

# Schrodinger's Dilemma

## Setup

### Intro:

An agent is notified that a "postage due" item is being held for him (or her) at the local post office. They owe ~\$1.00US and can pick the item up during normal lobby hours.

### The Envelope:

After receiving payment and verifying ID, the postal clerk hands the agent a worn and dirty 9"x12" padded manila envelope. The destination and return addresses are identical - they contain the agent's full legal name and residential address. They both seem to be in the agent's handwriting.

If asked, the postal clerk can determine via postmarks that the envelope entered the USPS system roughly 72hrs ago in Washington, DC. The clerk can also point out that the stamps on the envelope are over a decade old; they are commemorative "White House and US Flag" stamps issued in 1992 at \$0.29/ea. They are yellowed and brittle, and the glue isn't holding well. A few may have fallen off in transit.

### The Contents:

There is a smaller 6"x10" sealed manila envelope inside the larger one. It contains:

- A palm-sized scrap of pale tattooed leather.
- A very odd \$10US bill.
- A message (?) on a folded sheet of paper.

The leather scrap is about 4" in diameter and roughly circular. There is a stylized star tattooed on one side in red metallic ink, which seems to glow faintly.

The \$10 bill is slightly larger than normal. It is made of some sort of plastic material that will not hold a stain, crease or easily tear. It is rainbow colored, and has a holographic portrait of Ronald Reagan on the front; Reagan's face has been somehow defaced to include a crude holographic clown nose and makeup. The back contains barcodes, embedded circuitry and a US flag with 57 stars. Text on the bill is in both English and Spanish. The bill is dated "Series 2034".

The folded sheet a plain white printer/copier paper has the following scrawled on it in black ink:

there was thunder  
there was lightning  
then the stars went out  
and the moon fell from the sky  
it rained mackerel  
it rained trout  
and the great day of wrath has come  
and here's mud in your big red eye

the poker's in the fire  
and the locusts take the sky  
and the earth died screaming  
while I lay dreaming  
dreaming of you  
  
xox,  
palimpsest

The text appears to be in the agent's handwriting. In the bottom right corner of the page is a smudged fingerprint in what looks like dried blood.

\*\*\**Skin:*

Analysis of the leather will reveal that it is tanned human flesh from an adult Asian female, possibly from the back or torso. One day to determine this if the agents have contacts who can rush the labwork (or if they can do it themselves), otherwise it can take up to a week. There may be questions, ie - "Where the hell did you get recently tanned human skin?!?" and "Um, what happened to the 'donor'?" for starters...

There are no medical or genetic records of any sort on file for this woman. She hasn't been born yet. The tattoo ink will fluoresce brightly in ultraviolet light. Tattoo parlors will be unfamiliar with it, but very very interested. A lab can determine that the ink is an unfamiliar inert organo-metallic compound.

The tattoo is an Elder Sign. Mythos roll to recognize it if the agents have not encountered it before. Yes, it is functional.

\*\*\* *Bill:*

Lab analysis of the bill will reveal that it is composed primarily of woven polycarbon nanotube fibers embedded with doped fullerenes. These artificial molecules are incredibly difficult and expensive to manufacture using current methods. Researchers at university or commercial nanotech facilities would kill for this item as it provides hints on how to solve several manufacturing problems; ok, maybe not \*kill\*, but it's worth a small fortune and it will \*definitely\* generate a lot of attention if the right (or wrong) people have access to it. Same timeframe for analysis as the skin labwork above, roll vs Chemistry skill.

RFID receivers will pick up a broadcast signal containing the bill's denomination and serial number. I guess there's no EFF in the future.

The barcodes on the back are not a known format. Crypto or Computer Use to determine this.

Logic analyzers will capture close to 100G of digital data from the embedded circuitry; the data protocols are also unknown and seem to be strongly encrypted. Roll vs Electronics for an accurate data capture; multiple captures can be made and the results compared to verify completeness and accuracy. A fumble will destroy the embedded circuitry (including the RFID transmitter). If a complete capture is obtained, several years of study by computer science, math and crypto experts will lead to advanced, patented and highly profitable next generation routing protocols, security products, etc.

