TAHMINA
What kind of antibiotic did you administer?

DR. MCCARTHY
Doxycycline. Why?

They pass through into --

THE QUARANTINE UNIT

Where the NURSING STAFF eagerly awaits them.

TAHMINA
I can't be sure without running some tests but if the patients are coughing up blood it's probably pneumatic plague -- the most serious form. And the only one that can be transmitted from person to person.

DR. MCCARTHY
That's why we wear these.

He presents Tahmina and Mark with two yellow full-body PROTECTIVE SUITS, GLOVES and GOGGLES:

The modern day equivalent of the plague doctor outfit.

INT. QUARANTINE ROOM - LATER

A heart monitor SPIKES with a steady PULSE.

JOY WILLIAMS (23), a naturally warm soul, lies in a HOSPITAL BED that's ENCASED in PLASTIC SHEETS, her arm plugged into a bottle of plasma.

Her eyes flutter open to see --

Tahmina, Mark and Dr. McCarthy enter in their PROTECTIVE GEAR, faces visible behind PLEXIGLASS VISORS.

DR. MCCARTHY
How are you feeling?

JOY
Like crap. Probably look it, too.

DR. MCCARTHY
What are you talking about? You're practically glowing.

Joy cracks a weak smile.

McCarthy whips open a drawer, pulls out a syringe. Hands it to Tahmina, who twists on a needle.

TAHMINA
I'm going to take some blood and tissue samples.

JOY
Go ahead.

Mark looks on as Tahmina carefully inserts the needle into Joy's arm, pulling the plunger upwards.

The syringe slowly fills with blood.

MARK
Where do you live?

JOY
Fredericksburg.

TAHMINA
Do you work with animals?

JOY
Farm animals, mostly. I'm a
veterinarian.

Suddenly, Joy breaks into a VIOLENT COUGH.

A SPRAY of blood hits Tahmina's visor. Mark instinctively backs away but Tahmina remains calm, expertly pulls the needle out of her arm.

Next, she uses a tweezer to remove a LAYER OF SKIN from BLACKENED FINGERTIPS. Places it into a long GLASS TUBE.

Joy catches her breath, overcome with emotion:

JOY
I can't die now. There's so much I
want to do still. I ain't never
even been to Florence. And I've
always been wanting to go. Be
real with me... am I gonna die?

Tahmina meets her eyes, considering her answer:

TAHMINA
Well... even with treatment there
is a ten percent chance of death.

Joy's face drops. Mark shoots Tahmina a GLARE -- "*What the hell is wrong with you?*" He turns to Joy:

MARK
You'll be fine. You're in great
hands. And plague is easily
controlled with antibiotics these
days.

This seems to comfort Joy.

MARK
Now back in the 17th century it
would have been a death sentence.

Off this statement, we --

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. LONDON (1665) - STREET - DAY

A DEAD CART piled with BODIES is pulled down the alley by an emaciated horse. A CUSTODIAN stops outside every door he passes, calling out loud:

CUSTODIAN
Bring out your dead!

A door is opened and a solemn William Gayle appears, carrying out a child's DEAD BODY.

It's DOROTHY, the little girl we met in the beginning.

Her teary-eyed sister ANN watches from the door, devastated by the loss. William gently places her on top of the pile of dead bodies, faces the Custodian.

WILLIAM
Where are you taking her?

The Custodian doesn't respond. Continues on his way.

WILLIAM
Answer me! Where are you taking my
child?

He sinks to his knees. Ann wraps her arms around him. Off William's GRIEF-STRICKEN CRIES, we --

CUT TO:

THE LORD MAYOR'S HOME

A MAID serves up sliced LEG OF LAMB to Bloodworth, his immaculately groomed wife JOAN (30) and their son ALFRED (10), who surreptitiously feeds a piece to their SPANIEL.

There's a KNOCK at the door. A SERVANT hastily enters.

SERVANT
Langbourn and Vintry wish to speak
to you. As a matter of urgency.

Bloodworth trades a glance with Joan: *this can't be good.*

IN THE CIGAR ROOM

A CANDLE flickers, throwing ominous shadows against the walls. Vintry and Langbourn share the unfortunate news, keeping their voices low:

VINTRY

Hundreds are dying in their homes every day, faster than they can be buried. Spreading the illness to their families.

LANGBOURN

The pesthouse is overrun. At this rate, half of London will be dead by Christmas.

Bloodworth's torn, not sure how to handle this. He makes a pressured decision:

BLOODWORTH

Appoint a group of watchers and post them in key areas. They are to enforce new plague orders.

VINTRY

What orders?

BLOODWORTH

Any infected person is to be shut inside their house. And their families with them.

Vintry and Langbourn are stunned.

VINTRY

Even if they aren't sick?

BLOODWORTH

We can't know that. It's for the greater good.

CUT TO:

A PADLOCK

Being crafted by the blacksmith, George, while his son Joseph delivers a handful of metal chains to --

THE CONSTABLE

Who orders his Watchers to place them on a carriage. Joseph watches them go, his eyebrow furrowed. Turns to his father:

JOSEPH

What do they need all these chains and padlocks for?

GEORGE
Have you not heard?

JOSEPH
Heard what?

George is hesitant to tell his son what's happening...

DOWN THE ALLEY

The CUSTODIAN we saw collecting the dead earlier, indicates several homes to the Watchers, who swiftly fit padlocks on the doors. Ignoring the pleading VOICES coming from inside.

Once the LOCKS are fastened, a large RED CROSS is painted on the front door, marking it as a PLAGUE-INFECTED HOUSE.

CONSTABLE
Lord have mercy on us...

WATCHER
(to Custodian)
Which one's next?

