

The Hellbend Investigation

In the midst of the destruction, Hunt Electrodynamics fell under new ownership and changed. Hellbend was left behind, crippled. The firm changed its name to Hunt Electronics and shifted its attentions to the east coast, and focused on contracts with NASA and the Pentagon.

Without the leadership of Hunt, who lived and worked in Hellbend, the town dried up like the earth in Death Valley. People left, schools closed, things fell apart.

Decades later, the town is nearly dead. Only eighty-two people call the crumbling remains of Hellbend home, and those few don't look to the future. They get by on what they can, selling gas and goods to tourists on the way to the Death Valley National Park and biding their time. In another few years, Hellbend will die a natural death, shriveling up in the 110-degree (43 C) summer heat, leaving behind a skeleton of ruined buildings as a monument to a better time.

But in the last month, something else has worn away at the town, something decidedly unnatural. If the murder rate in Hellbend continues, it'll die a lot faster than a few years, and a lot more violently than just another victim of some dead industry.

Someone or something is killing the residents of Hellbend, California. No one knows who or what it is.

Future/Perfect, Part 1 assumes that the players are special agents from the Bakersfield office of the FBI. They have been assigned the case following the second murder of a resident of Hellbend. Hellbend is inside Death Valley National Park, which is owned by the federal government. That gives the FBI jurisdiction if it wants it.

The first death occurred on March 5 on the outskirts of the town. Clifford Potter, a 53-year-old white male, was found mutilated less than four hundred yards from the remains of the ruins of the old Hunt Electrodynamics plant. Evidence was scant; he lay near the Bobcat tractor he had rented, which was splashed with blood. After a cursory investigation by Inyo County Deputy Lucas Androzy, the coroner ruled the death a bizarre accident.

The second victim, Lucille Mayer, a 36-year-old white female, was reported missing from Hellbend on the night of April 24. Her body was discovered by Deputy Androzy on May 8 when he was drawn into the desert by a gathering of buzzards. The physical evidence—what there is of it—was consistent with the marks on Potter's body: violent blunt and cutting trauma.

That was too much for coincidence. The coroner ruled Mayer's death a possible homicide, and now called Potter's death as a possible homicide, too.

Since both deaths were on U.S. government land, the Inyo County Sheriff's Office contacted the FBI office in Bakersfield, which covers Inyo County. He asked if they wanted to investigate, and meant to ask for help should they decline to take the lead.

Somewhat to the sheriff's surprise, the FBI wanted the case.

Jurisdiction

Who are the player characters investigating this case?

The short answer is, it's up to you. *Future/Perfect*, Part 1 assumes the case is investigated by FBI agents sent from Bakersfield. But the FBI is unlikely to send more than one or two people for this kind of investigation, so additional Agents could come from other agencies. Or you could skip the FBI altogether.

The Agents

Other than the FBI, the most likely investigators would be some mixture of:

- » Special agents from the National Parks Service.
- » Special agents from California's Bureau of Investigation.
- » Deputies from the Inyo County Sheriff's Office.

Hellbend has no police force of its own. Crimes there are usually handled by the Inyo County Sheriff's Office, which keeps a two-deputy station at Furnace Creek, about 10 miles southeast. The sheriff's office rarely handles this kind of "whodunnit" homicide investigation, so they would likely reach out to the California Bureau of Investigation for aid if the FBI declined the case. The sheriff's office would then assign one or two deputies with local knowledge to assist the lead investigators.

The California Bureau of Investigation (CBI) sometimes provides special agents to assist county and local authorities with especially difficult cases. CBI agents more often investigate drug and corruption cases than murders, but they're veteran detectives capable of handling any cases. One or two CBI detectives might come from the Fresno Regional Office's Unsolved Violent Crime Team to lead the investigation or, if requested, to assist FBI agents.

Hellbend is inside Death Valley National Park. The National Parks Service sometimes sends highly-trained special agents to work with local cops enforcing drug laws and investigating abductions and other violent crimes in national parks, so one might be sent to help with the Hellbend case.



These are the likeliest professions for Agents assigned to the Hellbend investigation.