Anticounterfeit patterns in the bill contain Yellow Signs. Mythos roll or INT\*1 to spot this if the agent(s) have encountered a Yellow Sign previously, and a 0/1 SAN loss.

\*\*\* *Sheet:*

It's plain white recycled paper, 8.5"x11", just like what you'll find in a bazillion photocopiers and printers. Kinda low quality, though; a bit pulpy and fibrous. Kinda lemony smelling, too.

The lyrics are from a Tom Waits song called "Earth Died Screaming"; it's on an album called "Bone Machine", released in 1992. Any agent with musical taste and/or counterculture sensibilities will have this in their collection.

*Palimpsest:* n. - A manuscript, typically of papyrus or parchment, that has been written on more than once, with the earlier writing incompletely erased and often legible.

The blood is the agent's.

The fingerprint is also the agent's. Right thumbprint, to be precise. There seem to be two large scars in the print, disturbing the whorls. The agent has no scars on his/her right thumb.

If the agents don't examine the paper closer, try an INT\*3 or Cryptography roll. Someone remembers that childhood "invisible ink" trick with the lemon juice and heat lamp...

Here's what appears; you may want to use a monospace font:

```
KRYPTOS/ppzkmaqtkxqiwtudfwvxpdvpdxagkad  
azqkwr1fteeqzveeqtatpzfxeidbcevqxaZWuhit  
HpuiulwkSSN078051120LAQ131275EGsnrbcezwj  
66oy148vbGAA38.887701-77.019771GIU113743  
2840euxalnwyejsebheolacgxlkjsegrusmdkjnc  
mhtdwmbrimnn190138/xoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxoxo
```

Agents with US intelligence community backgrounds (CIA especially, followed by NSA and NRO) will recognize "KRYPTOS":

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/information/tour/krypt.html>

Agents who make an Idea, Cryptography or Computer Use roll will also be aware of this URL:

<http://elonka.com/kryptos/>

Elonk's Kryptos page gets more hits than the CIA's, but I digress...

Let the Computer & Crypto agents have at it for a while; make 'em break out the pencils & paper if you're feeling especially sadistic. Now might be a good time for Keepers to refresh their drinks, grab some more food, take a bathroom break, etc. Once the agents are ready to kill you, an idea roll gets them this:

<http://members.aon.at/cipherclerk/>

Kudos to players & cipher/crypto fiends who already know and love CipherClerk. The CIA Kryptos page provides a realworld CIA hook, Elonka's Kryptos page shows how parts of it have been decoded and the CipherClerk applet automates the process. I used a simple version of the Kryptos section one code to generate the encoded message.

My group took about ten minutes to hit the right combo & decode the message, but we're all hardcore code monkeys. Less experienced agents can make Crypto, Computer Use or INT\*3 roll a few times an hour for the following hints:

1. Decipher using 'Vigenere cipher'.
2. Use the alphabetic key 'PALIMPSEST'.
3. Unilateral substitution, repetitive key.

Award a SAN point each if they generate the plaintext message on their own. Then roll for 0/1 SAN loss when they \*read\* the message:

CIPHER TEXT:

-----  
ppzkmaqtkxqiwtudfwvxpdvpdxagkad  
azqkwrlfteeqzveeqtatpzfxeidbcevxazWuhit  
HpuiulwkHSY078051120LAQ131275EGsnrbcezwj  
66oy148vbGAA38.887701-77.019771GIU113743  
2840euxalnwyjsebheolacgxlkjsegrusmdkjnc  
mhtdwmbriomnn190138  
-----

PLAIN TEXT:

-----  
apocalypsebillionsdeadendofworld  
preventmeetingmayaltertimelinekillHScott  
WhitcherSSN078051120DOB131275MCaucbrwnhr  
66kg148cmGPS38.887701-77.019771UTC113743  
2840acellcompromiseddonottrustiffailrunr  
evelsuicideby190138  
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Note that only the encoded text inside the "/" symbols is decoded; "KRYPTOS" and "xoxoxo..." are used as a hint and padding, respectively.