The Custodian points towards --

THE GAYLE HOME

Inside, Ann is preparing vegetable broth for her ailing father, William, who has taken to bed, looking worse for wear. She hears the CLINKING of METAL.

Walks to the front door to see --

THE WATCHERS

Placing a padlock and chain to it. She wiggles the knob, desperately trying to force it open.

ANN
Please! Don't do this!

But her begging falls on deaf ears...

DOWN THE STREET

Joseph sprints towards the Gayle home, only to find it in the process of being locked up.

JOSEPH
Stop this madness!

He charges at the Watchers, pushing them away from the door, forgetting he is outmanned. The Constable and his men quickly subdued him, forcing him into an arm-lock.

JOSEPH
(accusingly)
How can you do this? You've lived
opposite them for years!

The Constable masks his guilt, convinced his actions are helping save lives.

CONSTABLE
Stay away from this house, boy. Or
I'll stick you in there with them.

Joseph watches, helpless, as a RED CROSS is painted on Ann's front door. It's like they're signing her death warrant.

JOSEPH
No! Let them out --

CUT TO:

A NEARBY HOUSE

From an UPPER STORY WINDOW Hatcher looks on as Joseph curses at the Watchmen.

JOSEPH (O.C.)
-- you bastards!!

He turns to his bed-ridden patient, a HOUSEWIFE, who is showing early signs of plague infection.

Her worried HUSBAND and SON stand by the door.

DR. HATCHER
(to Housewife)
You have to come to the pesthouse
with me.

HOUSEWIFE
I will not!

DR. HATCHER
(to Housewife)
If you stay, you will all be locked
up together.

She glances at her CHILDREN, torn. Starts to WAIL:

HOUSEWIFE

I don't want to die! Oh, dear Lord
don't let me die!

SON

(to Hatcher)

Can't you make her better?

Hatcher swallows hard, the question cutting like a knife into his heart. He lowers his eyes, ashamed of his helplessness.

HATCHER

I'll do what I can.

SON

The other doctor promised to cure
her.

DR. HATCHER

(to Husband)

What other doctor?

HUSBAND

Finlay's the name. I gave him all
our savings... for this.

He hands him a JAR, filled with a clear substance. Hatcher brings it to his nose:

DR. HATCHER

(sniffs)

It's opium dissolved in brandy. It
eases the pain but doesn't ward off
the illness. He lied to you.

HOUSEWIFE

(to Husband)

Please! Don't let him take me!

Off the Husband, heartbroken. About to make the hardest
decision of his life...

CUT TO:

THE HOUSEWIFE

THRASHING and SCREAMING on a stained cot in the PESTHOUSE as
Hatcher and his MEDICAL ASSISTANT struggle to restrain her.

HATCHER
 (to Assistant)
 Hold her still!

ASSISTANT
 I am trying. Do we really need to
 lance them?

HATCHER
 Only if the buboes are drained,
 recovery is possible.

ASSISTANT
 How do you know that?

Hatcher doesn't respond.

HATCHER
 (to Housewife)
 Forgive me...

Using a LANCET, Hatcher cuts into the tumor. Pus and blood
 oozes from the wound. The Housewife SHRIEKS with pain, her
 HOWL merging with that of a HUNDRED OTHER PATIENTS.

ANGLE WIDENS to reveal we're inside --

A PESTHOUSE

Once a local church, now serving as a makeshift hospital. A
 last-ditch effort to isolate the sick.

Hundreds of patients are crammed onto cots, often two or
 three together. Harried NURSES scuttle to and fro,
 desperately trying to tend to the DYING.

It's a losing battle.

Hatcher notices he's not the only doctor in the place. There
 is another, his beaked mask made of BROWN LEATHER.

Must be that DR. FINLAY he heard about earlier.

Finlay's bent over a PATIENT, using a SCALPEL to puncture the
 VEIN in his arm, catching the blood in a glass cup:

An ancient medical practice known as "blood-letting",
 believed to draw the disease out of the body.

A beat as Hatcher and Finlay CLOCK each other: the beginning
 of a beautiful MEDICAL RIVALRY.

Hatcher turns his focus back on his patient:

HATCHER
(to Assistant)
She has fainted.

ASSISTANT
Probably for the best.

HATCHER
We must cauterize the wound. Fetch
me the rod.

He motions to an open fireplace. The Assistant removes a glowing METAL ROD from the flame.

Hatcher places the red-hot tip on the wound. Wisps of smoke rise as the FLESH SIZZLES. The Assistant recoils, fighting the urge to VOMIT.

HATCHER
(to Assistant)
For God's sake, if you can't
stomach it, leave!

He moves off, HEAVING UP BILE.

A steely-eyed NURSE sees this. Pulls up her sleeves and sidles up beside Hatcher, assisting him in his stead.

We will get to know her as WIDOW ANDREWS (30).

HATCHER
I need vinegar. And bandages.

WIDOW ANDREWS
Use this.

She produces a GLASS JAR, filled with herbal OINTMENT.

HATCHER
What is it?

WIDOW ANDREWS
Yarrow and rose oil. Made it
myself. It aids in healing.

She gently applies it to the wound.

HATCHER
Who taught you?

WIDOW ANDREWS
I did. Observation is the best
teacher.

Hatcher considers her, quietly impressed. They share a moment: two people doing unpleasant duty as best they can.

The Assistant returns, eager to reclaim his spot.

HATCHER
I'm already being helped.

ASSISTANT
(offended)
You prefer that ugly, unwholesome
hag's services over mine? She has
no qualifications at all.

HATCHER
The only qualification she needs is
the balls to do this job.
(pointed)
Something you don't seem to have.

Widow Andrews gives Hatcher a small grateful smile.

