

INSIDE AT THE START OF THE THE NIGHTMARE



DOUG BOCK CLARK
UNCOVERS WHAT TWO HARROWING WEEKS
TRAPPED ABOARD THE OCEAN LINER FELT LIKE—FOR UNSUSPECTING TOURISTS,

DIAMOND

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK, ONE ILL-FATED CRUISE SHIP BECAME A SYMBOL FOR THE PANIC AND CONFUSION THAT WOULD SOON ENGLUF THE GLOBE.

VOYAGE



FOR FRIGHTENED CREW MEMBERS,
EVEN FOR THE CAPTAIN HIMSELF.

OF THE

PRINCESS

1. CRUISING

They had no idea about the danger. Not as they crowded around the famous champagne waterfall. Hundreds of delighted cruise passengers watched as golden bubbly, poured atop a pyramid of 300 glasses, filled the stemware below. Then the drinks were passed out. Hand to hand to hand. Guests clinked coupes and posed for photos, making the evening feel momentous. It was their fourth night aboard the *Diamond Princess*—a floating city of a ship that had been churning south from Yokohama, Japan—and they were all still unaware of how much their journey would transform them, and even the world.

The Four Amigos, as a pair of American couples called themselves, skipped the champagne waterfall, which happens on almost every Princess Cruises excursion. The 60-something traveling companions had seen it before on their annual cruises together. They were happy to turn in early for the evening, thankful for this two-week break from their busy lives. Carl and Jeri Goldman run a mom-and-pop radio station that broadcasts local news and high school sports to a suburb of Los Angeles. Mark and Jerri Jorgensen oversee a rehabilitation center that specializes in pornography addiction in the red rocks of St. George, Utah. This year, especially, they needed the respite of the cruise. Recently, Jeri Goldman's father had died; Carl had struggled with his health. None of them had been paying much attention to the news as they flew to Japan to board the ship. When they landed in Tokyo, Carl noticed an abnormal number of people wearing face masks, but he thought little of it.

Indeed, for the first four days, there seemed to be nothing amiss as the 18-story ocean liner

600 miles north, some 11 million people were being quarantined and local hospitals were bursting with casualties. In Hong Kong, so far, the response was modest. Foreigners were being screened at the ports, schools were suspended, and several Lunar New Year events had been canceled. But as the Four Amigos toured the city and watched a light show dazzle the skyline, the throngs weren't noticeably diminished. After all, you couldn't halt *life*.

For a week more, the *Diamond Princess* cruised on. The Amigos took a memorable kayak excursion in Vietnam, among the karst monoliths of Ha Long Bay. They enjoyed street food in Taiwan. But once there, panicky headlines and more temperature guns made the virus impossible to ignore. Still, they considered themselves safe, unaware that an 80-year-old passenger—a man who had coughed through the first third of the cruise before disembarking in Hong Kong—had been admitted to a hospital, where it was discovered that he was infected with COVID-19.

When the ship was two days away from returning home to Yokohama, a typo-riddled email from a Hong Kong port agent arrived in the inboxes of cruise line personnel, alerting them to the danger that had been found: "Would kindly inform the ship related parties and do the necessary disinfection in needed. Many thanks!"

Officials at Princess Cruises say the company had learned of the infected passenger hours earlier, when they were tipped off by a news report. Before long, they received another, clearer warning, this one sent by an epidemiologist from the government of Hong Kong. But seemingly nothing was done aboard the ship that aroused the concern of most passengers, including the Four Amigos.

"ANYBODY WOULD BE SCARED FOR THEIR LIFE," SAID ONE CREW MEMBER. "WE KNEW PEOPLE WERE DYING." HE DESCRIBED COLLEAGUES JUMPING INTO SCALDING SHOWERS OR WASHING THEIR HANDS

powered south through the East China Sea. As it did, the ship's 2,666 guests luxuriated in a dozen or so different restaurants, a multitude of bars and nightclubs, four pools, a spa, a casino, and more. All the while, an army of more than a thousand crew members stood ready to gratify their every whim.

Five days into the voyage, the ship docked in Hong Kong, and as the Four Amigos disembarked, health officials scanned their foreheads for fever with thermometer guns. Apparently, a mysterious virus was scything through mainland China. At first the People's Republic had attempted to cover up the flu-like disease, but things had gotten so bad that in the industrial city of Wuhan, nearly

Cruise line officials maintain that the day after the ship received the first warning, its crew began sanitizing public areas more frequently, put out extra hand sanitizer, and switched buffet utensils more often.

Of course, such measures couldn't be expected to do much against a virus that was currently crippling China—especially on a cruise ship, an environment designed to pack people in and then entertain them with communal activities. And the virus had already had ample time to attack people's lung cells until they coughed it into the air, where it might linger in a mist for three hours. Then, if the virions weren't inhaled, they could still settle on an elevator button or a roulette

wheel and survive up to three days, waiting to hitchhike on an unsuspecting hand to an itchy nose. At this point in the cruise, the coronavirus could be anywhere and in anyone.

On what was supposed to be the cruise's final night, February 3, while the Four Amigos were enjoying a multicourse meal in the mirrored Savoy Dining Room, they all agreed that they hoped the trip would never end. Suddenly the ocean liner's intercom came to life. In his Italian-inflected English, the ship's captain told all on board about the infected passenger. Accordingly, he said, when the *Diamond Princess* reached Yokohama, everyone would need to stay on the vessel for an extra day while Japanese health officials screened them. The Jorgensens gave each other a look that said: *What does that mean for us?* But soon enough, guests went back to their surf and turf. Before long, the baked Alaska was paraded out, accompanied by marching band music and diners festively waving their napkins.