ANTHROPOLOGIST OR HISTORIAN: A consultant with the FBI or National Parks Service brought in for expert knowledge of Death Valley.

COMPUTER SCIENTIST OR ENGINEER: A consultant with the FBI or CBI brought in after the Agents discover unusual technology in Hellbend.

FEDERAL AGENT: An FBI special agent from the Criminal Investigative Division, Bakersfield resident agency. Or a federal agent could be a special agent of the National Parks Service, Investigative Services Branch. In that case, use the Outdoorsman bonus skill-point package.

PHYSICIAN: An FBI or CBI forensic pathologist brought in to examine the remains. Use the Criminalist or Police Officer bonus skill-point package.

POLICE OFFICER: A special agent with the California Bureau of Investigation's Fresno Regional Office, on the Unsolved Violent Crime Team. Use the Criminalist, Interrogator, or Police Officer (for a career cop) bonus skill-point package.

SCIENTIST: An FBI forensic examiner specializing in biology and DNA analysis.

SPECIAL OPERATOR: A former Army Ranger who has hired on as an FBI special agent. Use the Criminalist or Police Officer bonus skill-point package.

Bakersfield FBI

The Bakersfield FBI office ("resident agency" in FBI lingo) is located at 4550 California Ave. #450, Bakersfield, CA 93309. The nearly two dozen agents in Bakersfield report to the much larger FBI field office in Sacramento. They usually deal with drug trafficking, bank robberies, and white-collar crimes. Homicides are typically handled by local, county, or state police. Kidnappings and interstate violent crimes are relatively rare.

The Hellbend case is different, and Bakersfield is the closest FBI office.

Bakersfield is confident that someone is murdering people in and around Hellbend. And its chief wants it solved.

Assistant Special Agent in Charge (ASAC) Kevin Slotin runs the Bakersfield resident agency. The Hellbend case smells like a big investigation. It's the first significant murder case the Bakersfield office has handled in years. He wants it solved while he's around to share the credit. Slotin has ambitions beyond Bakersfield.

ASAC Slotin will keep close tabs on the case. The Sacramento office is also watching closely, ready to step in if they feel the case has bogged down. Slotin absolutely does not want that to happen.

The Agents from Bakersfield are on a short leash. They must keep their i's dotted and their t's crossed, or face swift punishment or even replacement. This may have terrible repercussions for more than their careers.

The director of the Sacramento FBI office is Special Agent in Charge Michael Turk, a skilled investigator known for his long memory and his ability to recall, names, dates and personal histories in seconds. ASAC Slotin lives in particular fear of Turk, and will do anything to appease him.

If, God forbid, the investigation into Hellbend goes south badly enough to generate media coverage, the Sacramento field office will step in with both feet. The Agents, and more specifically Delta Green, don't want that to happen. Special Agent in Charge Turk is a large and looming threat to the security and secrecy of Delta Green.

Are the Agents DG?

This is a question the Handler needs to determine before the adventure begins. There are four options:

