OFFICE OF IMPROBABLE JURISDICTION

EXPERIMENTAL INTELLIGENCE AND AUTONOMOUS PERSONS REVIEW BOARD

NIMH-ERB-MUN-001

THE FITZGIBBON FARM

On Agricultural Operations, Unrecognized Occupancy, and the Foreseeability of Harm to an Enhanced Nonhuman Settlement

An Institutional Inquiry into Property, Ordinary Land Use, Informed Authorization, Pest Control, and the Limits of Responsibility Where an Autonomous Community Exists Without the Knowledge of the Human Occupants

Issuing Authority: Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
Reviewing Body: Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board
Administrative Division: Extraordinary Municipal Affairs and Interspecies Habitation
Docket: NIMH-ERB-MUN-001
Related Proceedings: NIMH-ERB-001 through NIMH-ERB-007
Principal Property: Fitzgibbon Farm
Human Persons of Interest: Mr. Fitzgibbon and members of the Fitzgibbon household
Additional Interested Parties: The enhanced rat community, Mrs. Frisby / Mrs. Brisby and her children, unidentified extermination personnel, and persons associated with the fictional experimental program
Classification: Agricultural Operations, Property Interests, Environmental Risk, Unrecognized Habitation, Foreseeability, Pest Management, Third-Party Representations, and Extraordinary Nonhuman Communities
Date: October 28, 2026

Status: Substantive Findings Entered; Institutional Knowledge and Contractor Responsibility Remain Partially Unresolved

Nature of Proceeding: Fictional regulatory satire and literary ethics review.

This proceeding concerns events depicted in Robert C. O'Brien's *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971) and Don Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH* (1982).

The literary and cinematic narratives constitute separate evidentiary records.

References to legal or regulatory concepts are illustrative. No specific historical statute is presumed applicable to the fictional events without supporting evidence.

No allegation of actual wrongdoing by the National Institute of Mental Health is made.

The Office claims no actual regulatory, judicial, agricultural, or municipal authority.

I. NOTICE OF MUNICIPAL INVESTIGATION

The Office of Improbable Jurisdiction hereby opens an investigation concerning the agricultural property occupied and operated by the Fitzgibbon household.

The investigation arises from the discovery that the property contained multiple nonhuman residential arrangements.

These included the winter dwelling of Mrs. Frisby and her children, situated within a cultivated field, and an organized settlement of experimentally enhanced rats beneath a rosebush near the farmhouse.

The inhabitants of these settlements possessed interests that were not necessarily known to the human occupants.

The enhanced rats demonstrated intelligence, communication, technical competence, and political organization.

Mrs. Frisby and her family possessed interests concerning shelter, medical care, and protection from foreseeable physical danger.

The farm, meanwhile, remained an agricultural enterprise.

Its human occupants maintained crops.

They operated machinery.

They undertook seasonal cultivation.

They possessed legitimate interests in protecting their property and sustaining its productive use.

The Board recognizes that these activities are not inherently wrongful.

It further recognizes that the Fitzgibbon household did not establish the extraordinary cognitive condition of the rats.

The human occupants were not responsible for designing the fictional laboratory's experiments.

They did not knowingly authorize the establishment of an autonomous civilization beneath their rosebush.

They did not enter into an apparent agreement to supply that civilization with electricity.

They did not receive a documented request for recognition from its governing body.

The Board therefore declines to presume that the household understood the circumstances now under investigation.

Nevertheless, the property contained beings whose lives and interests were affected by human activity.

The Office accordingly identifies a difficult question.

What responsibilities may reasonably be imposed upon a property occupant whose ordinary activities affect a community the occupant has no demonstrated reason to know exists?

The question requires distinguishing the interests of the affected population from the knowledge and conduct of the person whose activities affect them.

The mere existence of harm does not establish deliberate wrongdoing.

The absence of deliberate wrongdoing does not establish that no harm occurred.

The inquiry shall proceed.

II. QUESTIONS PRESENTED

The Board identifies ten principal questions.

First: What legitimate interests did the Fitzgibbon household possess in agricultural cultivation, property maintenance, and pest management?

Second: What interests were possessed by the nonhuman inhabitants whose homes existed within the cultivated area?

Third: What evidence establishes that the household knew, or reasonably should have known, that its property contained an enhanced autonomous community?

Fourth: Does ownership or lawful occupation of land establish unrestricted ethical authority over every living being present upon it?

Fifth: Does the existence of an unrecognized community establish an obligation to alter ordinary agricultural operations when the community's existence has not been communicated?

Sixth: What responsibilities arise when outside parties offer pest control services based upon information unavailable to the property occupant?

Seventh: What ethical significance attaches to concealment undertaken by the rats for their own protection?

Eighth: How should the interests of humans, ordinary animals, enhanced animals, and medically vulnerable inhabitants be evaluated when their needs conflict?

Ninth: What distinction should be maintained between an operation that causes foreseeable harm and an operation undertaken with the intention of causing that harm?

Tenth: What would constitute a reasonable accommodation if the extraordinary nature of the settlement became credibly known?

The Board considers the tenth question prospective.

The earlier questions concern the circumstances actually depicted.

The Office will not evaluate the farmer as though he possessed knowledge available only to the reader.

The distinction is entered.

III. THE FARM AS A LEGITIMATE HUMAN ENTERPRISE

The Office first considers the purpose of the property.

The Fitzgibbon farm is used for agricultural production.

Cultivation requires land preparation.

Land preparation may require plowing.

Plowing alters the physical environment.

The Board recognizes these propositions as ordinary features of agriculture.

The fact that plowing disturbs soil does not establish that the farmer possesses an improper motive.

Nor does the fact that wildlife inhabits agricultural land automatically prohibit cultivation.

The Office recognizes that agricultural activity necessarily interacts with ecological systems.

Such interactions may produce risks.

Those risks may warrant mitigation where practical and appropriate.

Nevertheless, the existence of environmental effects does not establish that all cultivation is unethical.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that Farmer Fitzgibbon acted improperly merely by intending to prepare his field for planting.

His conduct must be evaluated according to the circumstances.

The relevant questions include what he knew, what hazards were reasonably foreseeable, and what alternatives were practically available.

The Office further recognizes that a farm is not merely an abstract assertion of property rights.

It is a place of work.

Agricultural activity requires planning, labor, equipment, resources, and attention to seasonal conditions.

A farmer may possess legitimate reasons to begin cultivation at a particular time.

The Board therefore declines to characterize the decision to plow as inherently malicious.

The possession and operation of a tractor do not, standing alone, establish hostility toward the inhabitants of the soil.

The distinction is entered.

IV. THE FIELD AS AN OVERLAPPING PLACE OF HABITATION

The Office next considers the nonhuman inhabitants.

Mrs. Frisby and her children occupy a winter home situated within the area subject to cultivation.

Their ordinary seasonal arrangements permit departure before plowing.

However, Timothy's illness interferes with the family's ability to relocate safely.

The family therefore faces overlapping dangers.

Remaining in the field exposes the home to agricultural machinery.

Leaving under ordinary conditions may expose Timothy to serious medical harm.

The Board recognizes that these circumstances create a legitimate emergency.