The Assistant walks off in a huff, passing by a few BEDS,
where he finds one of the PATIENTS slumped over. DEAD.

Careful not to be seen, he rummages through the dead man's
jacket, finds a few SHILLINGS and pockets them.

Then, he waves over the NURSES, who rush across.

ASSISTANT
He's gone. Free up this bed.

The NURSES start dragging the body --

OUTSIDE THE PESTHOUSE

Where a GRAVEMAKER awaits them with his DEAD CART. He helps
them dump the body on top of a large pile of CORPSES.

GRAVEMAKER
There are more people dying than my
men and I can dig graves for. We
can't continue in this manner.

NURSE
(grimly)
Do what you must.

CUT TO:

A NEARBY FIELD

Grassy embankments below the imposing city walls.

The Gravemaker tips the cart, tossing two dozen dead bodies into a deep PIT -- a MASS GRAVE. With the death toll so high, no one is buried in individual graves anymore.

He shovels earth to cover the corpses, when --

A THIRD PLAGUE DOCTOR appears.

While he dons the same protective costume and black leather hat as the other doctors, his WHITE MASK -- resembling a BIRD'S SKULL -- sets him apart from the rest.

No one knows his real name but we'll call him VECTOR.

VECTOR
(points)
This one isn't dead yet.

He indicates a MAN on top of the pile, too weak to move, GASPING for air.

GRAVEMAKER
Oh, he will be soon.

The Gravemaker keeps shoveling. Vector moves off. Pauses next to another DEAD CART, the next to be unloaded.

He selects a PLAGUE VICTIM, pulls out a BLADE and CUTS into the INFECTED TISSUE. Using a SILVER PINCETTE he collects the severed piece, places it into a GLASS VIAL.

Before we can comprehend what any of this means, we --

MATCH CUT TO:

A SIMILAR GLASS VIAL

Being held by Tahmina as she uses a pipette to drop Joy's blood sample on a glass slide. Gazes intensely at the RED BLOOD CELLS under a MICROSCOPE.

Mark and Tahmina's lab assistant, DYLAN (28) stand nearby.

TAHMINA
The infection's definitely caused
by the plague.

MARK

Then why isn't it responding to treatment?

TAHMINA

I can't determine that without genetic analysis.

DYLAN

I can get it to the lab for you?

TAHMINA

Please do. Sorry I keep using you as a delivery boy.

DYLAN

(sly smile)

You can use me any way you want.

TAHMINA

Thanks.

Mark clocks their flirty exchange. Shoots Tahmina a bemused look as soon as Dylan's out of earshot.

She blinks, confused:

TAHMINA

What?

MARK

He was clearly flirting with you.

TAHMINA

He's too young for me.

He doesn't quite believe her but still changes the subject:

MARK

Why do you think the plague has returned? After all this time?

TAHMINA

That's how it operates. It retreats, sometimes for hundreds of years, only to emerge and cause huge pandemics, seemingly out of nowhere. We call it boom-and-bust cycle.

MARK

What causes them?

TAHMINA

We don't know. Which is why there were always supernatural theories about the plague.

MARK

What, like witchcraft?

She nods, affirmative.

MARK

Who knows? Not everything can be explained with science.

(beat)

Like the crazy chemistry we had.

A sudden, awkward silence yawns between them. Then:

MARK

Know what I don't get? You were the one who said you don't want marriage and kids. That the world is already overpopulated enough and that humans aren't biologically programmed to be with one person.

TAHMINA

We're not.

MARK

(sarcastic)

Well, that explains why you got knocked up and hitched six months after our breakup.

A sore subject for both of them.

TAHMINA

A child rewires your brain, Mark. I didn't plan for things to happen the way they did.

Mark takes this in, not the least bit comforted. Tahmina brushes past him, heads for the door...

TAHMINA

I still think there are serious downsides to commitment.

MARK

For example?

She turns, her face close to his.

TAHMINA
The sex isn't as hot.

The tension between them is ELECTRIC. For a moment we wonder if they will kiss, when --

Tahmina breaks away. Mark watches her depart.

CAMERA CONTINUES to WITHDRAW, allowing us to see the vast LABORATORY and the MODERN EQUIPMENT in its entirety as we --

CUT TO:

A DANK CELLAR (LONDON, 1665)

A frightening medieval lab, the polar opposite of the one we just saw. PRESERVATION JARS containing DEAD SPECIMENS line the shelves, along with a GOAT SKULL.

A large PENTAGRAM decorates the wall.

It's unclear if this room is dedicated to MEDIEVAL SCIENCE or BLACK MAGIC. Possibly both.

Lit by candlelight, VECTOR feeds the infected tissue he collected at the mass grave to --

A dozen CAGED RATS.

Watches as they greedily devour the pustulant flesh.

VECTOR
(to rats)
Eat up, my dears...

ANGLE WIDENS TO REVEAL HUNDREDS of CAGES, containing THOUSANDS upon THOUSANDS of RATS.

Clearly, something very sinister is going on here...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE**IN ANOTHER DANK CELLAR**

Hatcher is hunched over the CORPSE of a MAN, spread out on a blood-soaked AUTOPSY TABLE. He's assisted by Widow Andrews, who (like him) wears a protective mask and gloves.

Using a RIB SAW he opens the chest cavity, examining abdominal organs and appendages. Cuts into the left LUNG.

A thick grey SLIME oozes from within.

DR. HATCHER

As I thought. The infection had spread to his lungs. Was he coughing up blood before he died?

WIDOW ANDREWS

Yes. And he didn't develop any tumors like the other patients. What do you think that means?

DR. HATCHER

It means there are two forms of plague. The second is newer. More deadly. Only the first is curable.