## The Decoded Message:

Keepers should emphasize uncertainties and ambiguities.

"apocalypse billions dead end of world" (uh oh)

"prevent meeting may alter timeline" (er, ok...)(comma after "meeting", maybe?)

kill H Scott Whitcher (Mr. Whitcher is in trouble)

SSN 078051120 (social security number)

DOB 131275 (date of birth 13 Dec 1975?)

M Cauc brwn hr 66kg 148cm (white male, brown hair, 5'8", 145lbs)

GPS38.887701-77.019771UTC113743 (?)

2840 (?)

Acell compromised do not trust (shit)

if fail run revel suicide by 190138 (19 Jan 2038?) (shit^2)

A Cartography, Electronics or INT\*2 roll will yield:

"GPS 38.887701 -77.019771"

Plug 38.887701 -77.019771 into <http://maps.google.com> and you get the entrance to the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, at the intersection of Independence Ave and 6th Street. We have a where, so when must be:

"UTC 1137432840"

A Computer Use or Idea roll of INTx3 for non-computer techies and INTx1 for non-techies in general, whichever is highest, gets:

UTC = Universal Coordinated Time in unix epoch format

My preferred URL for unix time, YMMV:

[http://esqsoft.com/javascript\\_examples/date-to-epoch.htm](http://esqsoft.com/javascript_examples/date-to-epoch.htm)

Inputting 1137432840 gets you 16 Jan 2006, 12:30pm EDT (or 17:30 GMT). We have a when.

### When notes:

Keepers will probably want to change the time. I had to pick one, so I chose lunchtime for the Eastern US on the date the winner of the DGML Shotgun Scenario Contest is announced. Using the unix epoch to date converter previously listed, the Keeper can generate and insert into the coded message any time & date they want. The goal is for the players/agents to figure out the message and realize they *barely* have enough time to get to the indicated location, even if they drop everything and leave immediately.

### Where notes:

I chose the entrance to the Air & Space Museum in DC for several reasons:

1. It's a very public and busy spot, especially during lunchtime (assuming the weather doesn't totally suck). Tourists (inc families with kids and school tour groups), foot traffic, motor traffic.
2. DC is gun paranoid in these post-sniper, post-911 times.
3. DC is paranoid in general, post-911. Don't fuck with the Capitol Police.
4. It is literally in A-Cell's backyard.

### Travel notes:

My ideal scenario would have the agents decode the message around midnightish, after a long, stressful and confusing day. The rendezvous is ~12hrs and ~500 miles away (the agents are currently in Boston, for example). They have to pile into a car if they can't book an overnight flight or rail passage. They keep getting delayed (speeding tickets if by car, or airport security and flight delays, or an accident on the tracks); they may have to frantically switch between rail, short commuter flights and rentals. They have to be rude and pushy to keep moving, and spend their personal cash (for bribes, travel expenses, etc) like it was going out of style.

Bargain, Credit Rating, Fast Talk, and Persuade will be useful; so will Drive and Navigate (land). If they need to use Law, they've probably screwed up.

Do they contact A-Cell? If so, how long before they get a reply? What if A-Cell tells them to stay away while they handle it? What if the agents don't receive the "stay away, do not engage" message until they are a few blocks away from the Air & Space Museum?

Do the agents attempt to do research on Mr. Whitcher while en route? Do they know any graveyard-shift cops who will pull NCIC records for them? Do they suffer inopportune cellphone & wireless internet dropouts? Did they remember spare laptop batteries? Are they charged? How 'bout the cellphone? Do they have a car cigarette lighter adapter for the laptop(s) and cellphone(s)?

Do the agents attempt to equip themselves? How, in the wee hours of the morning? Is there a Green Box nearby? On the way? What happens if they get pulled over for speeding and the cops, sensing something is up, want to search the car?

They make it to the location with minutes to spare. They're exhausted, tense, jumpy, and not sure what to expect. How are they going to approach Mr. Whitcher? What if this is a set-up? Or a joke?

Keep the agents moving. Don't give them time to think or prepare or rest. "Tick tick tick tick..."

Who note:

Have the agent with the highest Cryptography, Computer Use, INT or EDU (in that order) receive the package; bonus if they have an intelligence community background.