The Four Amigos soon retired, but many of the other passengers continued their evening at the Skywalkers Nightclub or took in a show at the 740-seat theater. They were still on vacation, after all. Dealing with the real world could wait.

2. Security

Growing up in claustrophobic Mumbai, India, Sonali Thakkar had been desperate to see the world. She ended up spending her early 20s ping-ponging between continents as a security patrolwoman aboard several Princess ships. The long hours she spent managing the gangway—monitoring those who boarded and disembarked—could be taxing, but she'd happily put up with a lot for the chance to earn about twice what she'd make at home.

Not long after the captain's announcement, the 24-year-old Thakkar received an urgent call ordering her to the gangway. The

ship had sped up to reach Yokohama early, and soon she was standing at the weakly illuminated gangway, squinting into the liquid dark of the harbor while the ship anchored slightly offshore.

It was freezing outside, and down here by the waterline, Thakkar could hear none of the cheer of the parties going on hundreds of feet above. Her radio crackled, announcing the approach of several small Japanese boats, which drew alongside the hulking ocean liner. Even before the captain's announcement, the crew had heard rumors of an infection, but Thakkar claimed that management told them not to worry. Now, as she counted roughly two dozen Japanese



From left: the scene in the ship's crowded atrium; ill-equipped workers tend to thousands of guests; the Four Amigos (from left, Mark and Jerri Jorgensen and Carl and Jeri Goldman).

health care workers in protective gowns and masks being helped aboard by deckhands, she began to get an inkling of how bad things might actually be.

Not long before midnight, the captain reportedly returned to the intercom, finally ending the evening's revelry, ordering everyone back to their rooms.

In the morning, the Japanese health care workers fanned out across the ship to assess the virus's spread. Passengers, including the Four Amigos, expected to disembark the following day. But when the next morning came, the captain's voice again rang out from the speakers barnacled to the walls and the ceilings. Nine passengers and one crew member had tested positive for COVID-19. All passengers were to return to their cabins, where

Thakkar was concerned about contracting the illness. But she also told herself that she was no longer the timid girl who had never left India: She was a Princess Cruises security employee, and she was going to do her duty—even if that had unexpectedly changed. Once she had guarded the passengers from the outside world; now she was protecting it from them.

3. Inside

As Hong Kongers, Yardley Wong and her husband had been aware of the outbreak before many others on the ship—and the loss of a close friend to SARS, a similar virus, 17 years earlier, primed them to take this outbreak seriously. The 40-something couple had worn masks and practiced some

Finally, around 11:30 p.m., officials arrived to take their temperature—and found no sign of fever, though it was hard to tell because the couple and the health workers barely spoke a common language. Wong and her husband went to bed thinking they were okay but were woken by a knock at 4:30 a.m. This time the figures at the door had upgraded to hazmat gear: face shields, goggles, and shoe coverings. They swabbed the Wongs' mouths. Wong then watched as her sample was inserted into a tray alongside what seemed like a hundred other vials—and she wondered what these tests meant about the virus's spread.

For the Wongs, the world shrank to a room of about 150 square feet, much of that taken up by a queen-size bed. The primary decoration was a big TV and two large mirrors hung facing each other to create the illusion of spaciousness. There were no windows, and this relatively cheap cabin was about as far from fresh air as possible: on an interior hall of a middle deck, near the laundromat. These weren't the sort of accommodations highlighted in advertisements.

Wong and her husband might have found this confinement easier to endure if they hadn't been traveling with their then six-year-old son, who was sharing their bed. To occupy him, they had the TV and an iPad, on which he played Fortnite. At first they used in-room exercise routines to burn off his energy, before passengers were eventually granted an hour each day on deck, during which time they tried to run him ragged while carefully staying six feet away from others.

But they couldn't distract their boy from the fact that the situation (*continued on page 91*)

IN HOT WATER UNTIL THEY HURT. AS THE DAYS DRAGGED ON, THE SERVICE WORKERS BEGAN TO QUESTION IF THEIR SACRIFICES WERE WORTH IT.

they would remain quarantined for two weeks by order of the Japanese government. Rather than release 3,700 potential vectors—who could infect Japan or their farther-flung homes—public health officials were transforming the *Diamond Princess* into a floating quarantine center.

Thakkar was given a mask and a new set of duties: patrolling the hallways in her naval-looking uniform. Guests would open their doors and, from their thresholds, ask what was going on. But all she could tell them was to go back inside and remain calm—she didn't know anything more herself. Of course

social distancing measures since the start of the cruise; after the captain's initial announcement, they locked themselves away in their cabin, even as many guests still roamed the ship.

While they waited anxiously for the Japanese health care workers to reach them, they ordered room service, and when it arrived, they sanitized the utensils before eating. Sometimes Wong heard the crinkle of plasticky protective gear in the hallway, and through the peephole in the door, she glimpsed blurry figures in surgical masks and gowns—though they always passed by.



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was quickly worsening. On the second day of the quarantine, the captain announced that the number of cases had doubled to 20. The following morning, February 7, there were 61. Fear stuffed the cramped room. The Wongs still hadn't heard back about the results of their tests and had to hope that no news was good news. Infected passengers, they had gleaned, were being taken off the ship. Through their peephole, the Wongs had watched neighbors be escorted down the hall with hastily packed bags by men in hazmat suits, presumably en route to Japanese hospitals.

Yardley Wong distracted herself by helping others. Using her fluency in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese, she acted as a one-woman switchboard for older passengers who didn't know how to use the internet, taking messages from family and friends via social media and then relaying them through the ship's telephone lines. She appreciated that Princess Cruises was trying to ease the situation, making the ship's usually expensive Wi-Fi available for free and offering psychological counseling over the phone. The company had already promised to refund the trip and pay for guests' journeys home. Still, passengers were growing restive, blaming the cruise line for everything from a lack of clean bedsheets to lost medications, including essentials like insulin.