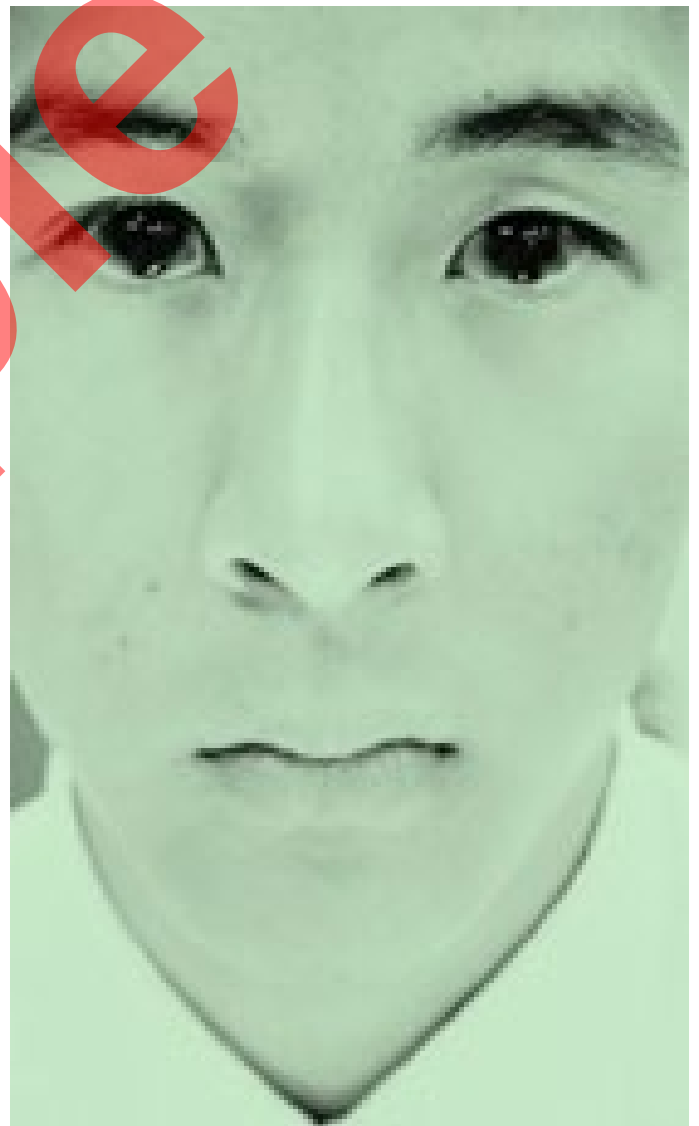
THE AGENTS ARE MEMBERS OF DELTA GREEN: This is the easiest solution, and works well if this investigation is to be run as a one-off adventure. In this case the normal routes of unnatural investigation are open to the Agents, depending on whether they belong to the official program or the illegal conspiracy: They can call in help, and they know that they might have to use bizarre and illegal means to get the job done.

SOME AGENTS ARE NOT DG: This can make for interesting roleplaying as the knowledgeable Agents attempt to "break in" those ignorant of the world of the unnatural.

This creates an interesting tension between Agents and therefore between players.

THE AGENTS ARE DG "FRIENDLIES": This works well if you want the Agents to have a whiff of the unnatural, but no definitive proof. They haven't been inducted into Delta Green, but they unwittingly have Delta Green's attention. They may have seen or heard first-hand about things that science could not explain. The Hellbend case might see them brought fully aboard.

ALL AGENTS ARE OUTSIDE DG: This operation is a great way to introduce Agents to Delta Green. Once they discover what they are dealing with, few will be able to deny the existence of the unnatural. See **DELTA GREEN IN SACRAMENTO** on page 5 for details on how to set this up.



Delta Green in Sacramento

Three Delta Green agents work in the Sacramento FBI office: Special Agent Grunberg, Special Agent Tralvayne, and Special Agent Makamura (see page 28). Their exact histories and their role depend on which Delta Green is at work in Hellbend. Are they with the official Delta Green program or with the illegal conspiracy? And more importantly, are the players' Agents already in the know?

Already in Delta Green?

If the Agents and Grunberg's people are in the official Delta Green program, then Grunberg is the DG case officer assigned to the Hellbend operation. Tralvayne and Makamura work on his behalf. The Agents get briefings from Tralvayne and are expected to send word back to Grunberg through her. If they uncover conclusive evidence of the unnatural, Grunberg reports it to the program. Delta Green's people in FBI headquarters in Washington activate a new investigation under the aegis of counterterrorism or counterespionage, classifies it Top Secret, and grants clearance only to its own people: Grunberg, Tralvayne, Makamura, and the players' Agents. That freezes out the sheriff's office, the state police, and even the rest of the FBI, including Slotin and even Turk. That wins the players' Agents exactly zero new friends.

If the Agents and Grunberg's people are in the illegal conspiracy, then their task is more fraught. They have to continue the Hellbend investigation while covering up all signs of the unnatural and keeping Bakersfield and Sacramento from sending more personnel. Grunberg, Tralvayne, and Makamura can run interference, but there's only so much they can do. They impress on the Agents how critical it is to walk with care and to provide a plausible cover story to keep Slotin and Turk happy.

Not in Delta Green?