WIDOW ANDREWS

I doubt it. I have yet to meet a man to survive it.

DR. HATCHER

You just have.

She stares, confused by his statement. After a beat, Hatcher unlatches his mask, exposing the skin on his neck.

There it is: a large circular SCAR -- the result of a lanced BUBOE. Proof that he is a plague survivor.

WIDOW ANDREWS

(in awe)

You were spared. By God's good grace.

DR. HATCHER

His good grace did not extend to my family. Nor any of the thousand people who die daily. I lost a wife, two daughters and a son.

Sympathy plays across Widow Andrews' face.

WIDOW ANDREWS
I'm very sorry.

DR. HATCHER
I don't want your pity. I only
want one thing: to find a cure.
(pause)
I will not rest until I do.

An otherworldly determination glows in Hatcher's eyes. Or
total lunacy. We don't know which yet.

WIDOW ANDREWS
How long have you been doing this?

DR. HATCHER
Years. I follow the disease
wherever it goes.

He indicates a wall, shrouded in shadow. Widow Andrews walks
across with a CANDLE, illuminating --

A MAP OF LONDON

And its surrounding parishes. Hundreds of dots made with RED
INK indicate outbreaks and track the spread of the plague.

Widow Andrews studies the map, mesmerized. Sees a section
that STRIKES her...

WIDOW ANDREWS
It all began here. In the port of
London.

DR. HATCHER
By the time they burned the
affected ships, it was too late.

WIDOW ANDREWS
Then you don't believe foul air is
the cause of the plague?

DR. HATCHER
I do not. Here is why...

Hatcher offers her a MAGNIFYING GLASS, pointing at a RASH on
the dead man's ANKLE. Widow Andrews takes a closer look...

Spotting a CLUSTER of pus-filled VESICLES on his skin.

WIDOW ANDREWS

What are those?

DR. HATCHER

Flea bites. They're still swollen, which means he was bitten less than a week ago. He died soon after the disease took hold.

WIDOW ANDREWS

So you believe... ?

DR. HATCHER

Fleas carry the disease. If the miasma theory was accurate, we all would be dead by now considering how bad the air in London is.

A solid argument.

WIDOW ANDREWS

But how could so small an insect have such a devastating effect?

For once, Hatcher has no reply. Off his silence, we --

CUT TO:

THE LORD MAYOR'S HOME

A fire crackles in a hearth. Bloodworth's SPANIEL lies at his feet, scratching his ears furiously. Joan is getting into bed, when --

Bloodworth breaks into a COUGH. He moves to the basin to wash his face, catches his waxy complexion in the mirror.

JOAN

Are you alright, dear?

Suddenly panicked, he peels off his blouse, searching every inch of his body until he finds...

A TUMOR in his armpit. An unmistakable sign he's been infected. Joan shrieks at the sight of it.

BLOODWORTH

Do not speak of it. To anyone. Or we will all be locked up in this house together. Do you understand?

Joan nods, deeply worried...

INT. GUILDHALL - CORRIDOR - NEXT MORNING

The CHURCH BELL tolls hauntingly. Bloodworth feebly trudges past the GUARDS, trying hard to suppress his coughing.

He briefly stumbles. Regains his balance. Advances toward --

THE GREAT HALL

Where half of the council has assembled. The Constable and local PLAGUE DOCTORS (Hatcher, Finlay and Vector) are with them, but only Vector has kept his mask on.

Bloodworth takes his seat.

BLOODWORTH
Where are the others?

LANGBOURN
They fled the city. As did
everyone else with the means to do
so.

BLOODWORTH
Cowards. We will not forsake this
city. Social order must be
maintained. An effective treatment
method found.

He turns to the PLAGUE DOCTORS:

BLOODWORTH
Have you made any progress?

DR. FINLAY
A preventative has finally emerged,
Lord Mayor.
(beat)
Fumigation.

Finlay lights a hanging INCENSE BURNER. Smoke rises from it, releasing an astonishing stench.

Langbourn clutches his nose.

DR. FINLAY
Burning great quantities of
saltpeter and brimstone helps ward
off the illness. I recommend
burning it at every street corner.

Bloodworth gives a pleased nod.

BLOODWORTH
See to it that it is done.

Finlay nods, bolstered.

DR. HATCHER
Fumigation will not prevent the
spread of the disease, Lord Mayor.
For it is not caused by foul air
but the bite of the flea, carried
by vermin from town to town.

UPROAR among the Aldermen, who possess neither the knowledge
nor the wisdom to recognize this truth.

Finlay releases a high-pitched LAUGH. Hatcher pins him with
a GLARE. *Do not test me.*

DR. FINLAY
With all due respect, Dr... ?

DR. HATCHER
Hatcher.

DR. FINLAY
No insect that small could cause an
outbreak of such proportions.

DR. HATCHER
All of the patients I've treated
had bite marks on their skin. It
also explains why the illness slows
down during the winter months. The
cold weather kills the fleas.

Vector eyes Hatcher, oddly intrigued.

DR. FINLAY
This is absurd!

DR. HATCHER
As absurd as selling opium to the
infected and calling it a cure?

Finlay spins in Hatcher's direction, aghast.

DR. HATCHER
(to council)
This man is a charlatan, gentlemen.
He's had no medical training. And
since he can't cure the ill, he
benefits from their misery instead!

Exposed, Finlay erupts with fury:

DR. FINLAY

That is an outrageous lie! He is simply envious that I am saving more patients than he is!

(to Hatcher)

I've heard about you, Dr. Hatcher. Perhaps your family would still be alive if they had come to see me.

