

Dark Fly
by Glen Jackson

Where to begin? I'm not even sure why I'm trying to begin at all. Well, I suppose I still have faith that humans can make it through this evolutionary test.

As I look to the pallid and gaunt faces of our people, living in underground tunnels and scraping out an existence on dehydrated rations, I sometimes think about what could have happened differently to prevent all of this. But the planet we live on had greater plans for the creatures that inhabited her. The time that I have left would be better spent passing on what I learned about how this all started. Maybe that knowledge will help your and future generations to work back out of the ground, and live on the surface again.

I'm not sure how the *Musca obscura* got here or how long they had been around, but when man and the Dark Fly came together there was an explosive reaction. Unfortunately for us, and almost every other creature on Earth, the flies had the upper hand in any conflict. The first contact came with a man who was camping on his own in the Northwest Territories.

He said the mosquitoes and black flies were as bad as usual for that time of the summer. Eventually, one of the casualties of his swinging hand was a species of fly that had never been discovered before. On the second day of his trip he headed out to his fishing spot and found even more flies buzzing around. He dismissed it as being caused by fish guts that he had accidentally left on the shore and scolded himself for having been so careless in potentially attracting bears. He tried to continue fishing but the flies were so bad that he had to change his location after killing many more. It was the following morning that he realized something strange was going on. He awoke in the early dawn to the sounds of buzzing outside his tent. He opened up the flap and saw the silhouettes of what seemed like thousands of flies all around his camp. He got out and tried to make his way back to the lake, but he found the flies to be a stifling force against him. He saw that the whole area was infested with them so he tried as best he could to quickly pack his equipment into his truck. They were so bad that he ended up just throwing his tent and other materials in the truck. He put his wipers on full and made his way out of the campsite and back towards civilization. It was the strangest thing he had ever seen, and luckily he had the sense to stop at the Game Warden's offices to report what had happened. Another bit of good sense combined with luck was that the man on duty didn't dismiss the fly infestation as being unworthy of a report. Especially after the camper told him that he had killed several more of the flies inside his vehicle while on the road.

The warden officer went out to collect some of the flies to send to the lab and they found that while they had been in the office the camper's truck interior had become populated with more of the flies. The warden captured a good number of live flies in jars, along with some of the dead ones, got more information from the camper, and then sent it all along to the labs where I worked. It's unfortunate that the warden didn't try to impound that truck though, because when those flies got back to a populated area our real troubles began.

I came in Monday morning to find the report and samples waiting on my desk for examination. The report sounded strange enough, but I certainly wasn't concerned about

things at this point. I mean, why would I have had reason to, based on only one report of an outbreak of flies ruining a man's camping trip?

It was a quiet day so I set to work studying the report and setting up the samples in my laboratory. We had procedures for investigating anything involving biological samples and I followed them that day, if maybe a little too loosely. I first tried to identify the flies but found that, although they were very similar in appearance to the horse fly, they were definitely not the same. I searched through all known species of fly and found that this one was new. It shared many physical similarities with the common housefly except that it was much larger, almost double the size, and was pure black with a black shaded wing. I knew from the reports that it had fed on carrion, so it appeared to be in the same family as the housefly, Muscidae.

Next, I examined the dead flies and found that each of them was not only squashed, most likely by the camper, but that their lower abdomen had been split open somehow. It appeared to have occurred after they were dead but I wasn't sure, and the condition was virtually identical on each of the flies. Next I turned my attention to one of the dozen or so live samples that I had. I found it surprising that all of the samples had survived for a day in the biological transportation packaging. They all seemed active and healthy. I glued one to a pinhead and clamped it down to be my first sacrifice, studying all of its physical characteristics using magnifying glasses, and making notes along the way. I'm a little ashamed to admit that it was somewhat exciting to know I had likely found a new species, and thoughts of a fly bearing my moniker began to play around in my head. Once I was finished studying this foreign specimen I used a delicate scalpel to incise the fly down the center, and that was when I became very concerned about these airborne insects.

What seemed like a fine greenish black mist suddenly burst forth from the fly in all directions, covering the lab table with fine spherical beads. The front of my lab coat, as well as the visor covering my face, were covered with even more of the beads and I immediately became concerned about contamination. I had sealed off the lab, as was the standard protocol when dealing with biological samples, but I had foregone the cumbersome body gear. I scrambled to bag my wardrobe and shower off inside the lab before returning a short time later, wearing the full body gear of course, and continued with my work. I found that my fly specimen now had the same opening in the body that the other flies had had. Closely examining some of the spheres that had been sprayed out of the fly showed that in the time I had taken to turn my attention to them again, they had grown significantly. There seemed to be hundreds of them on and around the table. As I monitored them over the next little while I realized that inside each of the beads was a rapidly developing larva. This fit with the camper's report and explained how the flies just seemed to keep increasing in numbers. I checked on the sealed bag that contained the clothing and lab coat that I had been wearing and found that those larvae were also expanding at the same rate. Flies breeding that easily were truly a remarkable finding.

Despite all of the other similarities to the housefly, not having to lay eggs in manure or carrion was a glaring difference in the species. It was only about five hours later that I had a lab filled with about a hundred flies, and the sealed bag of clothing contained a few dozen more. The maturation phase had somehow taken less than six hours, whereas most flies took many days to reach maturity. Also, the pupa stage of development seemed to be skipped over by the Dark Fly.

Curiously, as the flies became active adults the first thing they did was travel to the parent, if they were able to, amongst their siblings. I wasn't sure what they were doing until I examined them closer and realized they were actually eating their deceased parent still stuck to the pinhead. It was first come first served and once the parent was no longer a food source all the flies, including newly formed adults, ignored it. I would have smiled thinking about how similar that was to human teenagers but I was far too confused by the behavior.

This thought was disturbed though when I suddenly pictured people everywhere using fly swatters on these newly found insects, and realized that this was potentially an emergency situation. I retrieved a fine mesh net, captured all of the flies I could, and sealed them in storage containers. Next I called in my superior, and a few hours later he witnessed the way these flies reproduced first hand. He agreed that this would be a serious problem if they came into contact with heavily populated areas, and so we whipped off a report with the evidence I had gathered thus far and it was sent to top Ministry of Environment officials. Having done our job in alerting people to the problem, I returned to studying the flies to see what else I could learn about them that might help us control an outbreak.

I still hadn't seen a fly die of natural causes, even after a full week, but I didn't know if that was a good sign or not. I used more of my live samples to test different ways of exterminating the flies to see which was the most effective. Any form of physical death, such as crushing or swatting, resulted in well over 100 offspring being scattered in the immediate area. I tried killing one with an insecticide and that's when my hope really faded. The parent fly died as any other species of fly would, but within fifteen minutes the abdomen of the fly ruptured and dozens of the spheres seeped out. None of the offspring were harmed from the insecticide while in their birth sanctuaries. Fewer than when the parent fly was impacted were spawned, but still enough to mean that spraying to remove the flies would likely fail miserably.

Not only did the flies release many eggs when killed, but all of the eggs that I monitored in the lab succeeded in making it to an adult. Of course, without predators that wasn't statistically impossible, but it was still better than all other species of flies that I had data on.

I used a few of the flies to determine what they would eat, and found that they had the same diet as the typical house fly; excrement and decomposing carcasses were both eaten by the flies. Though, they didn't seem to consume very much before stopping.

It was around this time that I received a call from the Ministry, asking if I had any suggestions for how to address this new species of fly. It was being dubbed the Dark Fly for the time being. Partly for its color, and partly for the outlook Humans had at staving off the threat this insect posed. I informed them of all of my findings up to that point: We had a fly that would thrive if exposed to spraying of insecticides, and who would thrive even more when coming into contact with humans who would likely try to exterminate them; the flies didn't seem to need much food to survive; and finally, that their life cycle, while longer than ten days, was still to be determined. A fact that, I informed them, might work in our favour. I was thanked for the information and asked to keep them up to date on any new findings while they decided what to do.

Everything had gone pretty well for humanity up to that point. We'd had a few lucky breaks with things, but everyone pretty much did their job, and the proper

procedures had been followed. That was about the time that word of the fly infestation hitting the camper's hometown of Sudbury, Ontario made the news. In the week that he'd been back, the flies had continued to multiply despite people's best efforts to get rid of them. It got to the point where people wouldn't even go outdoors. Those that had not been able to keep the flies out of their households had a growing problem trying to remove them. Even the exceptionally clean people who tried to get rid of all of the larvae in their house failed. They were able to grow on practically any surface they stuck to, and there were just too many to keep track of. People didn't seem to understand that if they let the one or two flies alone that were flying in their house it wouldn't have been an immediate problem. They just had to capture them and free them back outside. However, my own research had uncovered that we were going to be in trouble no matter how smart people were about it.

Before long the flies had piggybacked with people leaving the infested town to neighboring areas, and their territory spread rapidly. To make matters worse, many of the towns sprayed whatever insecticides they had in storage to try to kill off the Dark Flies. Within only a few days of the fly outbreak in the camper's town, we had a widespread problem that had become too big to contain.

Over the next week the Ministry got the word out to people that killing these flies made the problem unmanageable, and that spraying to kill the flies would also make things worse. Unfortunately, most of the news stations in North America didn't even cover the story since no deaths had resulted from the flies yet. It was merely a time filler story for smaller market news programs.

Meanwhile, I had found that some of the fly samples had begun to die on their own, something I had eagerly been waiting for. It had been about twelve days since they had first been packaged up by the Game Warden, so that set an approximate minimum mark for the lifecycle of the Dark Fly. Interestingly enough, each of the flies that had died was among those that had been fed about one day prior. I had been video recording all activity with the samples in the lab, and watched the death of the flies very closely. After almost four hours there were still no greenish black spheres, and no rupturing of the bodies. Just as my hopes began to rise, small fissures in the flies appeared and out slipped newly formed Dark Flies. In one case that I was watching they successfully pulled out of the parent body and buzzed around the enclosure within a short time. I waited once again. Hoping. A few more flies made their way out, looking small and weak. Finally, a fourth young fly tried to follow but seemed too weak to escape from the adult's body, and eventually it stopped moving. Things were looking up, since the flies that had died of natural causes spawned less than a third the number of babies than ones that had died from chemicals. I still had no explanation of why that was the case though.

The Ministry let me know that their scientists were working on several plans to get rid of the flies, and that when the proposals were ready they would want me to review the plans to decide on the best course of action. I agreed of course, but I was already starting to wonder if it would even be possible to do away with them at all.

I think it was the following day that I saw more disturbing evidence about the flies. It turned out that the lake that the camper had been fishing had suddenly had a huge increase in the number of dead fish and birds. Apparently a park ranger had happened the lake and noticed all of the flies in the area. He pulled up to look around and saw what he estimated to be hundreds of fish floating atop the lake. There were dead birds near the

shoreline as well. The pictures he'd taken, along with some of the fish and birds packed in ice, were on my desk waiting for me that morning. By being stuck in the middle of it, I had suddenly become the expert on these mysterious flies.

It didn't take long to discover that the cause of death for the fish was that their stomachs and outer skin had been ruptured, and that the hundreds of fly larvae in the stomach was clearly the impetus for the rupture. The bird's cause of death seemed to differ slightly, but it seemed that they had suffocated on hundreds of growing larvae that had no doubt been released in their mouths as they captured and ate the large flies. Apparently humans were not the only species that could cause a population explosion in the flies. I guessed the same outcome would be found with frogs or any other creature that might live off flies and, regardless, it was reason enough for increased concern.

These flies seemed to have the perfect genetic makeup to thrive. Death merely resulted in an increase in their numbers. I realized that the Dark Fly, or whatever people wanted to call it, was going to take a miracle to overcome.

Over the next week the Dark Fly population spread further to the South, and even into some metropolitan areas. It was becoming clear to everyone that this problem wasn't going to just go away, and so the media all over North America began to give the problem the airtime it warranted. I had discovered a few additional facts about the flies as well. It turns out that they only need to eat once in their lifetime in order to enable their reproduction capabilities. Not only that but some of my sample flies were *still* alive and going strong, and this was heading into the fourth week for them. Almost all of the flies that were still alive, were ones that I had not fed in the lab. Even though I couldn't be sure if they had eaten before I was given the samples, it looked like the flies number one priority was to get a meal in order to reproduce, and then once that was accomplished they would kick off not too long after. It was puzzling how they could survive on so little food and create so many successful offspring with so little nourishment. Despite the fact that they were going to threaten our existence, the scientist in me had to admire their wonderful genetic blueprints. They were perfectly designed to succeed as a species, or so I thought.

It was at this time that the Ministry presented me with the plans that their scientists had formulated to address the rapidly growing Dark Fly population. There were a variety of suggestions put forth, some of which I still remember. One was to develop a spray so strong that it would obliterate the flies and their offspring no matter what. Of course the problem with that idea was that using a chemical so toxic would probably kill all life, not just the flies. Another plan was to use giant nets to scoop up the flies and then trap them in a solid steel or concrete vault with no food or air in order to wipe them out. The problem with that plan was that even if it was possible to catch most of the flies this way, which it surely wasn't, the facility to dispose of them would take too much time to prepare if it was going to be guaranteed to work. Those were the most notable ideas anyhow. There were other minor solutions like trying to educate the masses on how to best deal with the flies, but nothing substantial had been devised.

I started seeing reports on the news of many groups of people making escape plans that included inhabiting islands off the mainland of North America, living on barges that avoided land except when supplies was needed, moving to other continents, or simply heading as far away from other people as possible. That was when I realized it was becoming a matter of survival and nothing more. I had a duty to try to develop a

plan that might save us from the spread of the flies, but in the back of my mind I was already working out my own escape plan for my people. You people.

As towns and cities were invaded at an ever-increasing rate, I worked on a chemical that would kill the Dark Flies, but also form a nearly impenetrable shell on whatever it touched. Impenetrable for a fly at least. The plan was to make the shell last as close to sixty days as I could make it. Seeing as the last of my fly samples were finally dying around thirty days, I thought that doubling that amount would be prudent. The theory behind this idea was that the parent fly would be killed, setting into effect the spawning of its offspring. They would be stuck within the fly though, and when they matured they would be stuck in the shell for their entire life cycle and, since they would be unable to feed, they would not be able to breed. It was unlikely something could live within a cramped, semi-toxic, solid coating for one day, let alone sixty, but the idea was to make it work no matter what. The downside to the plan was that it would bring sprayed cities to a standstill, and that any flies indoors would be immune. For that I considered a door-to-door crew that would trap all flies to be exterminated later. It seemed like a nearly impossible plan to execute, but its chances of success were good, and the drawbacks were few, except for the inconvenience for people who would have to be evacuated somehow.

I submitted my plan to the Ministry, and only one day later I heard back from them saying that they wanted to try it as soon as I had my recipe tested and ready to go. I worked day and night for the next few days, knowing that if the flies reached a major metropolitan area it would be impossible to execute. While I ran test cycles on newly acquired Dark Flies, I formulated a plan for survival in the event of the worst-case happening. I talked with other colleagues and friends that I trusted and we came up with a survival plan. Many of the people dropped what they were doing in everyday life and mobilized to make it a reality. I didn't take the lack of faith in my work personally though; at this point even I was doubtful we had a chance.

Regardless, I gave all of my effort to the cause of stopping the Dark Fly as their steady march continued on unabated. People began to panic, and that meant that they were taking matters into their own hands. Perhaps the Ministry was at fault for not keeping people up to date with what we were working on. We were all so goal oriented at the time that public relations were neglected.

Many towns authorized insecticide spraying despite the warnings we had issued earlier. It seemed like each one of them seemed to celebrate as soon as the spraying was done and no flies were to be seen. The flies would then overrun these towns in a matter of hours. In some extreme cases there were reports that no sunlight was getting through the wall of flies.

I had been fine-tuning my insecticide for a final battery of tests when I heard that the flies had reached Toronto. Even before the completion of my first round of tests a few hours later, I was informed that Toronto was already becoming overrun. I couldn't understand how people could continue to ignore what we had told them. It was understandable that they would have a desire to get rid of the annoying bugs, but when they had been told it would only make the problem bigger they still persisted. I essentially gave up that day. My tests were successful on preliminary analysis so I sent the recipe to the Ministry for mass production, and then began focusing my attention on our group's escape efforts.

I did follow up with the Ministry a few more times but found that somehow the chain of command had broken down, and my contacts at the Ministry were now getting nowhere. My own feeling is that the politicians were too busy planning their escapes as well. But whatever the reason, the plan died in the red tape. I heard that American scientists were working on their own solutions so I sent along all of my research, hoping it might help them. Once Toronto had been infected, Buffalo and many other cities in the Northeast United States began to suffer similar fates. Not only that, but people were beginning to die. Cities came to a standstill and water and food resources became scarce. Sunlight became something that only flickered through the black clouds of flies from time to time. Plants withered and the animals that lived off man or plants eventually began to die as well. People continued to unknowingly transport the reach of the flies further and further in their panicked attempt to get away from the hideous fate that most within cities were suffering. In the wilderness the Dark Flies had been content to eat from carcasses and dung, but the food sources in cities were abundant, in the form of garbage. Once the flies had overrun a city the garbage would pile up even higher. Occasionally, one organization or another would declare that they had created a mixture that was sure to wipe out the flies and save humanity, but all of these spraying attempts failed. The fly populations continued to grow and spread.

As you know, by the time the majority of North America had been overrun, we were nestled into our underground sanctuary away from the rest of civilization. Through satellite feeds we discovered that the huge South American cities had been consumed like twigs in a roaring fire. The fly populations grew so large that they were forced to spread their territory and even reach those remote places that some people had hoped to be safe. Eventually word came that before the shipping and flight lines had been quarantined the problem had spread to Europe. From there, Africa and Asia fell quickly. Eventually all of the television and radio feeds went quiet except for those in Australia and New Zealand. There was still concern that the flies might reach their continent through the Pacific islands nearby, but so far they have held up fine with no reports of the Dark Flies.

Some people had successfully launched barges with years of food stores on hand, and the means to transform huge amounts of sea water to fresh water. Some people moved to the Arctic regions hoping the flies would be unable to follow, but they were wrong. Of those that tried to stay, it is almost assured they all perished.

We didn't have a long time to prepare this colony, but we have survived for almost a decade, living off ration stores, finding new food sources under the ground, as well as using hydroponics to grow our own food. To survive, we discarded our old traditions of a garbage producing culture, and now nothing goes to waste. Not everything died when the sun was blocked out, and with less food available, the flies are exhausting their food supplies everywhere. Perhaps that is the one flaw with their species. Their population growth was explosive when they came into contact with a species such as man, but in quickly wiping out most land life only a finite amount of food was available. Much like humans, their overpopulation will eventually lead to their ruination. Eventually, when everything they can eat is gone and the surface is nothing more than a barren, lifeless wasteland, you will be able to return to the surface and begin again. What happened to humans was a result of our nature, combined with unfortunate circumstances. The fly outbreak may very well have saved our species, or it may have just bought us time. This planet's human population was fast approaching an

unmanageable size when the flies first encountered that camper in the North West Territories.

There will be a new animal landscape one day, but if we live to see it I hope that somehow we don't repeat the mistakes of our forefathers. We have shown that humans can live without animal husbandry or hunting being necessary and, together, we have changed our nature to simpler means for survival. I only hope that this hasn't been merely a display of our adaptability. I pray that when people are free to live off the land again that the opportunities do not corrupt them. From what we have heard of their broadcasts, the people of Australia and New Zealand were able to change into an almost waste free society; and that gives me hope.

I'm tired now and I've told you all that I know of what happened, so do not forget this. Pass on to your children all that you have learned to survive, and the mistakes that humans have made. Better than that, lead by example.

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