Meanwhile, Japanese officials were struggling with their response. Lacking enough kits to test everyone on board, they reportedly left feverish Americans in their cabins for multiple

Thakkar decided to take the situation into her own hands. She video-called an Indian news station. **"We are requesting for help from Indian government,"** she said in accented English.

days before finally sending them to hospitals where they tested positive. Passengers were given N95 masks and alcohol wipes, but this seemed risibly inadequate, given the rapidly growing number of infections. Day five: 69. Day six: 135. Many passengers felt underinformed, left to piece together details from news reports. Some hung banners off the side of the ship—one apparent bedsheets was painted with a plea for help: "Serious lack of medicine, lack of information."

Eventually, Wong's son asked her, "Am I going to get it?"

Normally, Wong would have tried to ease his worry, but she couldn't deny reality. "If either of us gets it, we may not be able to see each other for a while," she said. Her son started crying.

Later he said, "Mama, I don't want to be here anymore. I just want to go home."

Now *she* wanted to weep. "Just a few more days," she promised him. "Just a few more days."

■ ■ ■

4. "The Passenger Is King"

From the glass-walled bridge of the *Diamond Princess*, Captain Gennaro Arma endeavored to protect the souls entrusted to him. He had brought them to harbor but not yet to safety. Arma had been with the cruise line for more than 20 years and looked like the movie-star version of a gracefully aged captain. He'd grown up on the Italian coast, enchanted by his seafaring family's stories, and landed a job as a Princess Cruises cadet not long after graduating from maritime school. He rose rapidly through the ranks, and when the *Diamond Princess* made its maiden voyage, in 2004, Arma was its senior second officer. By 2018, he was the captain.

Arma was undaunted by high-stakes challenges—in fact, he relished them. But this was unlike anything he'd faced before. And now, rather than having the absolute authority that he typically had at the helm, he was following orders from both the Japanese government and his corporate command chain. He was working, he later told me, with "no playbook, no dedicated training, no dedicated protocol." With the aid of Japanese officials and his crew, Arma was essentially trying to convert his ship into a colossal luxury hospital and oversee the logistics of food delivery, sanitization, and health care for a small town. In his daily P.A. announcements, he exhorted guests and crew alike to rise to the challenge, repeating the motto that it was only through pressure that coal became a *Diamond Princess*.

Most of the 1,045 crew members responded with enthusiasm to Arma's leadership—at least at the beginning. Kitchen staffers pivoted from restaurant service to delivering three meals a day to 1,337 cabins. Dede Samsul Fuad, a gee-whiz 28-year-old Indonesian dishwasher, worked 15-hour shifts, scraping food off plates and steaming them in an industrial dishwasher. He had heard of doctors in Wuhan falling sick after working too hard, but the motto drummed into him by supervisors had always been "The passenger is king." Fuad, Thakkar, and other members of the crew I spoke with took sincere pride in working hard during such a time of need. But it was also true that being a dishwasher or security guard on the *Diamond Princess* was a dream job that they couldn't afford to lose—as it was for the other Indians, Indonesians, Filipinos, Ukrainians, Hondurans, Venezuelans, and other citizens of 48 mostly developing nations who made up the majority of the ship's frontline staff.

Though masks and gloves were handed out, the crew had little training in dealing with a disease of this virulence. "Anybody would be scared for their life, because day by day more and more people were getting infected," said an Indian crew member who asked for anonymity,

as did other staff, afraid of retaliation from Princess Cruises. "And we knew people were dying." The Indian man described colleagues delivering food and then running back to their cabins to jump into scalding showers or wash their hands in hot water until they hurt. As the days dragged on, the service workers began to question if their sacrifices were worth it.

Another Indonesian dishwasher described watching the virus tear through the large kitchen where he worked shoulder to shoulder with some 150 people—a number that declined as fewer showed up for work. A little less than a week into the quarantine, he started feeling ill. He wasn't sure it was the coronavirus, but he decided to quarantine himself in his tiny room for 15 straight days, reasoning that if Princess Cruises couldn't protect him, he'd protect himself.

Most of the crew were housed in quarters beneath the passenger decks. There were no giant windows with sweeping ocean views, no scintillating chandeliers. Hallways with exposed piping led to small rooms packed with bunk beds. The crew could quickly tell that their home was becoming a hot spot, especially the mess hall, where more than 100 people at a time might visit the buffet. Later, a report released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention validated this fear, noting that in the early stages of the outbreak three fourths of all the infected crew members were food-service workers—employees who could easily spread the disease to other crew and passengers.

Some staffers tried to take whatever precautions they could. An Indian man told me that he ate only packaged foods—and boiled all his own drinking water in his room with an electric kettle—and avoided getting sick. But he was lucky, and some of the employees accepted getting infected as inevitable. As a CDC report would later show, not long into the quarantine the disease was infecting more crew than passengers, who were hidden away in their cabins while the staff kept working.

For government officials and corporate leaders, the question of whether it was fair—or even safe—to quarantine the passengers but not the crew was obscured by the priority to keep the ship operational. And so the poor took care of the rich, and the citizens of less powerful nations served those from more powerful nations, and the *Diamond Princess* remained a miniaturized version of the global order—because what other way could things go?

Once all the passengers had been trained to stay in their rooms, Thakkar returned to her normal post at the gangway, where her main activity was now counting the infected passengers as they were escorted off the ship. Most of them walked to waiting ambulances, but some left on stretchers. On the eighth day of quarantine, she counted 39, bringing the total to 174. A native of the tropics, Thakkar had bundled up for the northern winter, but by the end of that shift, she was shivering—and coughing. She called the ship's doctor, who ordered Thakkar to isolate herself in her windowless cabin.