## The Envelope Sender:

### VER01

The Sender is a future version of the agent. The Sender has managed to survive the initial stages of an abrupt and apocalyptic End Times. The Sender still has a few SAN points left, but is not thinking very clearly, hence the obtuse and not-quite-clear encoded message. The instructions and data in the message are more-or-less accurate, though, and should be followed.

Why did the sender have to encode the message and write it in invisible ink? Was someone watching them? Is someone or something following the manila envelopes into the past in order to retrieve them and their contents?

We won't even attempt to figure out how the future version of the agent managed to send an envelope decades into the past.

Idea: A confused-looking bike courier rides up to the agent(s) as they get to the Air & Space Museum. The courier addresses the agents by name and has them sign for a delivery. Inside a padded manila envelope is another message. What if more than one bike courier shows up? And they all have messages with conflicting instructions?

### VER02

The Sender is a future version of the agent. The Sender has managed to survive the initial stages of an abrupt and apocalyptic End Times. The Sender is batshit fucking crazy.

Ground Zero, VER\_A works well here, as does VER\_D. In the latter version, maybe Whitcher beat the agent out for a promotion a few years down the line, or slept with someone the agent had the hots for in 2010. Who knows?

## VER03

The Sender is a future version of the agent, similar to VER01. The future version of the agent is lying to or attempting to mislead the present-day agents for some reason. The message is deceptive and should not be followed. Except for the part about A-Cell. That's truthful. Maybe.

## VER04

The Sender is not a future version of the agent. The sender someone or something that DG thought they had destroyed. The sender managed to escape into the future (and not necessarily by time travel; hibernation or simply long life work, too). The sender has sent similar, individually crafted messages to other cells, agents and friendlies as well, maybe even to A-cell. The sender is working with the memories of several DG survivors in the 2040s. The sender has access to these DG survivors, or parts of them (reanimated salts? consumed memories?), and has used this info to track down spells, materials, tomes, etc. The sender has access to what we would consider advanced (but human) technologies.

Ask me about the Modern Ghoul Cabal at some point, they're my favorite candidates. I promise I'll figure out a better name for them.

## VER05

The Sender is not a future version of the agent. The Reagan bill is not from the future, but a neat-looking fake (Nuts & Volts magazine had DIY hologram articles in the 1990s & the supplies are fairly cheap; the stain/crease-free material is vinyl; Photoshop & some desktop publishing gear did the rest); the "friendly" is giving false info to the agent. Is the friendly nuts? A Fate adept? Why do they want Whitcher dead? Maybe Whitcher really is something nasty. Maybe the Elder Sign is real too.

Oh yeah: Tillinghast Radiation, if the stuff really is from the future. Time travel bad. See Delta Green Eyes Only vol03: Project Rainbow.

**Mr. H. Scott Whitcher; info received en route:**

**SSN 078051120 The story of the most misused number of all time...**

In 1938, wallet manufacturer the E. H. Ferree company in Lockport, New York decided to promote its product by showing how a Social Security card would fit into its wallets. A sample card, used for display purposes, was inserted in each wallet. Company VP and Treasurer Douglas Patterson thought it would be a clever idea to use the actual SSN of his secretary, Mrs. Hilda Schrader Whitcher...

More info at <http://www.ssa.gov/history/ssn/misused.html>

If the Agents didn't run the SSN themselves, they should expect some sarcastic comments from the contacts who provide them with the above info. This is an easy one - roll vs Idea, Computer Use, History or whatever appropriate skill is highest if the agents don't simply plug the SSN into a search engine.