Finlay just kicked the hornets' nest --

Hatcher DECKS him across the face, sends him staggering backwards. Not to be outdone, Finlay charges at him. They trade VICIOUS PUNCHES with each other, until --

Bloodworth holds up his hand for the GUARDS to stop the brawl. They converge on the two men, separating them.

BLOODWORTH

You will continue to search for a cure as you've been paid to do. And until such time comes --

(to Constable)

You will continue shutting the infected into their homes.

The Constable gives a firm nod.

DR. HATCHER

You're dooming the healthy by imprisoning them with the sick!

BLOODWORTH

The council has spoken, Dr. Hatcher!

Hatcher sweeps the room with furious eyes. Then, he storms out of the hall. Finlay watches him go, resentfully clutching the rising welt on his chin.

BLOODWORTH

(to Constable)

In the morrow, I want all city gates to be closed. No one can enter or leave London henceforth.

CONSTABLE

Yes, Lord Mayor.

BLOODWORTH

This meeting is adjourned.

The Aldermen rise from their seats, start to shuffle out.

BLOODWORTH
Dr. Finlay.
(off his surprise)
A private word please?

Finlay follows Bloodworth to --

AN ISOLATED CORNER

Bloodworth checks over his shoulder, making sure the Guards won't be able to overhear their conversation.

Finlay regards him with rising suspicion.

DR. FINLAY
How can I be of service?

BLOODWORTH
I haven't spoken of this to anyone,
but... my wife. She has the
illness. I trust that you can save
her as you have so many others.

Sensing an opportunity, Finlay plays along:

DR. FINLAY
I can. As is my duty. This will
resolve her illness within a day.

He removes a bottle of OPIUM from his robes, the same false cure he sold to the woman's husband earlier.

Expectantly holds out his hand.

DR. FINLAY
In return for a small charge, of
course.

Bloodworth hastily hands him ten shillings.

EXT. GUILDHALL - LATER

Finlay descends the front steps, counting the coins. He spots a carriage in the distance, raises his arm to SIGNAL the Driver.

The carriage stops, waiting for him to climb aboard. Finlay flicks a SHILLING to the Driver.

DRIVER
Where to?

DR. FINLAY
 Oxford.
 (low, to himself)
 There is nothing but death here.

The Driver SLAPS the reins and the carriage hurtles off,
 slowly receding into the distance. PULL BACK to REVEAL --

VECTOR

Watching Finlay's exit from the shadows.

Off this ominous image, we --

CUT TO:

INT. TAHMINA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Tasteful but spare with expensive furniture. A few
 CHILDREN'S TOYS lie scattered on the ground. SUNLIGHT
 streams in through the curtains, falling across --

TAHMINA'S FACE

She's curled up on the sofa, getting some shut-eye.

Two pairs of TINY FEET pound across the wooden floorboards,
 waking her. She opens her eyes, squinting up at --

NATHAN

Her six-year-old, bright-eyed son who's currently balancing a
 BREAKFAST TRAY with buttered TOAST and CEREAL.

TAHMINA
 Is that for me?

He nods, proud of himself.

TAHMINA
 That's so thoughtful of you.

She sits up, nuzzles into his chest. A warm moment. Then,
 her husband DAVID (46) walks in: an easy-going hipster-type
 with wire rim GLASSES.

DAVID
 Morning.

TAHMINA

Hey.

NATHAN

(to Tahmina)

Did you have to work late again?

TAHMINA

Sorry, sweetie. You see, the disease mommy's been studying... it's very old. So old that no one thought it would ever come back. But for some reason it has. And there are some very sick people who need my help.

NATHAN

Are those people going to die?

TAHMINA

They could. If we don't find a way to treat them.

NATHAN

Could you get sick and die?

TAHMINA

Technically, yes.

Nathan stares at her horrified. David chimes in:

DAVID

But the chance is really, really low. Why don't you go grab your backpack, buddy? Don't want to be late for school.

NATHAN

Can I have Lunchables today?

DAVID

Okay, but only today.

Nathan obediently scrambles out of the room. We get a feeling that David is the more active parent.

As soon as they're alone, David turns to Tahmina, who's chomping on a piece of toast.

DAVID

I don't like you talking to him like that.

TAHMINA
(mouth full)
You want me to lie to him?

DAVID
Every now and then, yes. He's a child. We have a responsibility to protect his innocence.

TAHMINA
I'm not raising a spoiled snowflake who can't handle the hardships of reality.

DAVID
Thing is: you're not raising him.

Tahmina's expression sours -- *what's that supposed to mean?*

DAVID
I mean, you're barely home.

She swallows. Considers her next words carefully:

TAHMINA
You knew it was going to be like this. I was never going to stop working. You wanted me to keep him and I did. This was our compromise.

DAVID
I thought things would change once he was born. How stupid of me.

TAHMINA
Yes. It was.

David shakes his head, giving up. The frustration between them is palpable. The dark side of domestic bliss.

Tahmina checks her wrist watch, throws on her jacket.

TAHMINA
I gotta go. They need me at the hospital.

DAVID
Know who else needs you?

Tahmina understands the implication. She stands there a moment. Feeling the weight of the world and the lives at stake, she makes her decision...

And leaves.

EXT. SIBLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE - LATER

Emergency lights FLASH. Tahmina climbs out of a CAB only to find the place swarming with AMBULANCES. PARAMEDICS wheel GURNEYS into the EMERGENCY ROOM BAY and down --

THE HOSPITAL CORRIDOR

Which is filled with SICK PATIENTS, all showing tell-tale signs of plague: high fever, necrosis and tumors.

Tahmina takes in the disturbing SIGHT.