Eventually, she tested negative, but her roommate was found to be positive and was taken away. Thakkar was left to worry what

her own symptoms meant. She dreamed of home and the aloo paratha her mother made. On her phone, she scrolled through headlines about the virus's dangers. Quarantines, it was becoming clear, are designed to protect only those on the outside—those on the inside have to fend for themselves.

Thakkar decided to take the situation into her own hands. She video-called an Indian news station. “We are requesting for help from Indian government,” she said in accented English, her face hidden by a surgical mask, her eyes bright with fear. She and other staff “do not want to stay in the same environment that we are, since we have found out there are coronavirus-infected people.”

Thakkar wasn't the only one desperate enough to launch this kind of modern SOS, as a fellow Indian, a cook, had already been issuing video appeals via Facebook to the prime minister of India. Fuad, the Indonesian dishwasher, who was so resolute at the start, would also later beg his government to rescue him.

In making her plea, Thakkar joined hundreds of others broadcasting from the *Diamond Princess*, some with serious messages, others using their moment in the historical spotlight to write reviews of their every meal. Indeed, many passengers essentially streamed life on the inside with their smartphones. And what wasn't being FaceTimed up close was being captured from afar by TV cameras set up onshore. Helicopters buzzed the ship and literal boatloads of journalists pulled alongside as international interest in the ordeal intensified. The world couldn't look away, because the coronavirus was now surfacing in scores of nations, and it was becoming clear that what Thakkar and the rest were suffering might provide a glimpse of what everyone would soon endure. Indeed, the number of *Diamond Princess* cases was exploding to such an extent that by day nine, when it reached 218, the ship had more cases than every nation in the world except China.

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5. The Suite View

Six decks above where Thakkar was entombed, the Goldmans and the Jorgensens watched the drama unfold from their neighboring mini suites. On their combined balcony, they had a view of men in hazmat suits marching passengers to ambulances, but it didn't seem likely to them that they'd get sick. They were the kind of seniors who hit the gym rather than putting on pounds by the pool during cruises, who always took the stairs, and who still seemed to have more vigor than many people half their age.

Certainly the quarantine was an inconvenience: They had to frantically shuffle schedules and delegate business tasks back home. But they were able to work remotely, even if they had to wake up at 2 a.m. to account for the time difference. Otherwise, the quarantine had its bright spots: Fancy meals were delivered to their door, the balcony provided ample fresh air, and thanks to being in connected quarters, their best friends could come over whenever. Both couples' suites contained two areas, each with its own TV, an essential convenience for the Goldmans, who could never agree on whether to watch sports (Carl

Goldman) or the Hallmark Channel (Jeri Goldman) and would otherwise have (some-what) jokingly bickered over the remote. Ultimately, the Americans recognized they were lucky, and they were determined to look on the bright side of things.

This mindful optimism was actually the origin of their friendship. The Goldmans and the Jorgensens had met about a decade before at a motivational life-coaching training. Together, all four now subscribed to a set of teachings that boiled down to “the law of nonresistance,” as they described it—fundamentally, making the best of the current moment. They had all used it to overcome the doldrums of middle age, and the Jorgensens taught a bit of it in their rehab center. Now, as Jerri Jorgensen said, “this is a chance for me to see if I'm ready to live what I'm teaching.”

To stay fit, they made an obstacle course and raced through their joined rooms, and they washed their laundry in the bathtub to reduce the workload on the crew. The four shared a similar, zany humor, and the husbands played goofballs to their deadpan wives to relieve everyone's anxiety with laughter. Carl even began blogging his upbeat perspective of life on the ship: “My wife's reaction to the toilet paper” being delivered “was like giving her a diamond ring.”

Unlike Thakkar, they never feared for their lives or livelihoods. They were healthy and had American passports and successful businesses, and a senator's aide had personally assured them that their situation was being monitored. But as the four watched a movie on the evening of Valentine's Day, not long before the quarantine was scheduled to end, Jerri Jorgensen became feverish. They didn't call the ship's medical center, figuring they'd see how she felt the next morning—and by then she was better.

Coincidentally, a knock rattled the door that morning. Several days earlier, the Jorgensens had been swabbed because Mark was taking immunosuppressants for a kidney transplant, putting him at increased risk for the coronavirus. Now the test results were being delivered by Japanese health workers in hazmat gear. They didn't speak English, so they thrust a piece of paper toward Mark, showing a positive result. “Wow, okay, when do you need

From the ambulance,
Jerri Jorgensen **watched**
out the window as they
drove for hours. The day
darkened. Streetlights
sharpened. She had no idea
where she was being taken.

me?” Mark said. But the masked head shook no. It was Jerri Jorgensen who was being summoned. Jerri: a mountain biking and workout fanatic, the Amigo who had always been the healthiest. On day 12, she became one of the 285 positives from the *Diamond Princess*.

Jerri wasn't given long to load a backpack. She chose not to take anything sentimental—just her passport, wallet, some toiletries, and

a book called *The God Who Weeps*. It taught an appropriate lesson for the time, she said, that “God is not this ruler with a magnifying glass, waiting for us to screw up so he can zap us, but sympathizes.”

It wasn't an option for Mark to join her, and when the time came, Jerri told him, “See ya when I see ya,” trying to lighten the moment. Then, following the law of nonresistance, she let an ambulance bear her away, telling herself: *Next adventure!* She watched out the window as they drove four hours beyond Tokyo's conurbation. The day darkened. Streetlights sharpened. She had no idea where she was being taken.