If the Agents aren't yet part of Delta Green, it's because the Hellbend case has not caught DG's attention. The case begins as a mundane investigation. But when their reports back to Bakersfield start including bizarre details, that catches the attention of Grunberg, Tralvayne, or Makamura in Sacramento. Grunberg persuades Turk to send him and Tralvayne to Hellbend to make sure everything is

squared away. Makamura remains in Sacramento to keep watch and to warn Grunberg if complications develop.

In Hellbend, Grunberg and Tralvayne review the Agents' discoveries, listening for cues that the Agents have indeed been exposed to the unnatural: evasiveness because the Agents saw things that didn't make sense, or objects set aside without being labelled as evidence because they were too strange.

Once they're convinced that the Agents are indeed dealing with the unnatural and know it, it goes much like if the Agents were in the official Delta Green program or the illegal conspiracy. If the Agents seem reliable and discreet, Grunberg and Tralvayne may tell them that they're part of a secret task force that looks out for weird cases like this. Or if the Agents seem prone to panic or publicity, Grunberg and Tralvayne may try to cover everything up and freeze them out.

What happens next is up to you. Maybe Grunberg and Tralvayne take over the investigation and send the players' Agents away—but the Agents get called back by Makamura to help when Grunberg and Tralvayne go missing, victims of the Hellbend killer.

The Program Takes an Interest

If any of the unnatural oddities in this investigation—the dragonfly, the gold cube, the radiation, the dinosaur—are reported to the mundane authorities, or if Grunberg and company are part of the official Delta Green program, then the program takes a deeper interest.

Already in the Program?

If Grunberg's in the official program, he receives orders to secure all such discoveries safely for pickup by other personnel. He and Tralvayne handle it and try to keep the players' Agents uninvolved, compartmentalized, out of sight. If necessary, they warn that the Agents are risking careers cut short, pensions severed and internal investigations launched out of nowhere. Agents who ignore the warnings and get caught will find these threats very real.

Within a day, Grunberg and Tralvayne take their finds deep into the desert to meet a helicopter belonging to the

U.S. Air Force. Specialists in hazmat suits put the discoveries in sealed containers under the watchful eye of heavily-armed guards and fly them away a Delta Green lab in a restricted corner of a top-secret base.

Not in the Program?

If Grunberg and the Agents are not part of the official program, they may run into agents from it. These new agents approach the problem through official channels as investigators from elsewhere in the FBI, part of a highly-restricted task force sent from Washington. Turk in Sacramento tells Grunberg and the Agents (if the Agents are FBI) to cooperate and to not ask questions, and warns them that their careers are on the line. He's not in on this other group's secrets; he only knows they have clearance that he doesn't.

These agents of the program weren't sent to investigate the Hellbend killings, only to seize the fruits of unnatural technology. They give the players' Agents some pretext meant to let them persuade themselves that they saw nothing unnatural, after all.

If the Agents have clearly seen the unnatural and don't seem likely to pretend otherwise, the program's agents tell them to keep quiet about it. Don't take it public. There's far more at stake than they know. Someone from the program will be in touch.

If the Agents try to interfere with the program's agents, it could turn bloody, fast. The program's agents are professionals, some of them actual FBI agents and some of them special forces with FBI covers. They are veterans of Delta Green's mission and have learned the hard way that when there's killing to be done, it's best to do it swiftly and to cover it up thoroughly. They try to dissuade the players' agents, showing respect for their diligence, not treating them with scorn. But they clearly are ready to kill to take these unnatural artifacts away from the public eye.

What happens next is up to you.

Hellbend History

Hellbend, California is little more than a bump in the road in the desolate wastes of Death Valley. The only thing that makes it unique in the area is that it's obvious it was once much more.

The remnants of a formerly vibrant company town are still to be found surrounding the core of what Hellbend has become. Derelict buildings, long abandoned and overrun by weeds and witch grass dot the roads leading up to town, the legacy of Hunt Electrodynamics.

Once the town supported a workforce of nearly 4,000, and they left their dwellings behind. Most have fallen into ruin: windows long ago shattered, paint peeled off, decks collapsed, foundations shifted. Only a few are still lived in. Most of Hellbend was long ago surrendered to the desert. No one goes into the abandoned areas if they can help it.