Placing a handkerchief on her nose, she hustles down the hallway, moving towards --

THE QUARANTINE UNIT

As soon as Tahmina enters in her protective suit, she hears a heart monitor FLATLINING. She follows the sound to --

JOY'S PATIENT ROOM

Where Dr. McCarthy and two NURSES frantically try to revive Joy. They grease the paddles of a Defibrillator machine, lay them on her chest, and --

THUMP! Voltage pours through Joy's body. She arches... and lies still, her lifeless eyes staring right at...

Tahmina, face contorted with ANGUISH.

INT. SIBLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL - LAB - LATER

Tahmina listens to an exhausted McCarthy, depleted by the futility of his efforts to save lives.

Mark (also in his protective suit) is with them.

DR. MCCARTHY

We lost all eight patients last night. They went into cardiac arrest right after their lungs collapsed. Not one of them responded to treatment. And we had new cases arriving this morning.

TAHMINA

How many?

DR. MCCARTHY

Fifteen.

They trade uneasy looks.

Just Then, the AUTOMATIC DOOR swings open. Dylan bursts in with the LAB RESULTS, hands them to Tahmina.

DYLAN

Here's the genetic analysis,
Professor.

Tahmina studies the DIAGRAM, her expression darkening.

MARK

What kind of plague are we dealing
with? Bubonic, pneumatic or...
whatever the third one was.

TAHMINA

All three.

Mark looks at her with DISBELIEF.

MARK

What?

TAHMINA

The DNA contains elements of all
three strains. But it's unlike any
of them.

She shows him the bacterium's GENOME SEQUENCE, points out several new genetic combinations.

TAHMINA

See this? We call it the Pla gene.
It's what allows the bacterium to
enter the bloodstream and cause a
full-body infection. But this
version of Pla has evolved...
making it a hundred times more
effective.

MARK

Meaning?

TAHMINA

Meaning we're dealing with a new respiratory pathogen that spreads like the flu and infects the lymph nodes, lungs and heart simultaneously.

DR. MCCARTHY

And it's multi-drug resistant.

A beat as their predicament SINKS in... they're fucked.

MARK

How the fuck is that possible?

TAHMINA

It's not. Not naturally at least. Mutation is arbitrary. These changes are not. They're precise. Deliberate. And they make the bacteria stronger.

Which can only mean one thing:

DR. MCCARTHY

They were engineered.

Mark stares, grappling with the unbelievable --

MARK

Somebody created this thing?

Tahmina nods grimly.

TAHMINA

And with the growing number of patients, I think it's safe to assume he's spreading it as well.

MARK

Who the hell would do something like this?

SMASH CUT TO:

A MODERN LAB

Where a group of MYSTERIOUS MEN, clad in black (their faces obscured by TUBE RACKS and FLASKS), reach inside a large cage, filled with INFECTED RATS.

They retrieve the largest one. Use a SYRINGE they draw the rodent's blood, isolating the deadly pathogen.

Watch patiently as the FLUID runs through several glass cylinders and gathers inside a large yellow bin that reads:

CAUTION. PESTICIDE STORAGE.

We instantly know -- whatever their plan is -- it doesn't look good for our heroes.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. CDC HEADQUARTERS (WASHINGTON D.C.) - DAY**

Mark's black Sedan pulls up in front of a sterile OFFICE BUILDING surrounded by a barb wire FENCE.

CAMERA HOLDS on a large sign:

CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

INT. CDC HEADQUARTERS - CORRIDOR - SHORTLY AFTER

Armed with the test results, Tahmina and Mark bustle through a series of SECURITY DOORS which SLIDE OPEN and CLOSED again.

MARK

We can't just waltz in there and tell her what to do. You gotta be smart about it. Just share your findings and suggest two counter-strategies -- one great, the other one awful. Then ask for her advice. She'll pick the right one, of course, but it'll make her think she came up with the idea. And for the love of God, avoid words like 'epidemic' or 'outbreak'.

TAHMINA

Okay. Got it.

INT. CDC HEADQUARTERS - FREEMAN'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

BRENDA FREEMAN (50s), the CDC's stern-faced CHIEF OF STAFF is at her desk, talking on the phone, when --

Mark enters, followed by Tahmina who ignores every single piece of advice he just gave her:

TAHMINA

(point blank)

We have plague outbreak on our hands. You have to issue an epidemic alert.

Mark SIGHS. He had a feeling this might happen.

FREEMAN
(into phone)
I'll have to call you back.

Freeman hangs up the phone. Considers Tahmina with a confused expression:

FREEMAN
I'm sorry... you are?

TAHMINA
Professor Shah from the Institute
of Infectious Diseases. We've met.
Several times, actually.

Freeman sits with her face unchanged.

TAHMINA
We're coming from Sibley Memorial
hospital, where they've had --

FREEMAN
Fifteen new plague cases, I know.
I just got off the phone with them.
But that's not enough to issue an
alert.

TAHMINA
Maybe this is.

Tahmina slides the lab results across Freeman's desk.

TAHMINA
We're dealing with a new strain
that's more infectious and
resistant to medication. I believe
it's a product of bioterrorism.

FREEMAN
And do you have any evidence to
support this claim?

TAHMINA
No.
(indicates diagram)
But it's the only explanation for
these genetic changes.

FREEMAN
Playing devil's advocate here: what
would a terrorist group stand to
gain from releasing the plague?

Tahmina mulls this over, putting herself in her opponent's shoes, when it suddenly DAWNS ON HER:

TAHMINA

The plague changed the course of history. The only reason Napoleon was able to invade Italy was because they were weakened by the outbreak. It helped reduce world population, eliminated the weakest members of society and made us stronger as a species. Scientifically speaking, it would be...

And this is hard to admit.

TAHMINA

Beneficial for humanity.