It further recognizes that the emergency was not necessarily apparent to the farmer.

The household's presence within the field does not establish that the human occupants understood the family's medical circumstances.

The Board therefore distinguishes three facts.

The mouse family occupied the field.

The mouse family faced serious danger.

The farmer did not necessarily know either the location of the particular dwelling or the nature of the family's medical emergency.

These propositions may coexist.

The Board considers their coexistence central.

A hazard may be real even when the person creating it does not understand its full consequences.

However, moral responsibility for creating or failing to avoid the hazard may depend upon what that person reasonably could have known.

The Office therefore rejects two conclusions.

First, that the absence of human knowledge renders Timothy's danger imaginary.

Second, that Timothy's danger automatically establishes culpability on the part of the uninformed farmer.

Neither proposition is sustained.

V. THE ROSEBUSH AS AN UNRECOGNIZED SETTLEMENT

The Board turns to the rosebush.

The external appearance of the site was botanical.

The internal arrangements were substantially more complicated.

Beneath the plant, the enhanced rats maintained an organized settlement.

Their infrastructure included residential spaces, mechanical systems, and access to electricity obtained from the surrounding human environment.

The community possessed leadership and collective decision-making arrangements.

Its members demonstrated advanced intellectual and technological capacities.

The Board recognizes that these circumstances distinguish the settlement from an ordinary animal burrow.

Nevertheless, the physical existence of the community was intentionally concealed from the human occupants.

The rats had reasons for secrecy.

Their history included laboratory confinement.

They had escaped an institution whose authority over them had become ethically questionable.

Discovery could expose them to recapture, experimentation, or destruction.

The Office considers these concerns legitimate subjects of ethical examination.

However, the protective reasons for concealment do not establish that the human household possessed knowledge of the concealed facts.

The Board therefore identifies a structural difficulty.

The rats sought protection through remaining undiscovered.

Their undiscovered status also made informed accommodation by the farmer unlikely.

A community may have good reasons to remain hidden.

But concealment can prevent outsiders from recognizing obligations that would become apparent only upon discovery.

The Office does not assign blame merely because this difficulty exists.

It regards the difficulty as an inherent feature of the circumstances.

The distinction is entered.

VI. ON KNOWLEDGE AND FORESEEABILITY

The Board considers the relationship between knowledge and responsibility.

An individual may cause harm without intending it.

An individual may create risk without understanding every possible consequence.

An individual may act with knowledge of danger but without a desire to cause injury.

These circumstances require separate evaluation.

The Office therefore distinguishes among:

Actual Knowledge: Information the actor demonstrably possesses.

Reasonably Available Knowledge: Information that an actor in the relevant circumstances could reasonably be expected to acquire.

Concealed Information: Information deliberately withheld or inaccessible through ordinary observation.

Speculative Possibility: A circumstance that could exist but for which no meaningful indication has been established.

The Board recognizes that different responsibilities may arise under these conditions.

A farmer who knows that a particular area contains an inhabited community capable of communication may be expected to consider facts unavailable to a farmer who reasonably believes the same area contains ordinary wildlife.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that all actors must be evaluated as though they possess the same information.

Such an approach would collapse the distinction between foreseeability and hindsight.

It would also produce an unreasonable standard.

A person cannot ordinarily be expected to investigate every speculative possibility before engaging in otherwise legitimate activity.

The Board recognizes that precaution may sometimes be appropriate despite uncertainty.

However, the scope of precaution must remain proportionate to the evidence, danger, and available means of response.

The Office therefore enters the following principle:

The existence of an extraordinary fact does not establish that an uninformed person was unreasonable for failing to anticipate it.

The distinction is sustained.

VII. THE TRACTOR AND THE QUESTION OF INTENT

The Office now considers the anticipated plowing.

The farmer intends to cultivate his field.

The mice recognize that cultivation threatens their winter home.

The farmer's objective and the mice's experience are different.

The Board recognizes that the same act may have different consequences for different beings.

To the farmer, plowing prepares land.

To the mouse family, plowing may destroy shelter.

To the agricultural operation, delay may create practical difficulties.

To Timothy, premature relocation may create medical danger.

The Office therefore identifies competing interests.

It does not regard these interests as automatically equivalent.

Nor does it regard one interest as inherently sufficient to eliminate every other.

The farmer's legitimate desire to cultivate does not establish that the mouse family's lives lack value.

The family's legitimate desire to survive does not automatically establish that the farmer must surrender the use of his field indefinitely.

The Board considers the question one of practical accommodation under constrained circumstances.

However, no evidence establishes that the farmer was informed of Timothy's illness or the proposed need for temporary delay.

The Office therefore declines to enter a finding that the farmer knowingly refused a request for accommodation.

No such request is established.

The Board further observes that a tractor is a machine intended to perform agricultural work.

Its operation does not independently establish the operator's knowledge of every organism within the soil.

The existence of a specific endangered household cannot simply be imputed to the operator without supporting evidence.

A person may possess a legitimate reason to perform an act whose consequences are tragic for another.

The legitimacy of the reason does not erase the tragedy.

The tragedy does not automatically establish malice.

The distinctions are entered.

VIII. THE PROBLEM OF THE UNCOMMUNICATED REQUEST

The Board considers whether the mice possessed a meaningful means of communicating their circumstances to the farmer.

The enhanced rats demonstrated advanced language and reasoning.

Mrs. Frisby possessed communication capacities sufficient to obtain assistance from other animals.

Nevertheless, the available records do not establish a practical procedure for negotiating with the human occupants.

Communication among animals does not automatically establish the capacity to communicate intelligibly with humans.

The Office therefore declines to presume that the mice could simply approach the farmhouse and explain Timothy's pneumonia.

The possibility of communication must be evaluated according to the circumstances.

The Board further recognizes that direct contact could expose the animals to danger.

The farm contained a cat.

The humans ordinarily understood mice and rats as animals rather than as participants in a shared political community.

The rats also possessed reasons to avoid revealing their extraordinary abilities.

The Office therefore recognizes that communication may have been difficult, dangerous, or impracticable.

Nevertheless, the absence of communication affected the distribution of knowledge.

The farmer could not respond to information he had not received.

The mice could not assume that silence would convey their needs.

The Board does not regard these facts as evidence of wrongdoing by either population.

They illustrate the limits of responsibility where the means of mutual recognition are absent.

The Office therefore enters the following finding:

An unmet need may be morally significant even where the individual capable of assisting has not been given a meaningful opportunity to recognize it.

The question of responsibility remains dependent upon the circumstances.

IX. THE FARM CAT

The Office briefly considers Dragon.

Dragon is the cat maintained upon the Fitzgibbon property.

The animal presents a substantial danger to mice and other small creatures.

The Board recognizes that predation is an ordinary feature of animal behavior.

It further recognizes that domestic cats may be maintained for companionship or pest control.

The narrative does not establish every purpose for which Dragon is kept.

The Office therefore declines to invent a contractual pest-management arrangement.

Nevertheless, Dragon's presence affects the practical options available to the nonhuman inhabitants.

Attempts to approach the farmhouse may expose small animals to serious danger.