Most of the 82 residents of Hellbend live near the center of town or within a few blocks of Main and State streets. A handful live a bit further out.

The only business worth mentioning is the Gas n' Sip, the local gas station/grocery store/post office on the corner of Main and State. Nearly every piece of mail comes or goes through the Gas n' Sip. Nearly everyone who stops in Hellbend does so for one of two things: gas or directions.

On a busy day, a car or two will come through Hellbend on the way to Furnace Creek Ranch, a small resort ten miles south. A scattering of locals visit the Gas n' Sip each day. A cat and a couple of dogs wander around. If it's a banner day, Jarvis Greene closes the Gas n' Sip early and plays horseshoes with neighbors in the lot in front of the station.

The town has no police force. If there's trouble, a deputy drives up from the sheriff's office station at Furnace Creek, 16 km south.

- » **HELLBEND AREA:** 323.33 hectares (799 acres).
- » **POPULATION:** 82 (2010 Census), down from 3,526 (1950 Census).
- » **FOUNDED:** 1940.
- » **INDUSTRY:** Tourism (formerly military electronics).
- » **TEMPERATURE:** High, 53.3 C (128 F); Low, -7.7 C (18 F).

Hunt Electrodynamics

Arthur Hunt, a self-taught genius from rural Ohio, formed Hunt Electrodynamics in 1926. With three significant patents registered by Hunt in its first year of operation, the company was soon flush with capital. By the time radio and rural electrification had swept the nation, Hunt was already at the head of the pack. The Hunt Resistor was a standard electronic component in nearly every radio produced between 1933 and 1949.

With World War II, Hunt Electrodynamics revenues exploded and the company grew to gargantuan proportions. By 1945, it employed nearly 11,000 workers across the U.S. In a move that would prove his genius, Hunt expanded his business into home devices such as washing machines, refrigerators and freezers, as well as electric ovens. By 1948, Hunt was the second largest producer of such items behind Westinghouse.

Hunt guided the company in several odd directions. First, it never went public. Second, though it did have large offices in both Los Angeles and New York, Hunt ran the business from the Hunt Electrodynamics plant he had constructed at great expense in one of the most inhospitable places on earth: Hellbend, California, in the heart of Death Valley.

Hunt rarely left Hellbend after 1940, and was the subject of some scrutiny due to his odd behavior. A legendary recluse, he spent the last decade of his life working on the design of a device that he said would “change the face of the Earth.”

In August 1952, at age 46, Arthur Hunt died in an explosion that demolished the Hellbend plant. The plant seemed to fold in on itself as the earth swallowed it whole. Nothing salvageable remained.

Hunt's right-hand man, Thompson MacAfee, assumed control of the company, purchasing Hunt's privately held stock from his estate at an enormous sum. He renamed the company Hunt Electronics, shifted its headquarters to Washington, D.C., and began actively reviving military contracts which had been slipping in recent years.

Beginning in September 1955, Hunt Electronics became a primary source of electronic components for the U.S. Air Force. The company's star rose along with the arc of the Cold War, and its revenues and work force exploded.

In 1977, Thompson MacAfee handed over the reins to William Lassiter. Lassiter moved Hunt Electronics into the realm of home computing. By 1990, the move proved sound. Hunt became a premiere producer of computer equipment and components. As the Cold War shriveled, Hunt restructured itself to the demands of the new market.

The company remains an anomaly to this day. It has been privately held since its inception. William Lassiter is a recluse, much like his predecessors. No one knows precisely which way the company will jump next.

Much more about Hunt Electronics can be learned in *Future/Perfect*, Part 3.



The Investigation Begins

The seat of Inyo County, California, is the tiny Death Valley town of Independence. The county courthouse, sheriff's office, and coroner's office are all right down the street from each other.

Driving to Independence from Bakersfield takes three hours. For CBI detectives coming from Fresno, it's a drive of four and a half hours; they pass Bakersfield along the way. From Sacramento, it's a drive of more than five and a half hours past Fresno and Bakersfield, or a two-hour flight aboard an FBI Cessna.

The Agents first meet the Inyo County sheriff and the deputy who handled the deaths up til now.