

Bleach-blank walls and glaring long lights, an aggressively clean rubber floor that bounces light off it so one has to squint no matter where one looks, and professional-looking metal-plated doors and signs with complicated words that say what is where in the facility in neat, bold letters.

The sole attracting colour in the place is the full, lively green of thousands of tiny infant plants in glass dish cradles: this the Nevada Institute for Crop Research and Genetic Science, or NICRAGS, if you're someone who likes using acronyms.

Most people refer to it as the Spike; due to the pointy conical hydration towers that stand atop the gleaming semi-cylindrical buildings built between the dusty dunes of the scorching stretch of desert.

What do they do there? In the simplest terms, they grow strange plants.

The facility was established during the Cold War as one of the FBI's many harebrained and... Unconventional new-fangled warfare methods.

The sixties saw the facility become a centre for attempting germ warfare, and when that got them nowhere they tried developing psychic pansies in a secret ploy to use mind control on soviet leaders. In the seventies, they accidentally bred highly unstable pea plants and the facility went into meltdown due to the plants somehow undergoing radioactive decay. It was blamed on the clumsy intern Louis, who allegedly caused the meltdown by disturbing the peas. *ha ha!*

The site had to be rebuilt; the new site was finished in 1985. The only other feat they accomplished that decade was when Doctor O'Connor grew corn that was capable of igniting and barbecuing itself, though this did pose a severe fire hazard. By the nineties, most of the more questionable and secretive practices of the facility had to be dissolved due to UN law and the fact that there was no longer a Soviet Union to unleash their 'crop-soldiers' upon. In the George Bush years, things lulled to a near standstill and most of their budget was spent on air conditioning so the scientists wouldn't collapse in the desert heat. As time passed, the facility's more dangerous projects could not be maintained and had to be destroyed.

However, deep within the Crop Research Institute's cavernous irrigated understorey, a terrible aberration of nature still lurks.

Today, Professor Carla Martinez, the facility's current director, is working on plant growth stimulants. It is a particularly hot and dry day in June, she's overseeing the newly spliced plantlets in the fertilization lab. She is not fully focused on her work today as she is concerned about having left her wife Cecile, the radio news broadcaster, home alone to care for their daughter Suzy who's off school with the flu.

Professor Carla does not pay too much attention to where she is casting the sprinkler containing the hyper-growth serum. She accidentally fertilizes the wrong batch of seedlings, several spaghetti tentacle plants, bringing them to full maturity in a matter of seconds.

The lab is now filled with freshly grown genetically modified spaghetti and Professor Carla, sweeping back her lovely hair in frustration, scolds herself for allowing family matters to distract her from her work.

A loud intern enters the lab with the Professor's mid-morning coffee, leaving the door wide open behind him. The noise he causes visibly agitates the enlarged spaghetti plant, which begins twisting and hissing in the clean light of the lab room. The tentacle spaghetti plant slithers out of the open door in hysterics. Carla, only a little more composed than the upset plant, turns to the intern.

"Terrence, you dolt!" She exclaims. "You forget that some of our plant-pasta hybrids have developed emotional sensitivity! In future, refrain from making noise near spaghetti-type specimens, as it seriously hurts their feelings."

Terrence looks ashamed. "Sorry, professor." He mumbles.

"You just stay here while I try to recover the specimen." Carla orders, flying out the door after the escaped, traumatized pasta plant.

The tentacle spaghetti plant flees screaming through the white, sterile corridors, tumbling down flight after flight of safety stairs and finally reaching the no-access understory and.... the Forbidden Greenhouse sector.

Professor Carla tries desperately to put the lab into lockdown, but it's too late. The spaghetti is loose, and worse, code FCD, a project so horrific it lies sealed firmly away in one of the forbidden greenhouses, risks being unleashed upon the world.

Wasting no time, Professor Carla rushes to the forbidden greenhouse vault in an attempt to bring the situation under control. The escaped spaghetti is already in emotional crisis; piled up against the heavy vault door sobbing and secreting highly corrosive pasta sauce. Smoke fizzes from the steel door, which is being dissolved by the pasta sauce acid at an alarming rate.

Sensing the overwhelming danger of code FCD's possible release, the professor presses the large red panic button on the wall, which has a menacing cactus-shaped silhouette printed on it. Red lights descend from ceiling compartments, flashing and whirring. Alarm bells ring from every part of the facility. The building's security system was wired to summon the nearest SWAT team and military helicopters at the push of the panic button. Carla hoped for the world's sake that they arrived in time.

The vault door is dangerously eroded; there is a good-sized hole in it through which Carla sees the movement of a prickly, airborne shape. A bead of sweat runs down her brown forehead. She whips

out her phone, ordering all personnel to evacuate the facility immediately. She is about to arrange her own departure when intern Terrence arrives wielding the emergency flamethrower.

He runs towards the vault, which is weakened to the point where it risks being blown down by the monster inside. Carla shouts for him to stop his hero act, but doom had already reached him. From the vault, a long cactus spike is fired into Terrence, slicing through him. He slumps.

The door gives way.

The plant inside stirs, revealing its terrible airborne form.

The cactus floats forward.

The world is doomed.