The need to administer a sedative to Dragon becomes relevant to the rats' efforts to assist Mrs. Frisby.

The Board recognizes that this action raises separate questions concerning the welfare of the cat and the safety of those attempting to approach it.

Those questions are not resolved merely by identifying Dragon as dangerous.

Predatory behavior does not establish moral culpability in the same manner as deliberate conduct by an enhanced being capable of sophisticated ethical reasoning.

The Office further recognizes that the cat's presence may be entirely ordinary from the farmer's perspective.

A farmer may keep a cat.

A mouse may reasonably fear the cat.

Neither fact establishes that the farmer knowingly intends the death of a particular mouse family.

The distinction is entered.

The Office declines to summon Dragon for testimony.

No reliable procedure for obtaining sworn feline evidence has been established.

X. THE RIGHT TO MANAGE PESTS

The Board next considers the human interest in pest management.

Agricultural properties may be affected by rodents.

Rodents may consume crops.

They may damage stored materials.

They may interfere with equipment.

They may create sanitation concerns.

The Office recognizes that these risks can justify proportionate measures to protect property and health.

The present proceeding does not establish that all pest control is unethical.

Nor does it suggest that a human household must tolerate unlimited damage merely because the responsible animals possess welfare interests.

Nevertheless, the means employed require consideration.

Different methods may impose different levels of harm.

The necessity of a particular method may depend upon the seriousness of the problem and the alternatives reasonably available.

The Board therefore distinguishes the legitimacy of pest management from the legitimacy of every possible extermination technique.

A legitimate protective objective does not automatically justify unrestricted methods.

The Office also recognizes that extraordinary circumstances may change the analysis.

A population of ordinary rats presents one set of questions.

A population of experimentally enhanced rats capable of communication, ethical reflection, and organized government presents additional questions.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that the same classification must govern every possible circumstance merely because the animals share a biological species.

The identification of a pest-management problem does not eliminate the obligation to consider what is actually being managed.

The distinction is sustained.

XI. THE OFFER OF FREE EXTERMINATION

The Office now considers the most consequential interaction between the Fitzgibbon household and outside parties.

In the literary record, unidentified men offer to eliminate the rats occupying the rosebush.

The service is offered without charge.

The offer follows an unusual incident involving dead rats discovered at a hardware establishment.

The circumstances attract attention because the reported conduct suggests intelligence beyond that ordinarily associated with rats.

The Board recognizes that the rats suspect the exterminators may be connected to the experimental institution.

However, the literary record does not conclusively establish that affiliation.

The Office therefore declines to identify the men as NIMH personnel in Record A without qualification.

The cinematic record differs.

The film depicts a telephone conversation in which the caller is identified as associated with NIMH.

The farmer agrees to the proposed removal of the rosebush and extermination of the rats.

These circumstances provide stronger evidence concerning the caller's stated institutional identity.

They do not establish that the farmer was informed of the rats' enhanced intelligence.

The Board therefore distinguishes between knowledge of the proposed service and knowledge of the underlying population.

A property occupant may knowingly authorize extermination.

The occupant may nevertheless misunderstand the nature of the beings targeted.

The distinction is significant.

Consent to an operation is not necessarily informed consent to every purpose concealed by the party proposing it.

The Office considers this principle central to the inquiry.

XII. THE PROBLEM OF THE FREE SERVICE

The Board considers the financial arrangement.

The offered extermination required no payment from the farmer.

The Office recognizes that no-cost services may be legitimate.

A service may be offered through public programs, commercial promotions, research arrangements, or other circumstances.

The absence of a fee does not establish improper purpose.

However, an unusual offer may warrant reasonable inquiry where the provider possesses interests not disclosed to the recipient.

The Board therefore asks why outside parties would offer to undertake an extermination operation without compensation from the property occupant.

The answer is not fully established.

In the cinematic record, the involvement of NIMH personnel suggests an institutional interest in locating the escaped animals.

In the literary record, the affiliation remains uncertain.

The Office therefore declines to assign identical motives in both accounts.

Nevertheless, the possibility of undisclosed interests raises an important question.

Was the farmer receiving an ordinary pest-control service?

Or was he being asked to provide access to his property for an operation serving another institution's purposes?

These arrangements may overlap.

They are not necessarily identical.

The Board recognizes that a property owner may consent to ordinary pest management without intending to facilitate the recovery of experimental subjects.

It further recognizes that an institution seeking access may possess information material to the owner's decision.

The party offering a service may have obligations to disclose facts that substantially change the nature of the service being offered.

The distinction is entered.

XIII. THE DUTY OF THE PARTY WHO KNOWS

The Office now considers the distribution of knowledge among the affected parties.

The rats understand their own extraordinary capacities.

The fictional laboratory possesses knowledge concerning the experimental program.

The farmer understands that rats occupy his property.

These forms of knowledge are not equivalent.

The Board therefore asks which party was best positioned to recognize that ordinary pest-management assumptions might be inadequate.

The answer cannot be determined solely through ownership of the land.

The institution responsible for the enhancement possessed specialized information concerning the animals.

If personnel associated with that institution sought access to the farm, their knowledge could materially exceed that of the farmer.

The Board recognizes that such an asymmetry creates potential ethical obligations.

An informed institution should not automatically rely upon the ignorance of an uninformed property owner to justify conduct the institution would otherwise be required to defend.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that a farmer's apparent consent resolves every question concerning the purposes of knowledgeable third parties.

The farmer may consent to the removal of rats.

He may not understand that the rats possess advanced intelligence.

He may not understand that the proposed operation could function as a means of recovering experimental subjects.

He may not know that the animals are capable of organized flight.

He may not know that an autonomous community exists beneath the rosebush.

The institution possessing such information cannot reasonably assume that the farmer's failure to ask about undisclosed facts establishes informed agreement concerning those facts.

The Board therefore enters the following principle:

Where one party possesses material knowledge concerning an affected population and another does not, responsibility for communicating that knowledge cannot automatically be assigned to the uninformed party.

The distinction is sustained.

XIV. THE LITERARY EXTERMINATION OPERATION

The Board turns to Record A.

In the novel, the rats learn of the proposed extermination and accelerate their departure.

They undertake measures to conceal the extraordinary character of the settlement.

The community's machinery and rooms are dismantled or disguised.

The remaining space is made to resemble an ordinary rat habitation.

Ten rats volunteer to remain behind during the extermination operation.

Their presence is intended to support the appearance that the site remains occupied by ordinary animals.

The exterminators introduce poisonous gas.

Eight of the ten rats escape.

Two die.

The Board recognizes the gravity of these events.

The record establishes that an extermination operation was conducted.

It establishes that the operation caused deaths among the rats who remained.

It does not conclusively establish that the farmer understood the extraordinary capacities of the affected population.

Nor does it conclusively establish the institutional affiliation of the exterminators.

The Office therefore declines to assign identical responsibility to every participant.

The farmer authorized or accepted pest management.

The exterminators selected and implemented the lethal method.

The rats designed and undertook their protective concealment operation.

The volunteers accepted substantial danger.

The precise responsibilities associated with these decisions require separate examination.

The Board further recognizes that voluntary risk does not make death ethically irrelevant.

The two rats who died were not merely components of a successful deception.

They were members of the community.

Their deaths remain part of the record.

XV. WHETHER THE FARMER KILLED THE TWO RATS

The Office has considered the proposition that Farmer Fitzgibbon was responsible for the deaths of the two rats because the extermination occurred on his property with his agreement.

The proposition requires careful distinction.

The farmer's consent enabled the operation.

The exterminators carried out the lethal intervention.

The rats remained within the affected area as part of a deliberate protective plan.

The volunteers' exposure to the gas produced fatal consequences.

These events form a causal sequence.

However, the existence of a causal relationship does not automatically establish identical moral responsibility among all participants.

The Board therefore distinguishes between authorizing an ordinary service, knowingly authorizing the destruction of an intelligent community, selecting a dangerous extermination method, and voluntarily remaining in a lethal environment.

The available record does not support the conclusion that the farmer possessed full knowledge of the circumstances.

The Office therefore declines to enter a finding of intentional killing of enhanced persons by the Fitzgibbon household.

Nevertheless, it recognizes that the extermination operation caused two deaths.

The deaths do not disappear because the farmer may have been uninformed.

Nor does the fact of death establish that he intended it in the ethically specific sense now alleged.

A person may be causally connected to a harmful event without possessing the knowledge necessary to make every resulting harm intentional.

The distinction is entered.

XVI. THE CINEMATIC REMOVAL OF THE ROSEBUSH

The Board now considers Record B.

The film depicts a more explicit relationship between the farmer and the institution seeking the rats.

Mrs. Brisby overhears a telephone conversation concerning the removal of the rosebush.

The caller is identified as associated with NIMH.

The proposed operation includes removal of the plant and extermination of the rats.

The farmer agrees.

The Board recognizes that the film establishes a credible threat to the settlement.

The rats' subsequent efforts to depart are undertaken under conditions of increasing urgency.

However, the cinematic record does not demonstrate that the farmer knew the rats possessed an organized political society.

The telephone conversation concerns unusual rat behavior and pest control.

The Board therefore declines to equate awareness that rats are difficult to trap with awareness that they maintain a technologically sophisticated civilization.

The distinction matters.

A farmer may recognize an infestation as persistent.

He may recognize that ordinary traps have failed.

He may welcome a proposed removal operation.

These circumstances do not establish that he understands the animals to be capable of language, engineering, and autonomous governance.

The Office therefore identifies the need to distinguish the knowledge of the institution seeking access from that of the property occupant granting access.

The film provides grounds to question whether the institution's interest was fully disclosed.

It does not establish that the farmer knowingly authorized the destruction of an intelligent municipality.

The Board further observes that the proposed removal of the rosebush was not merely an ordinary seasonal plowing operation.

It was a specific intervention directed toward the rats' habitation.

That circumstance warrants separate consideration.

XVII. ON THE RIGHT TO REFUSE ACCESS

The Office considers whether the human occupants possessed a legitimate interest in controlling access to their property.

The Board recognizes that property occupants ordinarily possess interests in determining whether outside parties may enter and conduct activities upon their land.

These interests are significant.

Consent may depend upon the stated purpose of the visit.

A property occupant may agree to pest control while declining access for unrelated research.

A person may authorize a particular intervention without authorizing every activity that an outside institution might wish to conduct.

The Board therefore considers the scope of authorization important.

In the cinematic record, the farmer agrees to removal and extermination.

That agreement does not independently establish consent to every possible research or recovery activity.

The Board recognizes that the actual purposes of the visiting personnel may not be fully disclosed.

The Office therefore identifies a potential conflict.

If the institution sought the rats because of their experimental history, the farmer's agreement to pest management may have supplied access under a description that did not fully explain the institutional interest.

The Board does not infer an established legal violation.

It does, however, find that the ethical significance of informed authorization depends upon the information provided.

An institution should not obtain the practical benefits of consent while withholding facts that substantially change what the consenting party is being asked to permit.

The distinction is entered.

XVIII. THE RIGHTS OF THE HIDDEN COMMUNITY

The Board returns to the rats.

The enhanced community possessed capacities relevant to moral agency.

Its members were capable of communication, planning, and political organization.

They maintained a settlement.

They had developed relationships and collective interests.

These facts were established in prior proceedings.

The Office therefore recognizes that their interests cannot be dismissed solely because the farmer lacked knowledge of them.

However, the Board also recognizes that ethical recognition does not automatically confer legal title to the property.

The rats had not established an acknowledged tenancy.

They had not negotiated an easement.

They had not obtained a documented agreement concerning electricity.

Their settlement was intentionally concealed.

These circumstances complicate claims concerning permanent occupation.

Nevertheless, the absence of recognized property arrangements does not establish that the community could be destroyed without moral consequence.

The Board therefore distinguishes three questions.

Whether the community existed.

The answer is affirmative.

Whether the community possessed ethically relevant interests.

The answer is affirmative.

Whether those interests created an enforceable right to occupy the Fitzgibbon property indefinitely.

The available fictional record does not resolve that question.

The Board further recognizes that lawful possession of land does not necessarily establish unlimited ethical authority over every being occupying it.

Property interests matter.

So do the foreseeable consequences of their exercise.

The question is how those interests should be accommodated when they conflict.

XIX. THE PROBLEM OF IMPOSSIBLE NOTICE

The Office considers a proposed obligation requiring the farmer to give advance notice before conducting operations affecting the rats.

The concept possesses intuitive appeal.

Notice may permit affected individuals to prepare.

It may allow relocation.

It may facilitate negotiation.

It may reduce preventable harm.

However, meaningful notice requires some means of communication.

The farmer did not possess demonstrated knowledge of the enhanced community.

No established channel existed through which the rats could receive and acknowledge formal communications.

No authorized representative had been identified to the human occupants.

No ordinary mechanism existed for delivering a notice to the underground settlement.

The Board therefore recognizes substantial practical difficulties.

It would be unreasonable to treat the farmer as though he had ignored a known communication procedure that did not exist.

The Office also declines to invent a statutory notice period.

Nevertheless, the broader ethical importance of warning remains relevant.

Where a property occupant possesses credible knowledge of an affected intelligent community, reasonable efforts to communicate foreseeable danger may become appropriate.

The extent of such efforts would depend upon the circumstances.

The Board therefore distinguishes between notice that would have been desirable and notice that could reasonably have been provided.

An obligation cannot be evaluated responsibly without considering whether its performance was possible.

The distinction is entered.

XX. THE PROBLEM OF RECOGNITION AFTER DISCOVERY

The Board now considers the hypothetical circumstances of credible discovery.

Suppose the farmer encountered evidence that the rats were not ordinary animals.

Suppose he observed them using language.

Suppose he discovered their machinery.

Suppose he received a comprehensible communication from a representative of the settlement.

These circumstances would materially change the inquiry.

The Office recognizes that the farmer would not necessarily be required to accept every claim immediately.

Extraordinary claims may warrant verification.

The farmer might reasonably question what he had observed.

He might seek independent assistance.

He might consider risks to his household.

He might wish to know whether the animals posed health or safety hazards.

These concerns would remain legitimate.

