

The Confusing Case

The bright white lights flicker every second, and it is driving me crazy. I really hate bunker laboratories.

This wasn't the first time the World Health Organization contacted me. I, Doria Brown, was also contacted to help control the second outbreak of Ebola in 2036. Considering my background in epidemiology, I was a top choice for the team, and we were able to contain the pathogen.

After the mass-outbreaks of the Zika virus all over the world, the United Nations promised they would find cures for infectious diseases and downsize superbugs. They stayed true to their promise; a portion of the CDC was then eliminated because there seemed to be no infectious diseases to prevent. The world went into an ignorant bliss with no diseases breaking out..... until now. Over 35 million world-wide deaths within the span of two weeks and five outbreaks; this disease is a catastrophic threat. What makes it even scarier is that there is only one symptom; most people have just been reported to have very high fevers before they died. Also, there is a terrified world wondering who is gonna be the next one infected. But, you know, no pressure or anything. The next victim could be anyone, including my family. My little sister, who I love more than anything else, gave me a kiss on my forehead right before I left and told me that she would be proud of me no matter what. That is the only reason I have not given up yet. *She* is keeping me going.

"Air-borne pathogens?" I theorized, re-brainstorming ideas for how this disease could have spread. It was one of the strangest disease outbreaks I have seen in a long while. The way it spread really stumped me; most air-borne disease outbreaks start at a single source and spread outward from there, but this disease popped up in five seemingly random spots over the past two weeks. At first, we thought the Zika virus had returned when over 17 million people in the small African country of Malawi suddenly died. The media started trying to calm people by making claims like "We stopped this virus 15 years ago; we'll stop it again." But then the disease suddenly broke out in London. That caused a worldwide panic, forcing the government to reinstate our epidemiology team. When there isn't a significant, worldwide infectious threat, WHO keeps our group hushed so that people can feel safe.

There are about ten of us medical microbiologists, each with our own underground laboratory. The underground labs were to cut us off from the rest of the world so we don't become contaminated. Each lab is complete with DNA samples of the victims along with high-tech lab equipment. The epidemiologists at WHO have no clue where this disease will pop up next and who will be the next affected, and because of that they blindly funded as much lab equipment as possible for us to thoroughly make sure we have all the resources we need to stop this thing.

"Transmissible?" It could be possible. Maybe someone who was exposed to the disease in Africa took an airpod to Europe? "Airpod travel record. Africa to Europe. July

8, 2042," I told to the empty space around me. I was suddenly surrounded by a blue holographic light that was cross referencing all reported flights from anywhere in Africa to anywhere in Europe. Finally, twelve records were left. "Airpod flights. Europe or Africa to the Middle East. July 9, 2042," I commanded the blue holograph. There were no airpod flights to or from anywhere on July 9, 2042 came the holograph's immediate answer. I assume the UN advised a total air travel shut down after the outbreak was reported.

The officials that brought us here are in some kind of a security room down the hall and are watching us through micro-cameras in our labs. I only know this because I saw the room when they escorted us to our labs. They told us if we think we have figured out what caused the disease outbreaks to type a short report on the Flat Typers on the back wall of the labs and send it to them so they can check the authenticity. How can they even check the authenticity? We're the best of best!

It feels like I've been in this bunker forever since I've been worrying about my family and doing tons of research and cross-referencing. The worry consumes me more with each new piece of information that I attain and with each passing second. Worry about my family, about my friends, and about the world.

WHO sends us occasional messages on our Flat Typers reminding us to sleep or eat. They said we should take short naps every three hours for optimal performance. I ignore those messages. It's not like I'm not trying to sleep, it's just that every time I close my eyes I see my little sister becoming the next one to catch the disease.

I scrolled down the brainstorm list I had conducted on the holograph. The next possibility was waterborne/zoonotic pathogens. One of the other scientists had messaged a question on his Flat Typer about water pipe information to the WHO officials and I patched it into my feed. This pathogen was obviously an emerging pathogen, considering the fact that a disease like this has never been recorded in all of human history. No pathogen has been found to travel quite as swiftly and dangerously as this one is. What caused this pathogen to emerge? And how did it emerge?

I keep going back to zoonotic pathogens because there seems to be a potential as to what caused it to emerge. I saw a news segment a few days ago about a livestock deal funded by the UN that was meant to help the economy and exports of Malawi. Although this project was intended to help the people of Malawi, the livestock were unknowingly diseased. The animals had already been bred, sold, and transported to other countries before the disease was discovered. I believe that is where the disease started. The country is home to a small lake. The pathogens started with the animals, then the animals drank and swam in the water infecting that. From there, the people of the town contracted the disease through simple drinking and bathing using the infected water.

Now here comes the confusing part. It is common to see that entire developing countries could become sick because they share from a small amount of resources. But

how could an entire city in Europe become infected with the same disease within a day of the African country? I have considered the possibility that the livestock in London were the same infected livestock from Africa but I didn't have to dig too deep to find that only 8% of the disease victims owned ranches and only 10% drank water from the same system as the livestock, so it couldn't be a problem with improper water filtration.

I groaned loudly and covered my face with my hands. I don't know how much longer I can take this. I leaned my head back and that's when I heard it. There was a pounding sound on the roof. No, that's just rain..... "*Rain*. Superbug...? No way...." I questioned aloud.

I turned on my projection screen, "Display map. Show all rainfall locations. July 8, 2042." I circled all the locations where there had been rainfall, one of which was London. "Show rainfall locations. July 9, 2042." A large storm cloud appeared over the Middle East. "Fatality reports. Syria. July 9, 2042." I scrolled through the long list of people and found there weren't as many war- or starvation-related deaths as there usually are. Instead, there was exposure to pathogens listed as the main cause of death in Syria that day. I checked the other two reported outbreak cases and found more reported pathogen-related deaths. More than I had ever seen in my lifetime. This was not good.

If this is what I think it is, if these outbreaks were being caused by some kind of crazy superbug that can evaporate, condense into a cloud, and then rain down upon unsuspecting places... then the world is in deep trouble.

I decided to do one last check before I reported my findings to WHO. "Aerial view. Time lapse of clouds. Beginning July 9." I told the holograph. It displayed time lapse of cloud formations and storms throughout the entire world. But my eyes were focused solely over London where a cloud formed after the outbreak. The cloud started moving west towards the United States, getting bigger and bigger until it stopped. I gasped. My legs gave way and I fell onto the cold, metal floor. My whole body was shaking. The room was caving in on me. I couldn't breathe. The storm cloud was above my house.