Not long after she left, the remaining Amigos found out that all of the 428 Americans aboard the “floating petri dish,” as Carl called it, were going to be evacuated by the United States government. Mark considered rejecting the offer, but eventually he and the Goldmans decided that there was no point in him waiting; he wouldn't be able to see his wife in the hospital, anyway—and he could always fly back if she took a turn for the worse. For the first time, Carl's lighthearted blog took on a dark tone. “We are shaken and devastated that we have been removed from our friend,” he wrote. “The next league of our journey may take days. I am uncertain when I will be able to post again.”

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6. The Hot Zone

Even before the world's attention fixated on the *Diamond Princess*, James Lawler knew what was coming. Lawler, an infectious disease specialist and a director at the Global Center for Health Security, had previously worked on pandemic preparedness in the White Houses of both George W. Bush and Barack Obama. As disturbing data had begun emerging from Wuhan, Lawler and numerous other infectious disease experts and senior government officials had kept up a worried discussion on a private email chain titled “Red Dawn.” On January 28, while most of the world was oblivious to the exploding pandemic, Lawler had written darkly: “Great Understatements in History...Pompeii—‘a bit of a dust storm[.]’ Hiroshima—‘a bad summer heat wave[.]’ AND Wuhan—‘just a bad flu season.’”

But what, exactly, the federal government should do about the emerging pandemic, as well as the Americans trapped in increasingly dire straits aboard the *Diamond Princess*, was unclear. By early February, the Trump administration's Coronavirus Task Force was debating responses to the spiraling catastrophe. The CDC recommended not bringing the American passengers home—the thinking being that they might carry the disease with them to the United States, which still had very few confirmed cases, and Japan could capably handle the quarantine.

But as the number of infected ship guests exploded, one American passenger, Arnold Hopland, called his friend, Republican congressman Phil Roe of Tennessee. Hopland is a doctor, and his detailed testimony of the unfolding disaster convinced Roe that action needed to be taken. At a congressional briefing about the coronavirus, Roe managed

to catch the attention of Robert Kadlec, a senior official in the Department of Health and Human Services, with promises of an “ace in the hole on this ship” who could offer “on-the-ground” intel.

An international conference call was arranged in which Roe and Hopland spoke with senior officials from the Trump administration, the CDC, and the State Department. From his room on the ship, Hopland made the case that he and other Americans could be safely repatriated and then quarantined in the United States. If they weren’t evacuated soon, he argued, they would be in danger. Congressman Roe backed Hopland up. “I’m an old country doctor,” said Roe, who once practiced as an ob-gyn, “and I was like, ‘Let’s get them off, or they’ll be infected.’” Kadlec and the others were convinced.

When the government decided to act, officials knew exactly whom to call: James Lawler, who combined years of scientific expertise with field experience in the world’s most dangerous hot zones. Along with a Harvard physician, Lawler joined up with a squad of 15 professionals from Federal Disaster Medical Assistance Teams. Officials from the United States and Japan had already been discussing disaster-evacuation scenarios in preparation for the scheduled Summer Olympics in Tokyo. Now they activated those protocols to smooth the American medical team’s arrival. On Friday, February 14—around the same time Jerri Jorgensen was developing her fever—Lawler and his team assembled in the lobby of a Yokohama hotel.

Their plan was to test all the Americans aboard the *Diamond Princess* for the coronavirus—and then, 72 hours later, fly at least the uninfected ones out on chartered cargo jets. Those who tested positive would presumably be transferred to Japanese hospitals.

On Saturday morning, Lawler and three other American physicians followed a Japanese doctor onto the *Diamond Princess*. They were wearing special helmets and breathing oxygen fed from hoses via their hip-mounted respirators—high-end machines called PAPRs that Lawler considered so important that he had made a stopover in Los Angeles to acquire them on his way to Japan. But through his face shield, he watched their street-clothed guide “screwing around with” his surgical mask, surprised that another medical professional could be so cavalier.

As they marched through the cruise ship galleries—eerie as a circus turned into a crime scene—he noted that some of the Japanese health workers were not observing quarantine protocols. While a portion were outfitted in hazmat gear, others were simply wearing blue bonnets and surgical masks. He spotted passengers moving freely around some parts of the ship and regularly clothed crew, wearing only masks, swabbing down the hallways. No wonder the disease had continued its wildfire spread. He began to worry about the Japanese health workers who were shuttling between the ship and the pier where the rest of his team waited. As soon as he disembarked, he warned the Americans to isolate themselves as best they could and to keep six feet away from the Japanese health care workers at all times.

Lawler wasn’t the only one who considered what he was seeing dangerous. Kentaro Iwata, an experienced Japanese virologist who visited the ship, later broadcast a video in which he described the quarantine as “completely inadequate in terms of infection controls.” Ultimately, at least six Japanese bureaucrats came down with the virus from the *Diamond Princess*, as did a Japanese health worker. And Japanese officials eventually acknowledged the quarantine was flawed.

On Saturday afternoon, Lawler learned that the evacuation planes previously scheduled to arrive Monday night were now going to be on the ground the next day—Sunday. His team’s ambitions to test everyone were reduced to making sure that all the passengers were healthy enough to endure long, uncomfortable flights home on cargo jets.

As the crowd pressed
onto the cargo plane, few
people heeded directions
to sit. **Instead, they fought
toward portable toilets
that had been secured to
the rear of each plane.**

The following morning, Lawler’s response team divided into three units and spread out across the ship, checking the American passengers. He estimated that he walked 10 miles that day in his heavy gear. It was around 10 p.m. when he tracked down the last American, in the crew quarters. When Lawler exited the *Diamond Princess*, his countrymen were filing off the ship in a cold rain, their luggage hauled toward a line of buses by Japanese in hazmat suits. Dozens of Americans decided to stay behind for various reasons, but those consenting to be evacuated were now headed to the airport.