FREEMAN

Almost sounds like you agree with their actions.

TAHMINA

I just understand their way of thinking, that's all.

We're not sure if that's completely true. And judging by Mark's doubtful expression, neither is he.

TAHMINA

They will start slowly. Releasing the bacterium in rural areas first. That's where the first patients were from. If it reaches the city, the results would be catastrophic.

FREEMAN

I can't risk causing a mass panic over a theory. If we're dealing with an unknown strain we should focus on finding a treatment.

TAHMINA

And sacrifice thousands of people to die in the process?

Freeman raises a hand for silence.

FREEMAN

That's my decision, Professor. And it's final.

Tahmina points a withering finger.

TAHMINA

Whatever happens next will be on
your conscience.

Freeman hangs on that as Tahmina storms out...

EXT. CDC HEADQUARTERS - ENTRANCE - SHORTLY AFTER

Mark emerges from the building. Spots Tahmina trying to hail a cab while frantically dialing a number on her cell.

DAVID (V.O.)

Hey, it's David. I'm either too
busy or lazy to pick up the phone.
You know what to do.

There's a BEEP.

TAHMINA

(into phone)

Hey, it's me. Something happened
at the hospital today and... I'll
explain later but I need you and
Nathan to leave town right away.
Go visit your parents in Philly.
Anyway, call me when you get this.

She hangs up. Looks up to see Mark approaching.

MARK

(with sarcasm)

That went just as well as I
expected.

TAHMINA

I tried.

For the first time, Mark sees Tahmina without her protective shield of attitude. Scared. He softens:

MARK

(genuine)

I know you did.

(off her reaction)

We should get back to the hospital.

TAHMINA

Not until I get my family out of
Washington.

Mark can see her distress, decides to help.

MARK
C'mon, I'll drive you.

Off Tahmina's surprise, we --

CUT TO:

MARK'S SEDAN

Spitting up gravel as he tears away from the curb with a SCREECH of TIRES.

MATCH CUT TO:

THE SPINNING WHEELS OF A CARRIAGE

A Driver whips his horse, racing his carriage across cobblestone streets, taking us back into medieval London.

He speeds past a CUSTODIAN, who secures an INCENSE BURNER to a lamppost, burning saltpeter just like Finlay suggested to the council. Wisps of SMOKE rise from it.

A few houses down, a SERVANT signals for the Driver to halt. He pulls at the horse's reigns, slowing to a stop right outside --

THE LORD MAYOR'S HOME

Bloodworth lies in bed, dripping with a fever sweat. Large tumors can be seen on his neck, a sign that his symptoms have worsened. Joan enters, dressed in an OVERCOAT.

JOAN
I'll go fetch Dr. Finlay for a second round of treatment.

BLOODWORTH
Thank you, my dear.

Joan averts her eyes. Leaves the room.

AT THE ENTRANCE

Joan drags a reluctant Alfred towards the carriage while SERVANTS load leather SUITCASES into the back.

ALFRED
But I don't want to leave father!

JOAN
Hush! Get inside!

Alfred resists.

JOAN
If you don't do as I say we'll be
shut inside the house to die with
him! Is that what you want?

Alfred deliberates... and finally CAVES. Climbs into the carriage, looking up at --

AN UPPER STORY WINDOW

From which Bloodworth watches his family abandon him, fighting TEARS as he quakes with FURY.

Realizing he's now a victim of his own orders, we --

CUT TO:

A PADLOCK ON A WOODEN DOOR

Making it impossible to exit. PULL BACK to reveal we're in front of the GAYLE HOUSE, guarded by two vigilant WATCHERS, making sure no one escapes.

FIND Joseph and his father George, watching them from the shadows of a nearby alley. Talking in hushed tones:

GEORGE
We can't take them both.

JOSEPH
Maybe not at once.

One of the Watchers glances in their direction, perhaps sensing he's being watched.

Joseph and George duck behind a CART.

The Watcher closes in on them, scanning the alley. A few unbearably tense moments pass when...

We HEAR urine splashing against the brick wall. The Watcher is taking a piss. He's about finish, when --

THWACK! Joseph smacks him over the head with a SHOVEL, knocking him unconscious. The second Watcher whirls around, alerted by the SOUND, only to see --

George charging at him!

He wrestles the Watcher to the ground while Joseph makes for the door with a set of IRON KEYS on a ring.

With shaking hands, he tries one after the next, until -- CLICK! The padlock springs open.

Joseph removes the chains. Pushes the door open.

JOSEPH

Ann! It's me, Joseph!

He steps into the darkened room, shocked to see --

William's corpse on the floorboards, flies BUZZING overhead. Ann sits slumped in a corner of the room, motionless.

Sheer TERROR floods Joseph's face...

JOSEPH

No...

When, unexpectedly, Ann starts to stir. She's alive! And not showing any signs of illness.

Joseph embraces her, relieved.

GEORGE

Run, you fools! Go!

Taking Ann's hand, Joseph ushers her outside. Together, they dash down the street, running at full tilt.

ANN

Where are we going?

JOSEPH

Away from here.

CUT TO:

THE CITY GATE

Large and imposing. Insurmountable. The grounds are patrolled by the CONSTABLE and two dozen WATCHERS -- all of them fully armed. Blocking any passage forward.

Joan's carriage pulls up. She sticks out her head to spot a group of TRAVELERS gathered out front, as eager to leave the city as she is.

HATCHER, wearing his PLAGUE DOCTOR garb, is among them.
Just as Joseph and Ann arrive, catching their breath:

CONSTABLE
The gate will remain closed.

Defiant SHOUTS from the crowd:

CITIZENS
Open the gate! / Let us pass! /
You can't lock us up!