**DOB Dec 13th, 1975 Caucasian male, brown hair, 145lbs, 5'8"**

Agents will receive hits on this info after searching the appropriate resources (NCIC, Nexus-Lexus, Choicepoint, Experian, etc). A few hours work will get them:

1. three residential addresses in the last eight years, including a current one; two are in nearby states, one is on the other side of the country;
2. a supposedly unlisted phone number for the current address; calling it gets an answering machine beep after a few rings; the machine hangs up after 30 seconds, and attempts to phreak it via touchtone access codes will fail;
3. college and high school info from institutions on the west coast; an MBA degree with minors in math and law;
4. no criminal history and a decent credit score;
5. unmarried, only child, no surviving parents or grandparents;
6. unusually uneventful medical records;
7. tax returns going back to Whitcher's late teens;
8. a driver's license, with a street address matching the current residential address; the physical description matches as well; most importantly, the agents now have a recent photo, as the license was issued less than six months ago. Whitcher has a dark complexion, like a Latino, Greek or Indian; his hair is very dark brown and a bit long. He is clean-shaven.
9. a SSN of 078-05-####, where #### is a number similar to 1120, ie - 7720, 1188, 1130, etc.; something that can be easily typoed to 1120.
10. The "H" stands for "Howard".

## Ground Zero

Approaching Mr. Whitcher at the designated time and place:

### VER\_A

The agents are in position, but no one matching Whitcher's description ever appears. None of the leads pan out; listed residential addresses are incorrect (and the current residents have never heard of him)(or the addresses are all out-of-business bowling alleys, or something similarly weird), listed schools, colleges and employers have no record of him, etc. The phone number is unassigned according to the company that owns it, Cingular, and further calls to it generate a "no longer in service" recording. The DL# is invalid according to the issuing state. Same deal with the tax records. None of the info the agents received en route can be reverified. Nothing more concerning Whitcher is ever learned.

### VER\_B

The agents are in position, but they have chosen to observe Whitcher before approaching him. They spot him coming out of the Air and Space Museum at the designated time. A black stretch limo suddenly halts on the street in front of Whitcher. Two large and tough looking men in dark suits and shades grab an obviously surprised and confused Whitcher by each arm and almost throw him into the back of the limo. The limo speeds off. This all happens within the space of a few seconds. Agents in cars can follow the limo to the Pentagon; even if they have credentials to get past the initial security checkpoint, the delay causes them to lose the limo.

Whitcher is not seen or heard from again.

Agents who clearly photographed or recorded the incident will notice that the men in suits look identical. A-Cell may have records linking them to MJ12. The limo tags are were registered to a state senator who passed away almost twenty years ago; they have not been reissued.

## VER\_C

The agents are in position, but they have chosen to observe Whitcher before approaching him. They spot him coming out of the Air and Space Museum at the designated time. Before they can react, Whitcher drops to the ground, screaming and twitching. His bones snap loudly, skin tears and blood sprays everywhere, drenching a nearby group of Cub Scouts and their Den Mother. 1/1d6 SAN loss for the agents, lifelong therapy for the Scouts. Whitcher is dead long before the ambulance arrives. Other than the extreme mangling that resulted from the rather spectacular nature of his death, the body is normal.

Clothing and personal effects are undamaged. The coroner's report is needlessly jargon-filled; it an attempt to make "extreme muscle contractions broke every bone in this dude's body with such force that the splintered bones ripped his skin open & forced his blood out like a firehose through a soda straw & I gots no idea WTF caused this" sound plausible.

Maybe a few months later the Cub Scouts and the Den Mother develop interesting growths everywhere they were splashed...

## VER\_D

An agent or agents spot Whitcher at the designated time and place. If approached, he responds to his name and is friendly unless given reason not to be. He'll shake hands with anyone who offers; any agent palming the leather scrap tattooed with the Elder Sign & pressing it into Whitcher's hand will get an odd look from Whitcher; hopefully the agent has a good backup story.

Whitcher interviewed with an intelligence agency (choose one, Keeper) on the previous business day; he's staying in DC for another week so he can explore the Smithsonian. Whitcher will not mention the interview; he'll simply say needed to use up some accrued vacation time or he'd have lost it. If any agent flashes a badge from the agency Whitcher interviewed with, Whitcher will gladly join the agents for lunch and will answer any reasonable question; agents may want to run this as an informal extra interview. Whitcher will also pump the agents for as much info as he can about working for the agency.