As they left, Lawler rushed back to the hotel, packed, and then, together with the Harvard doctor, frantically searched the deserted streets for a taxi, worried they were delaying the evacuation flights. It was around 1 a.m. when they finally found a ride, and the cabbie earned a big tip by racing the wrong direction up one-way streets to the airport. But rather than missing their planes, the doctors found them empty, except for crew. Something was very, very wrong.

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7. The Goat Rodeo

The Amigos, reduced now to three, along with the 325 other American evacuees, were still waiting on the buses. They had spent three hours idling on the pier and then, once they drove to the airport, sat on the tarmac for two more hours. Now, as the delay extended into a sixth hour, the passengers were nearing revolt. They were exhausted. And more problematically for the largely elderly group: The buses had no bathrooms.

Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., where it was still Sunday afternoon, the fate of the way-laid evacuees was being decided. Around the time the travelers were exiting the *Diamond*

Princess, Japanese officials had blindsided their American counterparts with the news that some of the passengers boarding the buses had actually tested positive several days before. Soon many of the highest-level members of the Trump administration’s coronavirus response team, including Anthony Fauci, were arguing about what to do. Representatives from the CDC continued to fear spreading the virus. William Walters, the State Department’s chief medical officer, wanted to bring everyone home anyway. Those urging the evacuation noted that the planes had been prepared with isolation units to contain the sick.

As the debate raged, the evacuees demanded to be let off the buses to find a bathroom. Carl was breathing so hard his masked breath fogged his glasses as he strained to control his bladder. Some seniors were crying. Finally, a few were allowed to relieve themselves in bottles beside the bus or were brought to a nearby terminal.

In the end, Walters and the State Department won the argument. Kadlec, the official from Health and Human Services, supported Walters and later said that “the notion of leaving Americans behind at that stage of the operation was not acceptable.” But the CDC, still worried about airlifting the virus to America, disagreed with the decision so vehemently that it refused to be named in the news release announcing it. (Officials from the CDC did not respond to requests for comment.)

Finally, after the lengthy and complicated process of being cleared remotely by Japanese immigration, which contributed to the delay, the passengers rushed off the buses and made for the jets. From his vantage, waiting on one of the two planes, Lawler saw the incoming stampede of seniors. He had hoped for an orderly boarding, but instead the scene resembled “a goat rodeo,” he said, using a military term from his 20 years as a Navy doctor. “There was just chaos.”

As the crowd pressed onto the cargo plane, Lawler watched as sleep-deprived nonagenarians stumbled through rows of ancient airline seats, bolted into place across trip-hazard tracks that normally held pallets of supplies. Few people heeded his directions to sit. Instead, they fought toward four portable toilets that had been secured to the rear of each plane.

The holds of the toilets quickly filled; two soon reached capacity and were taped off. “The back of the plane just reeked,” said Mark. “People were throwing up back there. It was so disgusting.” Once in the air, Carl estimated, the lines for the toilets on his plane ran about 50 people long and took 30 minutes to get through. Jeri Goldman said the “smell was unreal. We had to put ourselves under a blanket, it was so bad.” Jeri eventually escaped by knocking herself out with Benadryl, and Carl was so exhausted he fell asleep without aid.

But a few hours later, Carl woke, feverish. A temperature check, and then he was marched to the back of the plane, which had been cordoned off by a large plastic sheet, duct-taped to the fuselage. There he tried to ignore the coughs of the other passengers and the stench now emanating from right beside him.

Lawler was on the second plane, separate from the Three Amigos. During the 16 hours of flying, Lawler ministered to evacuees—continuing his two-day, nearly sleepless marathon of doctoring—and was not surprised when some started showing symptoms in the air. He had already guessed that many were still incubating, but once he had his orders that everyone was coming home, he thought this was for the best, given that America would have the capacity to quarantine and treat everyone effectively.

When the flights landed in America, CDC officials took over the care of the asymptomatic passengers, such as Mark, who deplaned and would be quarantined for two weeks on military installations. Meanwhile, the patients who'd tested positive at the last minute and midflight, as well as their spouses—including the Goldmans—continued on to Omaha, Lawler's home base. When they arrived, Carl felt strong enough to deplane on foot, but he was instructed to get onto a stretcher—which made for dramatic TV footage as he was wheeled across a tarmac packed with ambulances. Emergency vehicles convoyed the sick to the University of Nebraska Medical Center, where Carl was transferred into America's only federal quarantine unit. Finally the goat rodeo could end, and Lawler and his team took command of every detail of his patients' treatments. Still, he was forging his of the improvised repatriation. "Overall, that's a remarkable feat," he said. "It was the best anyone could do, given the circumstances."

■ ■ ■

8. Homecoming

Carl Goldman was sealed away in an isolation room on a special floor of a medical building in downtown Omaha. Most of the time he communicated with his doctors through a double-paned window or a computer monitor and microphone. It was by video that he was informed that he had been officially quarantined by a second government, his own. Carl's experience of the disease was relatively mild—mostly a low fever and a cough—so he sweated and drank voluminous quantities of Gatorade while also trying to keep his life as normal as possible, keying away on his iPhone, calling into work, and resolutely updating his blog.

As Carl's quarantine extended, the number of infections worldwide boomed exponentially—into the tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, and then, with the undiagnosed included, most likely into the millions.

Soon it was announced that two elderly passengers from the *Diamond Princess* had perished from the virus. Then a third. Then a sixth. "Our vacation," Carl blogged, "has now turned beyond tragic."

A month blurred past. Carl's fever faded, though it took longer for him to overcome his cough. He paced, trying to regain his strength. Carl had long ago lost what the Four Amigos jokingly called "the Great Quarantine Race." His wife, Jeri, had finished her quarantine nearby, but never tested positive, displaying a hardiness she attributed to a mushroom powder and four-times-a-week cryotherapy sessions. Before long, she was back in California, overseeing their radio station again, though

feeling something like a leper, as her return sparked panic in their community.

The Jorgensens were also home. Jerri Jorgensen's coronavirus infection had been luckily anticlimactic, and her greatest trial at the Japanese hospital occurred when Google mistranslated *constipation* while she was trying to communicate with her doctors. Once her 14 days were up, she flew home and was soon back to slickrock mountain biking. Not long after being quarantined on the military base, Mark Jorgensen had tested positive. He was airlifted to a hospital in Utah and then, as he had no adverse symptoms, eventually released to spend the rest of his quarantine at home, where he and Jerri cohabitated while wearing masks and staying six feet apart.

By the time Carl was released, in mid-March, the World Health Organization had declared the coronavirus a global pandemic.

An investigation by the *Miami Herald* linked 74 deaths to cruise ship outbreaks while emphasizing that the true number was probably higher.

America's longest-serving quarantinee was a different man from the one who'd left for his cruise—his hair grown shaggy as that of a prophet returning from the wilderness. When he arrived home, his dogs licked him and his wife hugged him, and the physical contact alone felt like winning the lottery. That night, Jeri handed Carl the TV remote, for the first time, he claims, in their entire marriage. He selected the nightly news, filled with predictions of economic depression, and of a death toll worse than any war. It wasn't just that he'd changed; the world had changed too.

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9. The Locked Church

By the time Carl left quarantine, Jan Swartz, the president of Princess Cruises, had spent weeks sleeping with her phone at hand. Her days of crisis management began early and ended late. From 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., she commanded the company's response from a situation room in its California headquarters. Twice she flew to Japan to keep closer tabs on the operation and greet disembarking passengers. But even when the *Diamond Princess* was finally emptied in Yokohama, her trials continued.

In early March, an outbreak discovered aboard the *Grand Princess* required 2,000 passengers to be quarantined. Later that month, some 2,700 passengers who'd disembarked from another ship, the *Ruby Princess*, were asked by the Australian government to self-quarantine—at least 22 deaths would be connected to this outbreak, and a homicide detective would later be tasked with investigating whether the crew had misled authorities. (In a statement, Swartz said that Princess Cruises would cooperate, calling the inquiry "an opportunity for all to learn from this tragic event.")

Reporters for *Bloomberg Businessweek* found that executives at Princess and Holland America Line—which are run by the same parent company, Carnival Corporation—kept ships sailing despite being aware of the coronavirus danger. Roger Frizzell, the chief communications officer for Carnival Corporation, said it was "utterly absurd to believe a cruise vacation company had any foresight that COVID-19 would become a global pandemic when... governments and experts around the world had no such insight at the time." Cruise ships operated by other companies were similarly caught up in the crisis. Eventually the CDC would find evidence of at least 25 ships incubating the coronavirus, and an investigation by the *Miami Herald* would link 2,787 infections and 74 deaths to cruise ship outbreaks while emphasizing that the true number was probably higher.

In mid-March, the day after the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus a worldwide pandemic, Swartz finally called a stop to all her cruises. Critics said the decision was long overdue. "We were making the decision as quickly as we could," Swartz told me, "based on the information that we had." Within a day, all other major cruise lines also called a halt. The cruise ship era had ground to a stop, and possibly ended forever, as the industry faces unprecedented legal and financial challenges.

Before long, Yardley Wong and her husband and son were settling back into a semi-normal version of life in Hong Kong—the whole family having dodged infection after their preemptive self-imposed quarantine. Hong Kong was successfully stamping out minor flare-ups of the virus, for after discovering its first case just three days after America found its own, it had quickly introduced many of the regulations that the United States would adopt only months later—social distancing, travel restrictions, and closing public institutions and schools. The decisive actions of Hong Kong and other places—such as Taiwan, South Korea, and New Zealand—meant they had just a tiny fraction of the number of coronavirus cases in America. Their quick efforts had actually been informed by insights drawn from the *Diamond Princess*: As the ship became a self-contained floating experiment, it provided one of the world's best data sets on the virus, confirming crucial facts about how the disease spread, especially through asymptomatic carriers.

In late March, the CDC reported that out of the *Diamond Princess's* 3,711 passengers and crew, 712 had tested positive. Eleven Americans were still hospitalized in Japan. Nine people had died. These numbers were infinitesimal compared with the vast casualties steadily accumulating across the globe, but these were a few of the original germs from which a huge tragedy would grow.

Most regions were not dealing with their outbreaks as successfully as Hong Kong, especially America. "We're prepared, and we're doing a great job with it," President Trump declared on March 10. "Just stay calm. It will go away." Two days later, Lawler wrote to numerous senior government officials on the "Red Dawn" email chain and desperately urged

implementation of stronger virus-control measures, similar to what “has worked in Hong Kong.” The 80-page email chain, first quoted in the *New York Times*, documents in extraordinary detail the White House’s failure to heed numerous warnings in time to stop the virus. “We are making every misstep leaders initially made...at the outset of pandemic planning in 2006,” Lawler declared. “We have thrown 15 years of institutional learning out the window and are making decisions based on intuition,” he wrote, predicting catastrophe. During his time working for Bush and Obama, Lawler had participated in simulations of similar pandemic scenarios, and what he was seeing now, he told me, was “kind of like watching a movie that you’ve watched before.”

When the time came for Captain Arma to leave the ship, the *Diamond Princess* was

empty. Thakkar, Fuad, and many other crew members had been airlifted home by their governments—though long after the American evacuation, and only after they issued more pleas on social media.

Before bidding goodbye to the ship, Arma had stood alone on the glass-walled bridge. The normally stoic captain was emotional. He had been with the boat since it was built and had guided it safely through every storm, until this one. He felt like he understood what he called her “beautiful soul.”

One last time, he switched on the P.A., in order to speak to the ship itself. It wasn’t her fault, he told her. He promised that they would see each other again, and he wished her a good night, his words echoing in the vacant galleries and cabins. They had done their best, he and his ship—and like all good captains, he was the

last person to leave. As he strode off the gangway in his crisp uniform, he was the very image of debonair fortitude. Except his true expression was hidden behind a protective mask.

It was a mid-March night when he returned to his seaside Italian hometown. Everything was locked down; the streets were deserted. At Italy’s overwhelmed hospitals, hundreds of patients were perishing every day. Arma asked his driver to stop at an ancient basilica, which held an icon that had succored seafarers for millennia, through medieval and modern plagues. In times like this, what more could a man do? The Catholic captain bowed his head, and outside the locked church, he prayed. For himself and his family. For the souls of his former passengers. For the dead, and for those still living. ❧

DOUG BOCK CLARK is a GQ correspondent.

ROBERT PATTINSON



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only are there very, very, very well-done versions of the character which seem pretty definitive, but I was thinking that there are multiple definitive playings of the character. I was watching the making of *Batman & Robin* the other day. And even then, George Clooney was saying that he was worried about the fact that it’s sort of been done, that a lot of the ground you should cover with the character has been already covered. And that’s in ’96, ’97

Yeah, 1997.

And then there’s Christian Bale, and Ben Affleck’s one. And then I was thinking, it’s fun when more and more ground has been covered. Like, where is the gap? You’ve seen this sort of lighter version, you’ve seen a kind of jaded version, a kind of more animalistic version. And the puzzle of it becomes quite satisfying, to think: Where’s my opening? And also, do I have anything inside me which would work if I could do it? And then also, it’s a legacy part, right? I like that. There’s so few things in life where people passionately care about it before it’s even happened. You can almost feel that pushback of anticipation, and so it kind of energizes you a little bit. It’s different from when you’re doing a part and there’s a possibility that no one will even see it. Right? In some ways it’s, I don’t know... It makes you a little kind of spicy. [laughs]

Hello? Hello? [Phone disconnects. Pattinson calls back.] What happened? My phone died on me. What were you saying?

You were talking about fear. You were gearing up to say something I was excited about regarding terror and Batman, but now I’ve lost the thread.

My, um, my publicist always calls me up after an interview, and she’s like, “Is there anything, like, is there any kind of fires you set now? What do I have to fix for you now?” And I’m like, “I don’t even remember anything I said.”

■ ■ ■

A FEW DAYS LATER, Pattinson decides to cook for me. Or cook in front of me, anyway. FaceTiming, we agreed, was hard, exhausting. We were a little sick of looking at each other. But what can two men do together when they’re on different continents, in different time zones? Pattinson thought: cooking. He had notions of *Top Chef*, of us photographing our respective refrigerators and then battling it out. (Neither of us has really seen *Top Chef*.) But then he looked in his refrigerator, and “the ingredients that were here are just so totally independent of each other. There’s no way to put them together.” So he went to the corner store, and now here he is, with a plan.

I wish I could tell you whether what I’m about to describe here is a bit, or a piece of performance art, or is in fact sincere—even now, I don’t totally know. I think parts of it are real and parts of it can’t be real. “He’s not mean,” Claire Denis says about Pattinson. “But he’s always trying to escape a little. He doesn’t want you to put your claws too deep in him. Sometimes I forget, and I’ll send him a text with something a little personal. And he will always answer: *hahahaha*. ‘This is the limit, Claire.’ You know?”

I know.

Anyway, the story Pattinson tells to preface what he is about to do is roughly this:

Last year, he says, he had a business idea. What if, he said to himself, “pasta really had the same kind of fast-food credentials as burgers and pizzas? I was trying to figure out how to capitalize in this area of the market, and I was trying to think: *How do you make a pasta which you can hold in your hand?*”

He says he went so far as to design a prototype that involved the use of a panini press, and then, he says, he went even further, setting up a meeting with Los Angeles restaurant royalty Lele Massimini, the cofounder of Sugarfish and proprietor of the Santa Monica pasta restaurant Uovo. “And I told him my business plan,” Pattinson recalls, “and his facial expression didn’t even change afterwards. Let alone acknowledge what my plan was. There was absolutely no sign of anything from him, literally. And so it kind of put me off a little bit.” (Massimini says: “It’s 100 percent true, everything he told you.”)

Nevertheless, Pattinson says, he conceived of a brand name for his product, a soft little moniker that kind of summed up what he thought his pasta creation looked like: *Piccolini Cuscino*. Little Pillow. He thought he’d give the product another go, with me now: “Maybe if I say it in GQ, maybe, like, a partner will just come along.”

So he now takes hold of the bag that he’s brought from the corner store, out of which he produces the following:

One (1) giant, filthy, dust-covered box of cornflakes. (“I went to the shop, and they didn’t sell breadcrumbs. I’m like, ‘Oh, fuck it! I’m just getting cornflakes. That’s basically the same shit.’”)

One (1) incredibly large novelty lighter. (“I always liked the idea of doing a little flambé, like the brand name, with kind of burnt ends at the top.”)

Nine (9) packs of presliced cheese. (“I got, like, nine packs of presliced cheese.”)

Sauce. (Like a tomato sauce? “Just any sauce.”)

He puts on latex gloves. He pulls out some sugar and some aluminum foil and makes a bed, a kind of hollowed-out sphere, with the foil. He holds up a box of penne pasta that he had in the house. “All right,” Pattinson says. “So obviously, first things first, you gotta microwave the pasta.”

I watch as he pours dry penne into a cereal bowl, covers it with water, and places it in the microwave for eight minutes. He says using penne is already new territory for him.