
Subject: Wednesday Morning, 5AM

Posted by [E. E. Nalley](#) on Mon, 03 Oct 2011 00:43:59 GMT

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Wednesday Morning, 5AM

A Whateley Academy Vignette

By

E. E. Nalley

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January 31, 2007

Workshop Lab, W.A.R.S. Studio, base of Kane Hall Astronomy Tower

Arwin yawned sleepily as he fumbled with the lock on the door while trying and managing not to dump his armload of papers, tapes and CDs. The florescent tubes came up slowly to the banks of switches by the door. On most days Arwin would have savored the smell of collection of radio equipment, some of it dating back well before he'd been born, however the gild was off that particular lily and the toll of being the 'morning man' was beginning to wear down on his system. Still, he'd volunteered for this shift, as a courtesy to his fellow students to help their day start right, and when Arwin Hochausser gives his word, then by God that word is kept.

At least the night guy had remembered to set up the coffee pot for him.

A flick of his wrist had that brewing while he got the wave form amplifier out of its case to connect to the transmission equipment. It wasn't 'technically' a drug, and that was why the school had allowed him to include it for his broadcast. It only subliminally triggered various processes in the brain that made a person more awake and focused. He'd argued that it should be a permanent fixture in the broadcast, but had been overruled by Mrs. Carson using the veto power the headmistress had for any school function.

Still, Arwin wasn't upset. Once the Arbitron numbers came back for this year, having the Goodkind buy it was a shoe-in. In short order it was wired into its place and powered up with the rest of the gear. A glance at the clock told him he had fifteen minutes; time to get the lead out. As he headed back to the coffee pot, he flicked on the little robot in its charging cradle. The radioheads had dubbed it 'Bert'.

"Identification, please," the automaton asked, its voice heavily electronic in nature but with something of the timber and tone of the actor Gilbert Gottfried.

"Hochauer, A," Arwin replied sleepily as he found his coffee cup in the cupboard and began to pour. "Student ID ETF44107Emerson."

The vaguely human-shaped little robot unfolded from its cradle, revealing itself to be about three feet tall with a head dominated by a single camera with a huge red lens in the center of what would be its forehead if it were human. As it moved, it became obvious that 'Bert' had seen better days and that very few of his parts were factory originals. The little robot had started life as a Hughes Industries Fire Fighter Mk 1 from about 1983 or so. It had been heavily damaged in a fire where it had saved one infant and a much beloved cocker spaniel, and having fulfilled its purpose without endangering the life of a human firefighter, it had been scrapped from the FDNY, whose emblem was still on the unit's chest. From there it had been saved from the blast furnace through a technology recycling program that saw it with a number of other industrial and residential robot parts shipped throughout the Tri-State Area. Bert's box had been routed to Whateley and there he'd been ever since with three generations of techies taking care of him.

"ID confirmed, good Morning, Doctor Goodvibes, how are you this morning?"

"Tired Bert, how are you?" asked the young man as he finished stirring his milk and sugar into his coffee and returning to the 'personality' side of the booth. "Do we have an up-link yet?"

"Radiostat 4 is just setting I'm afraid, and Radiostat 1 won't rise for two minutes. We're inside the limits, however."

"Good," mumbled Arwin around another drink of his coffee. "You've got my notes and play list?"

"On the board," the little robot replied.

Arwin removed a pair of tuning forks from their velvet case, set the WFA to test and struck them together at the microphone. Satisfied with the result, he pulled on his head phones and set the machine to broadcast. "Gimme a countdown Bert," he asked as he took a final sip of the coffee while it would be hot.

"Radiostat 1 is above the horizon and we have a good uplink," Bert announced through his head phones. Arwin keyed on track one with one hand and lit the On Air sign with the other. The cords of the National Anthem played dully as he finished bringing up the monitors and got the microphone where he wanted it. A button press switched from the orchestral arrangement of the Anthem to the wailing guitar solo of Jimmy Hendricks at Woodstock. "Five seconds," Bert warned.

Arwin let the solo reach its climax before he cleared his throat, dropped his voice four octaves and hit the microphone live button. "Good morning New Hampshire, you're tuned to 105.7 on your FM dial, and streaming live on the internet at www.whateleyacademy.edu/WARS, this is double you aye are ess, Dunwich, Berlin, and Jericho Lake; the Whateley Academy Radio Station, you're with the Doctor of your good morning, I'm Doctor Goodvibes, Bert's in the booth and it's Wednesday, January 31, 2007."

"It's the day of getting humped," added Bert as he made some minute adjustments to the sound output on the board.

Arwin stifled a laugh at the simple processor in his mechanical engineer trying to suss out the nuances of colloquial English. "Not exactly the meaning I was going for there, Bert, but we might be getting humped by the weather, it is currently ten degrees below the big goose egg here in the Greater Berlin area, looking for a high today of only twenty one degrees so bundle up folks it is cold out side. And you always get traffic and weather together on W.A.R.S., how is that morning commute going, Bert?"

"New Hampshire State Patrol reporting all major thoroughfares open and freshly plowed through out Berlin, Doctor," the robot replied instantly. "On campus we have a patch of ice across the path between Whitman Cottage and Dunn Hall, Security advises the Whitman girls to avoid the patch through the tunnels and for any Dickinson Dwellers in the area to exercise more caution than they showed getting assigned to such a prissy cottage."

"Now, now, my robotic companion, no need to be rude, there's plenty to respect about the nice girls from Dickinson Cottage."

"True," the robot replied. "But the girls from Whitman still get the respect and they're more fun."

"Ok, somebody put some pepper in your electricity this morning, so let's change topics before we get into some real trouble here. It's 5:48 in the AM here on 105.7FM W.A.R.S. stand by for news!" Arwin hit the play button for the news theme and muted his microphone. "Hey Bert, tone down the bites on Dickinson for me, ok?"

"Why?" the robot asked, genuinely confused. "Every problem I've had with a girl has been a girl from Dickinson Cottage. All of the girls who take care of me are from Whitman..."

"And that would explain it," Arwin replied with a chuckle. "Just tone it down for me and I'll explain after the show." He called up the news notes and made the microphone live once more. "Only a couple more weeks here until the seniors unveil the changes to Crystal Hall. Tensions have been running pretty high with everyone eating in the crowded Dunn Hall cafeteria, and the buzz on the campus is that we're all about to have our wildest expectations exceeded. Now, as you know the

Dome has been covered with a tarp since mid-January and some very large pieces of concrete have been moved into the Crystal Hall whose purpose isn't exactly clear. Wyatt Cody, the senior in charge of the project declined multiple requests to be on the show this, or any other morning. We'll soon see if our Alaskan cowboy has grabbed the brass ring or if this will forever be known as Cody's Folly.

"Turning to state news, Goodkind Health and Beauty, a division of Goodkind Pharmaceuticals announced a recall of nearly a million Goodkind pro-biotic antibacterial toothbrushes sold in the tri-state area from October to December of last year at G-mart, Wal-Mart and other discount outlets. Spokesmen for the megalithic manufacturer claim that while the toothbrushes don't represent any harm to the general public they actually did not meet internal quality standards and were shipped by mistake. Customers may go to www.gkhealthandbeauty.com/toothbrush to determine if they have one of the affected models and where they can return it for an exchange or full refund."

"This is why I am glad I don't have teeth," interjected Bert causing Arwin to have to slap the cough button so his bark of laughter didn't go out live.

"Don't we use those to clean out your servos though?" he asked as he nabbed a quick sip of rapidly cooling coffee.

"Here's hoping," the robot shot back. "I'd love to have a lawsuit against pockets that deep!"

"Bert, they'd have you tied up court for centuries!"

"What do I care about centuries?" Bert replied blithely, "I'm a robot. I'll live forever."

"Speaking of living forever, or at least another day, the Associated Press reports that NYPD confirms the first officer to be saved by their new all Kevra uniforms. Kevra, the extremely tough but flexible fabric was developed right here at Whateley by our very own southern belle Elaine Nalley. Patrol Sergeant Michael Penn was answering a robbery in progress call when he became involved in a fire fight with two well armed suspects in the process of holding up a grocery store on the East Side. Here with more on the story is the AP's Ileana Reyes." Arwin mashed the play button on the pre-recorded report and sat back in his chair to listen to it.

"When that shotgun came up I thought to myself, Mike, this is it, super suit or not, your ticket's punched," started a male voice that was obviously still shaken.

"That was the voice of a very much alive Sergeant Michael Penn," began the reporter in her professional and blasphemous tones. "Whose ticket is not only still un-punched, but has both of his suspects in custody tonight. It all happened here, at Merkz's Grocery on 2nd Ave where two men muscled their way into the store right at closing before pulling guns and demanding cash. A

robbery was foiled and more lives were saved than just Sergeant Penn's."

"Oh they made it very clear they weren't going to leave witnesses," an older voice declared matter-of-factly. "I tried to tell them the cameras go straight to the security company but they were either too stupid or too high or both to listen. I knew the minute I opened that safe I was a dead man."

"But neither Mr. Merzk, nor Sergeant Penn are dead tonight because of an amazing new substance their clothing was made from. That substance is the bullet proof fabric Kevra, produced by Dow Chemicals. Last year in a bitter and controversial decision, the NYPD decided to go with a double layer of the fabric both under and in the uniforms themselves, replacing older soft body armors bought in the eighties and nineties that only protected the torso."

"The NYPD will not now, or ever, apologize or compromise in decisions that affect officer safety," a gruff, older voice proclaimed. "There will always be people who complain about the outlay of taxpayer money on items like this, but tonight a valuable officer, husband, and father will go home to his family. You can't put a price tag on that."

"Police Commissioner Kelly had no further comment and declined offers to appear on this broadcast," Ms. Reyes intoned.

"I tell you," the voice of Sergeant Penn interjected. "I don't know who thought this stuff up, but I owe him a beer."

"Bert, find out if this cop is related to Marty Penn at all," Goodvibes instructed as he readied himself for the ending of the report.

"On it, boss."

"For the Associated Press, I'm Ileana Reyes in New York."

"Thanks for that Ileana, it's now 5:58 in the AM and anybody who has to be at work at 6 better hurry!" Arwin declared with a chuckle. "Coming up at six we've got the morning rock-out from six to seven, the least interrupted hour of music on your FM dial, then at seven more of the W.A.R.S. Morning Show with me, your host, Dr. Goodvibes and Bert. As always we've got The Voice of Reason with our esteemed programming director Zenith at nine this morning and you'll want to stay tuned for the Peeper and Greasy Show at eleven. That's all in store so stay tuned!"

"Do you want to get away from it all?" purred the smooth voice of the commercial in Arwin's ear. "Of course you do, I know just the place! Outer Space..."

"Doctor Goodvibes," Bert interrupted. "Miss Penn's MySpace page lists her father as Mike and

he's a sergeant on the NYPD."

"That can't be a coincidence," Goodvibes decided, as he shuffled through the MP3 list on the HDD he had already installed on the board.

"With daily nonstops... from Houston and the Kennedy Space Center... to the ISS or Hilton Orbital Casino Hotel... Airtran can get you out of this world... for a price that will leave you on cloud nine! This is... William Shatner... for Airtran Airlines... Go! There's nothing stopping you!"

"It is six o'clock in the AM and welcome to the wake-up rock Power Hour, on W.A.R.S.," announced Arwin as his hands cued up the song he wanted while he talked. "And we've got some new info on that Kevra save down in New York. Miss Nalley, you didn't just save some stranger's life, you saved the life of the father of fellow classmate Marty Penn and that makes you, Miss Nalley, our Wednesday Mensch of the Morning. This one's for you hon, and well done."

The opening guitar rift of Lynyrd Skynyrd's Georgia Peaches filled the studio for a moment before Arwin turned down the speakers.

* * *

January 31, 2007

Kitchen, Whateley House, Whateley Academy

Liz Carson rolled her eyes as the Southern Fried Rock poured out of the little clock radio on her kitchen island and made a mental note to educate Mr. Hochauser on the real meaning behind the song he'd picked as a tribute to the Lit Chick and why it might make her furious. As it was she took a bite out of her toast as she fished the cell phone from her purse and dialed. "Security, Lieutenant Reynolds, how may I help you?"

"Christian? Liz Carson."

"Yes, Headmistress? Do you have a problem? Do you need...?"

Liz choked down a chuckle. "Slow down Chris. Please have someone drop by Poe and collect Marty Penn and bring her to my office please."

"Yes ma'am, we're on it."

"Thank you," she replied as she disconnected and chose another speed dial setting. "Bella? Liz. Would you go wake up Marty Penn and have her ready? I have somebody from security coming to bring her to me." Carson took a sip of coffee as she listened. "Her father was involved in a shooting last night. No, no, he's fine, thanks to Loophole of all people! I want to tell her myself."

I'm sure she'll want to go see him and I'll have a furlough set up. Yes, have her pack an overnight bag. Thanks Bella."

* * *

January 31, 2007

Jackson Ave, near Beck Library, Whateley Academy

Despite the bitter cold, Zenith was enjoying her morning run. An application on her iPod allowed her to monitor the radio station as she ran. She was gratified that Goodvibes was on time and seemed to be sharp this morning. It sounded like a good show. A vault to the top of the trashcan facilitated the second jump to the roof of the bus stop shelter and a double flip took her off that and she was running once again. Goodvibes had a good ear for running music, and his selections made her morning run more enjoyable than it would have been. There wasn't enough interesting stuff between Poe and Kane Hall to make for a really great run. As it was, and with the temperature being so low, Zenith wouldn't even be sweating when she arrived at the studio. A quick glance at her watch showed the number six twelve floating in ghostly holographic three dee above her wrist. It was time to pick up the pace.

One of the floating golfcarts Security used passed her on the path, its blue light flashing, but it didn't stop for Zenith. She waved at the officer inside, but he was intent on operating the little hovercraft and zipped along on the line of magnetism embedded in the path toward Poe. Zoe filed that away under 'not her business' and continued toward Kane Hall. She ran up the handrail instead of using the stairs for the small amount of thrill it would provide. Nevertheless she was unable to outrun the signal from the RFID chip embedded in her ID. The door recognized her, realized she was authorized before the start of classes, and unlocked itself just as she reached the handle.

"Next time," she promised herself as she flung open the door and quickly proceeded deeper into the building, wet sneakers from the snow squeaking every now and then. As she arrived at the studio, Zoe stopped, captivated by the framed photograph next to the plaque naming the studio itself. In it a large, burly black man stared menacingly out at the viewer, framed by an older man in bib overalls whose left arm was made of metal, but it was the last figure in the photograph that always caught Zoe's eye. It was of a blonde woman wearing one of those terrible 70's hair styles and a blue body suit with MM emblazoned up the side and, for all that, the classic lines of the woman who was now the headmistress of the Academy. Zoe couldn't help wondering what incredible twist of fate had led Elizabeth Carson, AKA Ms. Might, to become one of the founding faculty advisers of WARS.

* * *

December 12th, 1975

Basement of Poe Teacher's Dormitory, Whateley Academy

Aye Calypso the places you've been to,
the things that you've shown us,
the stories you tell...

"I thought we decided this was gonna be a Top 40 Station?" demanded Matt as he turned down the outlet speaker over the folk singer's ballad with an angry glance at his partner.

"Dude!" protested Greg from his side of the fold-up table that was serving the pair as their makeshift broadcast booth in the dusty basement of the Campus' least used cottage. "Did you forget September 27th already? Number one?"

"Yeah, well it ain't September 27th any more and this cat gives me the creeps. Fly, Robin, Fly! is number one now!"

"It's on the play list, brother!" Greg shook his head at his 'engineer's' taste in music as he got his broadcast notes in order. In his headset the folk ballad came to its thunderous crescendo before Matt gave him the high sign and cut the mike live. "It's seven in the pm and you're tuned to the Big W on AM 1422, Berlin, Dunwich and the armpit of America. This is Greg, Matt's on the board..."

"Yo!"

"And it's time for news baby!" Greg carefully flipped his note page so the sound wouldn't pick up on the sensitive microphone. "First up for all gearheads and rocket jocks in devisor land, NASA has announced the Maiden Flight of the Space Shuttle Enterprise, STS Number One, baby is gonna be a re-supply run to Sky Lab and the delivery of the first custom-built section for the space station."

"What?" interrupted Matt, "Did they run out of Apollo junk to refurb?"

"Well my brother, while the big N has always been on the bleeding edge of reduce reuse and recycle, there are times you gotta bust out with new shit, you dig?"

"I'm down."

"President Ford rapped with UPI reporter William Harvard who tells us that this new module for Skylab is going to be packed with scientific gear that would monitor Global Cooling and the coming Ice Age..."

Matt made the adjustment to his board and looked up as Greg's voice trailed off mid-sentence.

"Hey, Greg, we're broadcasting here, buddy. Cat got your tongue?"

"This station is officially off the air," growled a deep voice from behind Matt. Greg turned slowly to take in the pair of adults that were filling the only door in or out of this closet. One was the familiar mustachioed face of his own house father, Mr. Maxwell. His already dark face was flush and darkened to the midnight hues of a panther that had been Mr. Maxwell's nom-de-guerre of Midnight when he'd been crusading for social justice in Harlem in the sixties.

"Aw, shit," breathed Greg.

"You got that right," Midnight snarled. "Jack, can you shut this junk off?"

"Sure Cliff," the other man replied as he entered the room.

"Mr. Duncan," Matt started, "We can explain..."

"You will," the teacher replied. "To Dr. Alexander. Did I not specifically tell you this equipment was not to be used to actually broadcast? Do you two knuckleheads have any idea how much trouble you've gotten us in? How deep you've gotten the school in dutch with the Feds?"

"You're going over these fool's heads, Gizmo," Mr. Maxwell retorted. "Let's give them something easy. Like the obscenities Jack Benny and Rochester here dropped on their broadcast just now? You boys know each one is a felony right?"

The color drained from both boys faces. "And you had the balls to pull this where I live?" demanded Jack from shutting down the equipment. "If Dr. Alexander doesn't skin you, I'm going to!"

"Out," ordered Cliff as he took each boy by the scruff of the neck and marched them upstairs.

* * *

December 17th, 1975

Devisor Lab (Cybernetics) Kane Hall Tunnels, Whateley Academy

"Mr. Duncan, can I have a word with you please sir?"

Jack 'Gizmo' Duncan sighed the forlorn breath of the persecuted. Most of his left arm was on the work bench as he replaced a worn out servo. It never failed that whenever he was right in the middle of something one of these kids would barge in with one of their hormone-induced teenage 'emergencies'. "You're on my shit list just now Greg. Did Dr. Alexander not give you enough

detention to keep you out of what little hair I have left?"

The boy took a long breath and screwed his courage to the sticking place. "I know I fouled up good, Mr. Duncan, and, for what it's worth I'm sorry if I got you personally in dutch with the Headmaster."

"Son, if you're so bored you're wondering about my relationships with the other faculty members, I'm certain you have too much time on your hands. Now, that I can fix..."

"I had enough to come up with this, sir," the boy said, thrusting out a manila folder. The head of the Advanced Technology Program sighed again as he took a pair of reading glasses from a pocket of his bib overalls and perched them on his nose. "Ok, what's this?" he demanded as his good hand opened the folder and took in the spread sheet that met his eyes.

"I think its how we'll pay for that GE Fabricator you've been wanting, maybe some other stuff around the shop, too."

"You don't honestly think you can bribe your way back into my good graces, do you?" the teacher demanded, looking up from the numbers.

"No sir," the young man affirmed quickly. "It's just, when Matt and I, when we were, when we broke your rules, we opened up a dummy phone number to let people call back in." Jack's eyes shot up to which the young man quickly put up encouraging hands. "No, no, sir it was totally secure, ran through thirty hops all over the country, nobody could have traced it back to us."

"Famous last words," the teacher growled. "What does that have to do with this?"

"Sir, three of the calls were requests for what we'd charge for commercial time. That's where these numbers came from. I mean, all the teachers I've ever overheard were worried about how the school was going to stay in the black. And those numbers are weekly rates, sir, not monthly."

Jack flipped through the spreadsheet twice, before he broke out his Texas Instruments SR-50 and began to feed it numbers. By the time he'd worked the numbers up to a per annum number it was all he could do to keep a respectful whistle behind his teeth. Numbers like these were hard to argue. Despite himself there was a part of him that was already thinking about what money like this could buy. Finally he looked up at his recalcitrant student over the top of his glasses. "You realize that if you and Matt commit to this - and I put my johnson on the block with Dr. Alexander you damn well will commit to it - it's going to be run like a job, every day, day in, day out, or you can take your damn folder back right now."

"I already spoke with Matt and couple of the other guys, sir, we'd really like to do this!"

"This is way too much for me to serve as an adviser myself for," Duncan thought aloud. "We probably would need somebody from the English Department..."

"I'm pretty sure Mrs. Stevens might be interested, Mr. Duncan."

"Yeah, I'd bet Ms. Might would love to stick her nose in," groused the small part of Jack Duncan that was still Gizmo the Supervillain. "What the hell, I'm retired. Why not? That's still not enough. If you can talk Midnight, that's Mr. Maxwell to you, you punk, into this, I just might be persuaded."

"Who do you think he came to first?" drawled a familiar baritone from the doorway.

* * *

December 20th, 1975

Headmaster's Office, Schuster Hall, Whateley Academy

"No," Dr. Alexander's somewhat weedy voice announced after a long silence. "No, absolutely not. I'm sorry, Gentlemen, Lady, but I can't risk the school being exposed in such a manner."

The years were beginning to show on the school's headmaster. His hair, once a pepper mixed with a sprinkle of salt was now predominantly white. Even the tweed jackets with their leather patches on the elbows that he favored seemed a bit moth-eaten and careworn. He'd been standing implacably at his office window as the two teachers and the house father made their case, staring out in to the courtyard that the two wings of Schuster Hall framed, hands clasped behind his back. He'd said nothing during the entire proposal, asked no questions and then had asked his three faculty members to give him a moment alone to consider things.

His moment had stretched out for better than an hour, while Liz and Cliff had made small talk and Jack fiddled with a project from one of his trademark overall's many pockets. Now that they'd been called back in, it seemed like he hadn't moved, still staring out into space before finally announcing his decision.

"There are precautions that can be taken, sir," Gizmo said softly. "Dump buttons and tape delay..."

"It's not a question of technology, Jack," Alexander replied from the window. It can be traced back to us, back here. Even if the enemies of this school never hear a broadcast they can simply perform a freedom of information act request on the FCC License!"

"Clifford," Liz asked softly, "have you thought of the fact that word getting out about the school could be a good thing?"

"I'm listening, Mrs. Stevens," Alexander replied loftily.

Ms. Might refused to rise to the bait or even bristle. She knew she was the most junior of the staff there. Despite that, if the much vaunted Dr. Alexander hadn't wanted to be addressed by his first name he should have said so. She refused to be intimidated.

"It's really quite simple, Clifford," she replied with a smile. "These kids are going to be in the real world someday, and mutants and mutation aren't going away. So, folks out there can be afraid of the unknown, or they can be part of the solution. It's my experience that people love to help, especially if they're asked correctly. Now, Jack, correct me if I'm wrong, but don't some of those workshop kids of yours have inventions that could be patented?"

Gizmo nodded guardedly. "More than a few, why?"

She smiled her most disarming smile. "Isn't it obvious? Those kids have products that could be brought to market, and this school has some of the best minds and well connected people in the country. We could start a trust; call it the Whateley Academy Project..."

"I wouldn't want the school directly identified," Alexander protested.

"Paranormal Academy Project then," Midnight interjected, "remind the people of who they're helping, right? Go on, Liz."