If asked, Whitcher will laugh and admit that yes, he is related to the infamous Mrs. Hilda Schrader Whitcher (paternal great aunt or something similar). "You wouldn't believe the problems my family has had with social security numbers ever since. My crazy Uncle Hubert tried to sue the Ferree Company and Doug Patterson several times a year until the day he died."

Whitcher is staying at a modest hotel nearby. Agents find nothing odd if his room is tossed. If the agents gain Whitcher's trust, it will be very easy for them to get away with putting a bullet in his brain. *SAN loss of 1d4/1d6* if the agents kill him; Whitcher seems like a genuinely nice guy.

## VER\_E

An agent or agents spot Whitcher at the designated time and place. If approached, he responds to his name and is friendly unless given reason not to be. He'll shake hands with anyone who offers; any agent palming the leather scrap tattooed with the Elder Sign & pressing it into Whitcher's hand gets a dramatic reaction:

there is a visible flash of light, a loud 'POP' and Whitcher jerks his hand back with an inhuman yelp. The agent feels a sharp pain in their right thumb - the claws retracting into Whitcher's fingertips tore the agent's flesh when their hands jerked apart; the agent's thumb is bleeding and it will need stitches

(and maybe a poison roll). It will scar in the same spot as one of the two scars on the blood thumbprint, assuming that this is the agent who received the manila envelopes.

The leather scrap, which has been dropped, lies face up on the pavement. The Elder Sign is glowing bright red, blazing like neon despite the noon sun.

People are staring. A lot of people. A couple of beat cops are approaching, one talking into a radio, the other with her hand on her pistol.

Whitcher, clutching his right hand, eyes glowing, glares at the agent and snarls.

What happens next is up to the Keeper and the agents. Does Whitcher bolt? I have a mental picture of him whirling around and knocking over an 80yr old nun resembling Mother Theresa in his escape. Maybe he composes himself instead, and turns to ask the approaching cops for help; an assault charge might get him the agent's personal info...

I don't know what Whitcher is at this point, but a Serpent Man seems too obvious and a ghoul using a recently-eaten victim's likeness isn't nasty enough. Make Whitcher nasty. If you want to go all out, though, use VER\_F.

## VER\_F

The Agent(s) suddenly spot a slim, dark brown haired male in a suit, turned or walking away from them. If hailed by name, Whitcher turns around, smiling. Whitcher, aka Stephen Alzis, warmly and rather loudly greets the agents by their real names, code names, other aliases, etc., which draws odd looks from umerous passers-by.

Alzis invites the agents to check out the latest exhibit with him and his now-obvious bodyguards/associates (who have quietly surrounded the agents while they stood gaping at Alzis and losing 0/1 SAN)(agents acting as spotters from across the street, inside the museum, etc are also surprised by bodyguards and "escorted" to Alzis); the entire group, which may include another high-ranking member of the Fate, walks towards the museum entrance. "By the way," Alzis says "can any of you break a twenty? A ten and some smaller bills would do nicely."

The rest of the conversation, and the inevitable devil's bargain that follows, is up to the Keeper.

Keepers may want agents to roll for an additional 1/1d4 SAN loss as they tour the museum with Alzis & Co., due to the various comments, observations, "funny" anecdotes they tell and hints they drop.

## Fallout:

Blowing Whiter away on the street outside the Air & Space museum will attract a lot of attention, especially if he doesn't die.

Sniper positions should not be an option (how close are we to the Capitol Building and the White House?), especially due to the time constrains. Getting hold of a sniper rifle in time for the rendezvous should be impossible anyway, if the Keeper pushes the agents hard enough.

Big bangs will have law enforcement reacting to "terrorist attacks" in the nation's capital.

An A-Cell friendly has observed the entire scene outside the museum, and made a report.

Agents may be more suspicious than usual of A-Cell from now on, and A-Cell may no longer consider the agents reliable after their actions, especially if they specifically defied or ignored orders from A-Cell. "Do not trust" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The Keeper may have the leather scrap, the \$10 Reagan clown bill, and the note go missing at the end of the rendezvous/scenario. Any photos of the items, forensic and lab info, data dumps, etc will remain, but the original items, including the manila envelopes and stamps, are never seen again. Or maybe the items change in some way. Maybe the messages are different...