However, the acquisition of credible information concerning an intelligent community would create a different ethical situation from that presented by ordinary pest management.

The Board therefore identifies several potentially reasonable responses.

The farmer might temporarily defer destructive action while the information was evaluated.

He might seek a means of communication.

He might consider whether relocation could occur without unacceptable harm.

He might examine whether property damage or resource use could be reduced.

He might consult appropriate persons possessing relevant expertise.

The Office does not require that any single response be adopted automatically.

The appropriate response would depend upon the danger, urgency, and available alternatives.

Nevertheless, the Board finds that credible knowledge of extraordinary intelligence would be materially relevant.

An individual cannot reasonably insist that new information changes nothing merely because recognizing its significance would be inconvenient.

The distinction is sustained.

XXI. THE POSSIBILITY OF ACCOMMODATION

The Office considers whether the human and enhanced populations could have reached an arrangement permitting coexistence.

The Board recognizes several possible forms of accommodation.

These might include agreed access to land, negotiated use of resources, temporary protection during relocation, or arrangements preventing unnecessary interference.

However, the Office does not presume that successful negotiation was inevitable.

The interests of the populations might conflict.

The farmer might reasonably reject continued unauthorized use of electricity.

The rats might reasonably fear exposure to an institution seeking to recover them.

Communication might remain difficult.

The household might face risks it did not wish to accept.

The rats might possess reasons to avoid dependence upon human permission.

These circumstances complicate accommodation.

Nevertheless, the existence of difficulty does not establish impossibility.

The Board therefore declines to treat extermination and indefinite concealed occupation as the only imaginable outcomes.

The Office also recognizes that relocation to Thorn Valley offered a possible means of reducing the conflict.

The rats' Plan reflected their own desire to establish greater independence.

The contemplated departure could benefit both populations.

The rats would reduce their exposure to human intervention.

The farmer would no longer unknowingly host an extraordinary underground settlement.

The Board therefore considers voluntary relocation a potentially significant resolution.

It does not regard relocation as automatically simple or harmless.

The process itself required planning, resources, labor, and exposure to danger.

The distinction is entered.

XXII. THE FARMER AS AN UNKNOWING PARTICIPANT

The Board now addresses a broader institutional concern.

The farmer may have become an unwitting participant in events originating from the fictional experimental program.

The rats' presence arose from their escape.

Their enhanced intelligence arose from scientific intervention.

Their settlement developed through their own subsequent choices.

The institution's possible efforts to locate them introduced additional danger.

The farmer did not create those circumstances.

He encountered only their consequences.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that every responsibility associated with the experimental program may properly be transferred to the person whose property the escaped subjects happened to occupy.

The institution that produced the enhanced beings possessed knowledge unavailable to the farmer.

The rats possessed knowledge of their own community.

The farmer possessed knowledge of ordinary agricultural operations.

These forms of responsibility must not be confused.

The Office recognizes that ownership of land may create duties concerning activities conducted upon it.

It does not establish that the owner becomes responsible for every undisclosed institutional history connected to beings residing there.

The Board therefore identifies a potential injustice in assigning responsibility according to physical proximity alone.

A person may be closest to the consequences of a problem without being the party principally responsible for creating it.

The location of a problem does not necessarily identify the institution responsible for its origin.

The distinction is entered.

XXIII. THE QUESTION OF PROPORTIONALITY

The Office returns to the competing interests.

The farmer seeks to cultivate land and manage pests.

The rats seek survival and independence.

Mrs. Frisby seeks to protect Timothy and her other children.

Outside personnel seek access to the rosebush.

These objectives are not necessarily compatible in every circumstance.

The Board therefore considers proportionality essential.

The seriousness of the problem should inform the response.

The availability of less harmful alternatives should be considered.

The knowledge possessed by the actor matters.

The interests of affected beings matter.

The practical costs of accommodation matter.

The risk of delaying action matters.

The Board does not propose that every minor disturbance requires a comprehensive institutional hearing.

Nor does it suggest that every legitimate property interest must yield automatically to the presence of wildlife.

However, where extraordinary facts become known, ordinary assumptions may require reconsideration.

The Office therefore rejects categorical approaches.

The farmer is not inherently malicious because he owns a tractor.

The rats are not inherently entitled to unrestricted use of the farm because they are intelligent.

The exterminators are not necessarily justified merely because the farmer accepted their services.

The laboratory is not absolved of responsibility merely because its subjects escaped onto another person's property.

The mouse family is not unworthy of protection because its home was established in a cultivated field.

The Board considers each proposition independently.

An ethical framework becomes unreliable when it recognizes only the interests of the party whose position is most convenient to describe.

The distinction is entered.

XXIV. FINDINGS

Following review of the literary and cinematic records, the Board enters the following findings.

Finding 1 — Legitimate Agricultural Use

The Fitzgibbon household possessed legitimate interests in cultivating and maintaining its agricultural property.

Finding 2 — Ordinary Purpose of Plowing

The anticipated plowing was undertaken for agricultural purposes.

Finding 3 — Nonhuman Habitation

The property contained the winter home of Mrs. Frisby / Mrs. Brisby and an enhanced rat settlement.

Finding 4 — Material Vulnerability

The mouse family faced serious danger arising from the interaction between agricultural operations and Timothy's medical condition.

Finding 5 — Extraordinary Settlement

The rosebush contained a community possessing advanced cognitive and technological capacities.

Finding 6 — Human Knowledge Not Established

The available records do not establish that the Fitzgibbon household understood the full nature of the enhanced community.

Finding 7 — No Presumption of Agricultural Malice

The farmer's ordinary cultivation activities do not establish deliberate intent to harm a particular intelligent population.

Finding 8 — Legitimate Interests of Affected Animals

The absence of human knowledge does not eliminate the welfare and other morally relevant interests of the affected beings.

Finding 9 — Concealment

The rats' intentional secrecy materially limited the possibility of informed negotiation.

Finding 10 — No Automatic Property Entitlement

The existence of the settlement does not independently establish enforceable title or indefinite occupancy rights.

Finding 11 — No Unlimited Property Authority

The existence of human property interests does not resolve every ethical question concerning the treatment of intelligent inhabitants.

Finding 12 — Legitimate Pest Management

Proportionate pest management may serve legitimate agricultural and household interests.

Finding 13 — Separate Literary Extermination

The novel depicts an extermination operation conducted by unidentified men whose connection to NIMH remains unconfirmed.

Finding 14 — Literary Fatalities

The literary extermination operation resulted in the deaths of two rats who remained behind during the colony's protective deception.

Finding 15 — Separate Cinematic Threat

The film depicts a telephone conversation involving NIMH and the proposed removal of the rosebush.

Finding 16 — Institutional Knowledge Asymmetry

The fictional experimental institution possessed information potentially material to the appropriate treatment of the enhanced population.

Finding 17 — Limits of Informed Authorization

A property occupant's agreement to pest management does not necessarily establish informed consent to undisclosed research or recovery purposes.

Finding 18 — No Automatic Transfer of Institutional Responsibility

The farmer's physical proximity to the escaped animals does not make him responsible for every consequence of their earlier experimental treatment.

Finding 19 — Importance of Foreseeability

Ethical responsibility requires attention to the information reasonably available to the actor at the time.

Finding 20 — Practical Limits of Notice

The absence of an established means of communication materially affects the feasibility of advance warning and negotiation.

Finding 21 — Changed Duties Upon Credible Discovery

Credible knowledge of extraordinary intelligence could create grounds for reconsidering otherwise ordinary agricultural or pest-management decisions.

Finding 22 — Potential for Accommodation

Coexistence, negotiated resource arrangements, or voluntary relocation may provide alternatives to continued concealed occupation or destructive intervention.

Finding 23 — No Consolidation of Narrative Records

The literary and cinematic accounts shall remain separate where the circumstances of extermination and institutional involvement differ.

Finding 24 — No Complete Assignment of Liability

The available fictional evidence does not support a comprehensive determination of responsibility among every human, animal, and institutional participant.

Finding 25 — Ethical Relevance of the Unrecognized

The absence of formal recognition does not establish that an affected community lacks morally relevant interests.

XXV. THE BOARD'S DETERMINATION

The Board returns to the principal question.

What responsibility does a person possess toward a community the person does not know exists?

The answer cannot be absolute.

Responsibility depends in part upon knowledge.

It depends upon what could reasonably be foreseen.

It depends upon the circumstances in which action occurs.

It depends upon the availability of alternatives.

It depends upon the interests affected.

The Fitzgibbon household operated a farm.

The farmer intended to cultivate land.

He maintained equipment.

He sought to manage animals he regarded as pests.

These were ordinary activities.

The Board does not find that the farmer knowingly undertook a campaign against an intelligent civilization.

The available records do not support that conclusion.

Nevertheless, the land contained extraordinary inhabitants.

The rats possessed intelligence.

They possessed social organization.

They possessed independent interests.

They had developed a community beneath the rosebush.

Mrs. Frisby and her children occupied a dwelling within the cultivated field.

Timothy's medical condition made ordinary relocation dangerous.

These facts were significant even where the farmer did not know them.

The ethical problem therefore cannot be resolved by denying the legitimacy of either population.

The farmer possessed legitimate interests.

The nonhuman inhabitants possessed legitimate interests.

Those interests overlapped within the same physical environment.

The difficulty arose partly because the populations did not possess a recognized means of negotiating the overlap.

The rats concealed themselves.

The farmer continued his ordinary activities.

The institution that had produced the enhanced population retained knowledge unavailable to the property occupant.

Outside personnel sought access under circumstances whose complete purposes were not necessarily disclosed.

The Board therefore identifies a problem of distributed knowledge.

The facts necessary to understand the full ethical situation were not possessed equally by the parties whose conduct affected it.

The rats understood their capacities.

The farmer understood his agricultural needs.

The laboratory understood the experimental history.

Mrs. Frisby understood Timothy's condition.

No single participant necessarily possessed the complete picture.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that responsibility may be assigned solely by identifying which participant was physically present when danger became immediate.

The farmer's tractor presented danger to the mice.

But the farmer did not necessarily know that a child with pneumonia occupied the endangered dwelling.

The proposed extermination presented danger to the rats.

But the farmer did not necessarily know that the animals possessed extraordinary intelligence.

The laboratory's involvement introduced additional concerns.

But the precise institutional identity of the literary exterminators remained uncertain.

The ethical analysis must preserve these distinctions.

The reality of suffering does not establish the intentions of every person whose conduct contributed to it.

The absence of wrongful intention does not make the suffering unreal.

Both propositions are sustained.

The Board further recognizes that knowledge changes responsibility.

A person who receives credible information concerning an endangered population may possess opportunities unavailable before that information was received.

The proper response may change.

The justification for continuing an activity may require reconsideration.

The availability of accommodation may become relevant.

The Board therefore determines:

The Fitzgibbon household's ordinary agricultural activities do not establish deliberate wrongdoing against an intelligent population whose extraordinary nature was not demonstrated to have been known.

The interests of that population nevertheless remain ethically significant.

The institution possessing specialized knowledge concerning the enhanced animals cannot automatically transfer responsibility for that knowledge to the uninformed property occupant.

And credible discovery of the population's capacities would require renewed examination of the practical and ethical basis for continued destructive intervention.

The determination is entered.

XXVI. DISPOSITION

NIMH-ERB-MUN-001 is hereby concluded as to its principal findings.

The Board enters no determination that the Fitzgibbon household knowingly attempted to destroy an autonomous civilization.

It enters no finding that ordinary agricultural cultivation was inherently improper.

It recognizes the household's legitimate interests in its property.

It recognizes the interests of the nonhuman inhabitants.

It recognizes the difficulty of balancing those interests where the populations did not possess a practical means of communication.

It further recognizes that the proposed extermination operations involved outside parties whose information and purposes may have differed materially from those of the farmer.

The Board therefore reserves questions concerning institutional disclosure and individual responsibility.

No binding property judgment is entered.

No municipal incorporation is recognized.

No retrospective assessment of agricultural damages is imposed.

No specific historical regulatory violation is alleged.

The Office concludes that the presence of an unrecognized intelligent community may create serious ethical questions without automatically establishing wrongdoing by the person whose property contains it.

The matter is concluded, subject to further evidence.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM A

Regarding the Proposed Designation of the Rosebush as a Municipality

The Office of Extraordinary Municipal Affairs has reviewed the proposed designation.

The application identifies the rosebush settlement as a municipality.

Supporting materials describe residential infrastructure, electrical access, organized leadership, and collective deliberation.

The Board recognizes that these characteristics are relevant to determining whether an organized community exists.

However, the available record does not establish that the settlement was incorporated under any recognized human municipal framework.

No charter has been produced.

No territorial boundary has been legally established.

No relationship to a surrounding jurisdiction has been documented.

The Office therefore declines to recognize formal municipal status.

Nevertheless, the lack of incorporation does not disprove the settlement's existence.

The Board distinguishes between functioning collective organization and formal legal recognition.

The Office further observes that the absence of a municipal seal does not establish that the inhabitants lack interests in the preservation of their lives.

The proposed legal designation is not sustained.

The factual description of the settlement remains accepted.

The botanical classification is unchanged.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM B

Regarding the Assertion That the Farmer Should Have Known

The Office has considered the proposition that the farmer should have known his rosebush contained an advanced civilization.

The submission identifies several circumstances.

The rosebush was located on the farm.

The settlement was electrically sophisticated.

The rats had occupied the site for a substantial period.

The farmer maintained the surrounding property.

The Board acknowledges these observations.

However, the submission does not identify evidence establishing that the farmer observed the internal chambers or recognized their significance.

The existence of concealed infrastructure does not establish its visibility.

The presence of electrical consumption does not independently establish that the property occupant understood the source of that consumption.

The long-term occupation of a hidden site does not establish that its extraordinary character was apparent.

The Board therefore declines to impute knowledge solely from proximity.

The Office recognizes that a farmer may reasonably be expected to know many things about his property.

It does not recognize an obligation to infer the existence of a self-governing technological civilization from the appearance of an ordinary rosebush.

The assertion is not sustained.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM C

Regarding the Proposed Requirement for a Rodent Census Before Plowing

The Office has reviewed a hypothetical proposal requiring the farmer to identify every animal present in the field before commencing agricultural operations.

The stated purpose is to prevent harm to vulnerable inhabitants.

The Board recognizes the protective objective.

However, the proposed requirement lacks a practical method of implementation.

The field may contain numerous animals whose locations change over time.

Some inhabit subterranean spaces.

Others occupy temporary shelters.

Some may be concealed within vegetation.

The Office has not received an established method by which an ordinary farmer could conduct a complete census without causing additional disturbance.

The Board further recognizes that the presence of ordinary wildlife does not automatically prohibit cultivation.

Reasonable mitigation may be appropriate in particular circumstances.

Nevertheless, the proposal would require proof of complete absence of animal habitation before every agricultural operation.

The Office considers that standard impracticable.

The Board therefore declines to adopt it.

The Office further observes that the existence of one extraordinary intelligent settlement does not establish that every field contains a similar settlement.

The proposed requirement is rejected.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM D

Regarding the Suggestion That Free Extermination Requires No Further Questions

The Office has considered the proposition that the farmer had no reason to question the proposed extermination because the service was offered without charge.

The Board acknowledges the financial benefit.

However, the absence of a fee does not establish the absence of other interests.

A service provider may possess commercial, institutional, scientific, or other objectives.

These objectives may be legitimate.

They may also be material to the recipient's decision.

The Office therefore considers the identity and purpose of the provider relevant.

The Board does not conclude that every complimentary service requires an investigation.

It does conclude that a no-cost offer is not necessarily self-explanatory.

The Office further recognizes that the film depicts a caller identifying NIMH.

That circumstance differs from the unidentified men in the novel.

The records shall remain separate.

The Board therefore rejects the proposition that the word *free* constitutes a complete institutional disclosure statement.

The objection is not sustained.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM E

Regarding the Proposed Transfer of All Responsibility to the Rats

The Office has received a proposed finding asserting that the rats were entirely responsible for the danger because they chose to remain concealed.

The Board recognizes that concealment limited opportunities for communication.

It further recognizes that the rats' unauthorized use of resources created legitimate ethical questions.

However, the proposal fails to distinguish the reasons for concealment from the circumstances of the proposed extermination.

The rats possessed credible concerns concerning recapture.

Their extraordinary intelligence arose from experiments they had not originally authorized.

Their efforts to establish autonomy were not inherently illegitimate.

The Office therefore declines to conclude that the rats' secrecy eliminated every obligation owed by others.

The Board also recognizes that the rats' decisions may themselves be criticized.

Their need for protection does not automatically justify every action.

The Office therefore rejects both complete exoneration and complete attribution.

A population may possess legitimate reasons for secrecy while remaining responsible for consequences of its own conduct.

An institution may possess legitimate reasons to seek information while remaining responsible for the methods it employs.

A farmer may possess legitimate reasons to manage pests while remaining subject to the ethical significance of facts he subsequently learns.

The distinction is entered.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM F

Regarding the Proposed Classification of the Fitzgibbons as Enemies of the Rat Community

The Office has considered a proposed classification identifying the Fitzgibbon household as an adversarial human institution.

The classification appears to rest upon the farmer's use of agricultural machinery, maintenance of a cat, and willingness to permit extermination.

The Board recognizes that these circumstances presented dangers to the animal inhabitants.

However, the record does not establish that the household understood itself to be engaged in conflict with an intelligent political community.

The existence of danger does not automatically establish mutual hostility.

The Office further recognizes that the rats used electricity and other resources originating from the farm.

Their relationship with the household was therefore materially more complicated than a simple division between aggressor and victim.

The Board declines to infer war from ordinary agricultural activity.

It also declines to treat the absence of a formal peace agreement as evidence that hostilities existed.

No declaration of war has been produced.

No recognized diplomatic exchange has been established.

The proposed classification is rejected.

The Office recommends the term *uninformed neighboring property occupants*.

The Board recognizes that the designation is less dramatic.

It is also more accurate.

ADMINISTRATIVE ADDENDUM G

Regarding the Proposed Requirement That the Farmer Obtain Consent from the Rosebush

The Office has considered a hypothetical proposal requiring the farmer to secure consent from the rosebush before undertaking its removal.

The Board recognizes that the plant contained an established settlement beneath its roots.

However, the rosebush itself is not established as possessing the capacities of the enhanced rats.

The Office therefore distinguishes the vegetation from the community residing beneath it.

Consent from the affected inhabitants would present questions concerning communication and representation.

Consent from the rosebush would present a different question.

The available narrative does not establish that the rosebush can communicate informed preferences.

Nor does it establish that the plant possesses authority to bind the underground community.

The Office therefore declines to treat the vegetation as an authorized representative of its occupants.

The proposed procedure is rejected.

The Board respectfully requests that future submissions distinguish the property feature from the political community occupying the surrounding space.

The rosebush is not the mayor.

The distinction is entered.

FINAL ADMINISTRATIVE NOTICE

On the Difference Between Being Unaware of a Life and Being Entitled to Disregard It

The Office concludes this proceeding by returning to an ordinary agricultural scene.

A farmer prepares his field.

He possesses a tractor.

He intends to plant crops.

The work is familiar.

The season requires preparation.

The machinery performs a known purpose.

Nothing in the farmer's ordinary understanding requires the conclusion that the field contains a medically vulnerable mouse child whose life may be endangered by relocation.

Nothing in the ordinary appearance of the rosebush requires the conclusion that beneath it exists an organized civilization of experimentally enhanced rats.

The farmer knows his work.

The animals know their danger.

The laboratory knows the history of the experiment.

These forms of knowledge do not automatically meet.

The Board recognizes the difficulty.

A human being cannot respond to every hidden need.

A property occupant cannot reasonably be expected to anticipate every extraordinary possibility.

An institution cannot demand omniscience as a condition of ethical conduct.

The Office therefore declines to condemn Farmer Fitzgibbon for failing to possess knowledge that the narrative does not establish he had.

This restraint is not indifference.

It is the recognition that responsibility must be examined according to circumstances rather than assigned according to the emotional force of an outcome.

The mouse family's danger was real.

The rats' fear of recapture was real.

The farmer's agricultural interests were real.

The institution's specialized knowledge was real.

The failure of these different interests to become mutually understood created circumstances in which serious harm could occur.

The Board therefore considers the problem one of recognition.

Not merely recognition of intelligence.

Not merely recognition of property.

Not merely recognition of medical vulnerability.

But recognition of the limits of one's own knowledge.

The farmer did not know everything occurring on his land.

The rats did not know everything concerning the intentions of the humans.

Mrs. Frisby did not know everything concerning the consequences of her choices.

The experimental institution may have possessed knowledge unavailable to all of them.

These differences mattered.

They affected what each participant could reasonably foresee.

They affected what each participant could attempt.

They affected which alternatives appeared available.

The Office therefore rejects the assumption that every tragic consequence can be explained through the deliberate cruelty of a single actor.

Some harms arise through the interaction of legitimate activities.

Some arise through ignorance.

Some arise through institutional secrecy.

Some arise through the absence of communication.

Some arise because one population's ordinary conduct threatens another population's survival.

These circumstances do not make ethical examination unnecessary.

They make it more demanding.

The Board recognizes that the farmer's property interests cannot be dismissed merely because the affected animals are sympathetic.

It also recognizes that the animals' interests cannot be dismissed merely because the farmer possesses lawful control over the land.

The question concerns the relationship between authority and knowledge.

A person may possess authority to act.

But the ethical exercise of that authority may change when the person learns that the action will produce consequences previously unknown.

The Board considers this distinction fundamental.

The ownership of land does not confer omniscience.

Nor does ownership eliminate the significance of new information.

A farmer may begin with a legitimate plan.

He may discover facts requiring reconsideration.

He may possess practical reasons to continue.

He may also possess opportunities to reduce harm.

The proper exercise of responsibility requires examination of those circumstances.

The Board therefore rejects two opposite propositions.

The first is that the farmer must be condemned because the consequences of his ordinary activities threatened an intelligent community.

The second is that the community's interests were irrelevant because the farmer did not know of them.

Neither conclusion is adequate.

The first confuses harm with culpability.

The second confuses ignorance with moral insignificance.

The Office considers both errors dangerous.

The first would impose impossible standards upon individuals.

The second would permit ethically relevant interests to disappear whenever those possessing power were uninformed.

The proper inquiry requires something more difficult.

It requires attention to what was known.

To what could reasonably have been learned.

To what was deliberately concealed.

To what interests were affected.

To what alternatives existed.

And to what became possible once additional information was available.

The Board further recognizes that responsibility may fall most heavily upon the party possessing the greatest relevant knowledge.

The fictional laboratory created the conditions under which the rats acquired extraordinary intelligence.

That institution possessed information concerning their history.

The human property occupants did not necessarily possess it.

If institutional personnel sought access to the farm for purposes arising from that history, the ethical significance of the information they possessed could not reasonably be transferred entirely to the farmer.

The Office therefore rejects the proposition that physical control over a location automatically establishes complete responsibility for every extraordinary circumstance occurring within it.

The institution responsible for a problem's origins may remain accountable even after the consequences move beyond its walls.

The rats had escaped the laboratory.

Their departure did not erase the laboratory's role in producing their condition.

The farmer had not created that condition.

His property became the site upon which its consequences unfolded.

The distinction matters.

The Board also recognizes that the rats themselves exercised agency.

They established the rosebush settlement.

They concealed their capabilities.

They obtained human resources.

They debated the ethical implications of their dependence.

They planned to relocate.

Their decisions materially shaped the circumstances under review.

The Office therefore declines to reduce them to passive victims.

Their autonomy was real.

So were the responsibilities accompanying it.

Nevertheless, their agency did not eliminate their vulnerability.

They remained small beings living within an environment dominated by human activities.

Their intelligence did not make them immune to poison.

Their technology did not make them immune to agricultural machinery.

Their political organization did not make them immune to the consequences of discovery.

The Board considers this coexistence of power and vulnerability essential.

An individual or community may possess extraordinary capabilities while remaining exposed to danger from systems beyond its control.

The existence of intelligence does not eliminate the need for protection.

Nor does the need for protection eliminate responsibility for independent conduct.

The Office therefore concludes that the Fitzgibbon farm represents a place where multiple forms of legitimate and contested authority overlapped.

The farmer exercised authority over agricultural operations.

The rats exercised authority within their settlement.

The laboratory claimed an interest in the animals it had enhanced.

Mrs. Frisby exercised parental responsibility for her children.

None possessed unlimited control over the consequences of every other party's actions.

The ethical problem arose where the exercise of one form of authority affected lives that the actor did not fully understand.

The Board does not suggest that every such conflict can be prevented.

It does determine that credible knowledge of another being's interests may change what responsible conduct requires.

That is the central finding.

A person cannot be expected to answer a request the person has not heard.

But when the request becomes known, the question changes.

It is no longer solely whether the original action was reasonable.

It is whether continuation remains reasonable in light of what has been learned.

The Office considers this distinction applicable to the fictional circumstances.

It further recognizes that the principle extends beyond them.

Institutions encounter new information.

Property occupants encounter unanticipated consequences.

Communities discover the interests of people previously excluded from consideration.

Authorities learn that existing procedures produce harms they did not originally foresee.

The acquisition of knowledge creates an opportunity for reconsideration.

Whether that opportunity is accepted becomes part of the ethical record.

The Board therefore enters its final determination:

The legitimacy of an action must be assessed in light of the knowledge reasonably available when it was undertaken.

The continued legitimacy of that action may require reassessment when material new information becomes available.

The existence of unrecognized interests does not automatically establish culpability in those unaware of them.

But the discovery of those interests may create responsibilities that did not previously arise in the same form.

The distinction is entered.

The Office recognizes that Farmer Fitzgibbon intended to cultivate his field.

It recognizes that the field contained a mouse family.

It recognizes that the family included a child suffering from pneumonia.

It recognizes that the property contained a rosebush.

It recognizes that the rosebush concealed an enhanced rat community.

It recognizes that the community possessed electrical infrastructure, leadership, and the capacity for ethical deliberation.

It recognizes that the farmer did not necessarily know these things.

It further recognizes that the existence of an extraordinary civilization does not establish that ordinary agricultural work was undertaken with extraordinary malice.

The Office therefore concludes:

The farmer was not required to know the unknowable.

The rats were not required to cease existing merely because their existence was unknown.

And the institution possessing specialized knowledge could not reasonably claim that the ignorance of others erased the ethical significance of what it knew.

The Board considers these propositions compatible.

The matter is concluded.

The Office recognizes that the property was a farm.

It recognizes that the occupants were rats.

It recognizes that the principal settlement was located beneath a rosebush.

It does not recognize any of those facts as sufficient grounds to dispense with careful distinctions concerning knowledge, responsibility, and the foreseeable consequences of power.

The case is closed.

So entered.

Office of Improbable Jurisdiction
Experimental Intelligence and Autonomous Persons Review Board
Division of Extraordinary Municipal Affairs, Agricultural Operations, and Unrecognized Nonhuman Habitation

END OF NIMH-ERB-MUN-001

SOURCE RECORD

Record A: Robert C. O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971).

Relevant material includes the seasonal relocation of the Frisby household, Timothy's illness, the Fitzgibbon family's agricultural activities, the rosebush settlement, and the proposed extermination operation.

Record B: Don Bluth, director, *The Secret of NIMH* (1982).

Relevant material includes the Brisby family's threatened home, the farmer's agricultural operations, the telephone conversation concerning NIMH, and the proposed removal of the rosebush.

Foundational Proceeding: NIMH-ERB-001 — *Preliminary Investigation into the Rats of NIMH*.

Companion Proceedings: NIMH-ERB-002 through NIMH-ERB-007.

Next Proceeding:

NIMH-ERB-MED-001 — TIMOTHY FRISBY

On Pediatric Pneumonia, Emergency Relocation, and the Competing Duties of a Parent Confronting Multiple Foreseeable Hazards.

Scope of Findings: Fictional institutional and literary ethics analysis. No actual legal liability, municipal status, regulatory violation, or historical misconduct is established.