CONSTABLE
No one is permitted to leave the
city. Lord Mayor's orders.

A beat as this news lands on --

JOAN, fearfully clinging to Alfred.

JOSEPH and ANN, their escape plan foiled. Everyone is
trapped, except...

HATCHER

Who confidently steps forward, holding up a crumpled
PRESCRIPTION, written in shorthand.

HATCHER
I'm a doctor. If I don't fetch
supplies at the apothecary in
Smithfield, hundreds will perish.

The Constable looks at Hatcher. Considering how to proceed.
His hard squint drifts over to the Watchers.

CONSTABLE
Let this man through.

With the crowd rioting around him, Hatcher walks through the
OPEN GATE, trudging across --

THE OUTSKIRTS OF LONDON

Where a large wooden CROSS marks the SITE of the PLAGUE PITS
we saw earlier. Hatcher walks past them, crossing the flat,
dormant farmland which seems to stretch on endlessly.

Raising a bright OIL LANTERN, Hatcher continues down a dirt
road, surrounded by complete darkness.

He cuts through the heavy mist until he finally reaches...

CUT TO:

SMITHFIELD

A sleepy parish near London that has not yet been affected by the plague. The light of kerosene lanterns illuminate the deserted streets.

Hatcher rounds a corner, scanning the surrounding buildings. Checks the apothecary's address on a piece of paper.

It should be close by.

Suddenly, he hears a NOISE down a nearby alley. Wondering who, other than himself, would be out at this hour, Hatcher rounds a corner to see --

VECTOR

Kneeling down in an alley, releasing a cage filled with RATS, who spread out in all directions.

Scavenging. And infecting the entire parish in the process.

HATCHER (O.S.)

What on Earth are you doing?

Vector twirls around, startled to see Hatcher.

A tense beat, then surprisingly --

Vector BOLTS.

HATCHER

Hey!

Hatcher takes off after him, GIVING CHASE.

Vector stumble-runs down a tight alley. Hatcher stays close on his heels, dodging obstacles, tearing through hanging clothes, vegetable carts, when --

A carriage barrels STRAIGHT at him.

The Driver's eyes GO WIDE as he PULLS the reigns! The carriage swerves -- missing him by a hair.

Hatcher continues to RUN -- ON a MAD DASH -- face sweating as he pushes himself beyond his capacity --

Slowly GAINING on Vector as they arrive at...

A STONE BRIDGE

Ten feet above the roaring currents of the RIVER THAMES.
Vector reaches the middle of the bridge, when --

He slows to a halt and doubles over, his lungs burning.
Hatcher closes in on him, BREATHING HARD.

HATCHER
It was you. You've purposely
spread the disease.
(pause)
Why?

VECTOR
There is only one ailment in the
world. It's mankind.

He spreads his hands, like Jesus dispensing peace.

VECTOR
We are the cure.

HATCHER
What do you mean, we? Who are you?

REVEAL: a second PLAGUE DOCTOR IN A WHITE MASK creeping up
behind Hatcher! He LOOPS a CHAIN around his throat and --

YANKS, CHOKING him.

Hatcher flails, GASPING for air as the chain digs into his
larynx, his feet dangling off the ground.

His attacker tightens his grasp as Hatcher desperately tries
to force his free hand under the chain --

In a moment of PURE INSTINCT, Hatcher swings his cane --

HITTING the attacker's head.

His grip loosens just enough for Hatcher to SUCK in some air
and slide his free hand under the chain.

He pulls at the chain, using his body weight to SLAM the
attacker against the side of the bridge. Once. Twice.

Hatcher's about to free himself, when --

He's THROWN over the handrail.

Hatcher plummets, HURTLING towards the river below...

He PLUNGES UNDERWATER. After a moment, he breaks the surface, GASPING and WHEEZING. He paddles to the shore, struggling to keep afloat in the icy torrent.

Weakened, he wades out of the water, looks upward...

CAMERA RISES to reveal the desolate bridge. No sign of the two mysterious PLAGUE DOCTORS.

Off Hatcher, wondering who they were, we --

CUT TO:

THE PRESENT DAY

As a group of MYSTERIOUS MEN fastens the yellow container with the deadly PATHOGEN to the underside of a CROP DUSTER, getting it ready for take-off.

We PAN UP to REVEAL their faces:

OBSCURED by the same WHITE MASKS Vector and his Associate were wearing. Both as a protective measure (gas mask) and to hide their identities.

Seeing this, we realize that these men are part of the same SECRET SOCIETY. One that has been operating for centuries, shaping the course of mankind.

The MASKED MEN watch as one of them starts up the CROP DUSTER and SOARS into the sky.

EXT. TAHMINA'S HOUSE - SAME TIME

Mark's Sedan skids to a stop. Tahmina jumps out, bounds up the front stairs and into --

THE LIVING ROOM

Checking every room, looking for her family. Growing more anxious with each passing moment.

TAHMINA
David? Nathan?

They are nowhere to be found.

TAHMINA
(low, to herself)
Where the hell are you guys?

CUT TO:

A PLAYGROUND

Where Nathan swings around on a set of MONKEY BARS with some other CHILDREN. He hears the ROAR of an ENGINE overhead. Runs over to David, who sits on a bench, reading a BOOK.

NATHAN
Dad! Look, an airplane!

DAVID
That's no airplane, it's a crop
duster. They're used to spray
pesticides on crops.

NATHAN
What's that?

DAVID
It's where we grow our food. Like
a vegetable field.

NATHAN
But there are no vegetable fields
out here?

A strange look overcomes David as he realizes:

DAVID
You're right...

HOLD ON the crop duster, flying suspiciously low. Getting
closer and closer to the city as we --

SLAM TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT