



0. INVESTIGATING the EBOLA VIRUS - Story Preface

1. A TEACHER in YAMBUKU GETS SICK

2. A DEADLY, UNKNOWN DISEASE

3. DISCOVERING the EBOLA VIRUS

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8. FUTURE of EBOLA

By the time Peter Piot and his colleagues arrive in Yambuku, Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), to investigate a new virus, many people have died of the disease. This image, from the CDC's Public Health Library, depicts a local health-care worker "incinerating materials used in the treatment of Ebola patients at a Yambuku hospital in 1976."

Two weeks after first seeing the strange, wormlike virus under an electron microscope in Antwerp, Peter Piot arrives in Kinshasa. Despite the alarming news about the deadly power of this new virus, he is excited about his pending investigation.

He, and others like him who have come to Africa to hunt-down the epidemic's cause, are known as "Disease Cowboys."

It is clear this new virus can cause a pandemic. There is not much beyond that sobering fact, however, that Piot and his colleagues understand. To learn more, they must travel to the places where people are dying.

Yambuku is ground zero. The village, located in an equatorial rainforest, is around 620 miles (1,000 kilometers) north of Kinshasa. To reach the remote village, Piot and his colleagues fly on a C-130 cargo plane loaded with supplies, including a Landrover.

Landing in Bumba, a port on the Congo River, Piot immediately senses the fear people have of the mysterious illness. The pilot keeps his engines running while the medical investigators unload their gear:

As they left they shouted "Adieu." In French, people say "Au Revoir" to say "See you again," but when they say "Adieu" - well, that's like saying, "We'll never see you again."

Undaunted, Piot begins his work.

I wasn't scared. The excitement of discovery and wanting to stop the epidemic was driving everything. We heard far more people were dying from the disease than we originally thought and we wanted to get to work.

After traveling about 75 miles (120 kilometers) from Bumba, Peter and his colleagues reach Yambuku and its Catholic mission.

The area was beautiful. The mission was surrounded by lush rainforest and the earth was red - the nature was incredibly rich but the people were so poor.

Arriving at the mission, Piot sees a sign, written in Lingala (the local language), which warns people not to go further:

Please stop, anybody who crosses here may die.

Behind the sign, in a self-quarantined mission guesthouse, are a group of nuns and a priest. Four of their colleagues have already died. Those still alive think they will also die.

Disregarding the sign, Piot tells the mission personnel that he and his team are there to help. It is their hope to find out what is causing the illness, and to stop its spread. To do that, they must ask the villagers three essential questions:

- How did this epidemic evolve?
- From where did the infected people come?

- Who is getting infected?

Getting answers to these questions will help the team to unravel the mysterious puzzle of this disease. With gathered information, they can:

- Map-out where the infections originate and where they end-up;
- Determine whether young or old, males or females are mostly impacted;
- Discover whether there is anything in common between the people who are getting sick.

What they learn helps them to better understand the virus which, at this point, is still not named.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/INVESTIGATING-the-EBOLA-VIRUS-Ebola-Past-Present-and-Future>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/INVESTIGATING-the-EBOLA-VIRUS-Ebola-Past-Present-and-Future>

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