

A mostly true story about a swine flu shot, with references to 3 ABC television shows and 1 Will Smith movie

by Josh Spilker

Yellow tape marks a walkway that was previously unknown. Caution, caution. Lounge turned waiting room for a ballroom turned infirmary. An entrance, an exit, caution, caution. The line is of amusement park ride length. But no roller coaster at the end, only an antidote to our fears.

“You're under 45, right?” it's a lady with an institutional name badge, but a pleasant and fairly young lady with long brown straight hair, probably a waitress in her former life before she started waiting on patients, turning in her servers' tray for fearmongering, guiding us sheep to a good or an evil, the difference I would never know.

Her attitude is cheery, merry even for a mass inoculation of unknown substance. Perhaps she knows more than I do or maybe she had been on the consultation team for the movie *I Am Legend* and now is participating in the reality TV version. I see no cameras, other than the usual surveillance ones.

“Under 45,” I say and take a clipboard from the woman.

“Are you allergic to eggs?” one question on the form reads.

No, I'm not, but maybe I should be. If I were allergic to eggs would I possess the specialized trait to resist whatever injection they are trying to give me? Am I supposed to be wary of this process, not sure if I am a man of reason or a man of faith, but sure that trusting this inoculation takes equal parts of both? I think of the ABC TV show, *Lost*. The fundamental question is, of course, am I John Locke or Jack Shepherd?

I play Tower Madness on my iPod Touch. I protect sheep from aliens with hastily constructed missiles and guns. I remember newspaper articles from last spring, press announcements from school systems about how many children had contracted not just flu, but the dirtiest kind of flu, swine flu, the muckiest, muddiest type of flu. Bird flu did not seem as disgusting.

My game was quickly over. I lost. A Junior League-type lady waves to another Junior League lady 50 feet away. An older man with a large tanned nose clothed in a swishy windsuit speaks behind me in German to a woman next to him. Maybe to his wife. They were over 45. In front of me were two tall teenage boys sharing a set of headphones, listening maybe to Taylor Swift or Owl City or Black Eyed Peas.

I think of the recently relaunched television show *V* on ABC. It features Juliet from *Lost*. Around Thanksgiving there was an episode where the aliens swapped a shipment of common flu shots with their evil diabolical mind-controlling shots. Or something like that. That episode was stiff and poorly acted and simultaneously lacked emotional distance and resonance unlike these two boys sharing an iPod headphone set.

At one of the rounded corners of the caution tape line is a sanitary soap dispenser. Hand wash, as if that was enough to save us now. I

take some and rub it in my hands; a magic potion, an invisible shield from the coughing proletariat.

"Oh, are you okay with the nasal shot?" The woman with brown hair again. "We recommend it for all under 45."

"Yes, that's fine," I say. Caution, caution, 45 minutes and now at the front. "Please enter to the middle line, please," the woman tells me.

I'm now in the ballroom/infirmery and the middle line is the longest. A family of four sits in cheap banquet chairs. A doctor, or a man in a white lab coat stands to the side, chatting. I think of the new television show *Flashforward* on ABC. It stars Penny from *Lost*. I wonder if the doctor is part of a specialized FBI staff looking for the cause of swine flu.

Maybe there was an evil warlord walking through sports stadiums giving people swine flu. Maybe one of the former cast members from *Lost* will be in the made-for-television movie about swine flu. Maybe it's almost my turn.

"Been like this all day?" I ask to the lady monitoring the line. This is an older lady, puffier and friendlier than the woman outside. This woman is probably an administrative assistant in the health center. This task of stringing up caution tape and monitoring us sheep is a nice break for her from *Solitaire* and reading *TMZ.com*.

"No, for part of the day, there was no one here, you could walk right in this room," she says. She looks across the room at a nurse behind a card table. "Now go ahead."

Twenty feet across a tile floor in the ballroom/infirmery and I sit down in a plastic chair.

"Now," said the nurse. "Sniff once when I inject it in this nostril and

then again in the other nostril. Try and have no nasal movement for 30 minutes." I wonder if this mean sneezing. I wonder if this meant picking my nose. Before she unwrapped the nasal spray vial, I sniff and I sniff again.

"Okay here we go," the nurse says.

The vial is in my left nostril and she presses. "Sniff." I sniff. She moves to my other nostril. "Sniff again." I sniff again.

"Great, now here's a Dum Dum," she says.

I unwrap it and suck. My body takes it all in.