The English teacher nodded. "The technical students get protection and their product out in the market place, helping them and reducing the number of scholarships we need to give out. The Trust pays the school a percentage to help us keep the school going and with our own radio station we have a means to not only self promote, but also bring in another stream of revenue for the school. The public needs to be educated that these kids, these mutants they're so afraid of, are just kids. Not to mention it's a tremendous learning experience and valuable job training."

For a long moment the Headmaster said nothing, merely staring out his window. Finally he took in a long breath and drawled, "Devious, Mrs. Stevens. Pluses to the students, pluses to the school, pluses to society, I'd have to be a fool to disagree, wouldn't I?" For the first time he turned he turned from the window and speared his teacher with a gimlet eye.

"I'm sure headmaster that whatever your decision is, it will be for the best interests of everyone involved."

"Oh you are good," Alexander replied. "Very well, I will carefully consider your request and give you an answer soon."

The three faculty members filed out. Once they were a discreet distance behind the English teacher, Gizmo stopped his friend to demand, "Look, I get you might not have been in the biz for the money, but I know you tangled with more than one straight-arrow type. What gives with you giving her the moon eyes?"

Midnight laughed and shook his head. "Brother, if I have to explain that to you, you're never gonna understand."

* * *

January 31st, 2007

Penthouse, Waterfront Center, 1000 Wisconsin Ave, Washington, DC

"Good morning, Mr. Tywyswyr," greeted Susan as she maneuvered the trolley she was pushing into her employer's office. "Did you have a pleasant commute?" she asked as she began to unload onto his desk the collection of newspapers, no two alike.

"A wreck on the Key Bridge tied up traffic for miles," the dragon complained from his pile of cushions. "Had to go all the way down to Arlington Memorial to go around."

"I heard about it on the radio," she replied as she removed the decanter from the cart and began to pour a steaming cup. "I hope no one was injured." She placed the tankard of coffee within his reach, his eyes fixed on his wall of televisions. "Any special projects this morning, sir?"

"Yes, actually," he said around a gulp of the steaming coffee and pushed a manila folder across the desk to her. "Make sure this gets taken care of before 9, if you please."

Her smile would have had lesser males begging to father her children. "Certainly sir," she assured him as she returned to her desk in the outer office.

* * *

January 31st, 2007

Workshop Lab, W.A.R.S. Studio, base of Kane Hall Astronomy Tower

...They'll get you anything with that evil smile
Everybody's got a drug dealer on speed dial
Hey, hey, I wanna be a rockstar...
Hey, hey, I wana be a rockstar...

"That's Nickelback with their number four smash Rockstar, going out by request just for you, Cody," recited Arwin as a light began to blink on the board. "It's eight minutes before the hour and

coming up at nine it's time for The Voice of Reason with Zenith but right now we got the newsmaker line, this is Dr. Goodvibes, who's this?"

"This is a tip," purred Susan into the line as she began to read from the sheet of paper from the folder. "If you want the scoop of the new year, get someone remote to the MCO field headquarters in Berlin."

"Who is this?" demanded Arwin.

"Better hurry," the voice replied before the line clicked and went silent.

Arwin thought frantically for a second, exchanging a glance with the expressionless face of his robotic engineer before he sprang into action. A quick button press got a new song playing and he rapidly dialed the non-emergency line to Security. "Hey, this is Goodvibes, WARS, lemme talk to whatever flyer you have doing student assistance this morning. Thanks. Hey, Gloriana, how'd you like to make history?"

* * *

January 31st, 2007
MCO Regional Office, 175 Mason St, Berlin, NH

Fritz Haustin yawned as he made his way down Main Street. As it was the center of what these yokels called a town, naturally there was no parking. However, the Mutant Commission Office made a point to have all of its offices as close to the largest government building in the area so as encourage the perception they were more of a government agency than they actually were. In this case that meant the corner office of the Berlin Boxing Club Building, across the two lane street from City Hall.

Fritz hated his job, hated being this close to that school of freaks and inhuman monsters, and most of all he hated having to put on a smiling face when one of their skills in the media threw a gotcha question generally along the lines of "Why does the MCO hate mutants?" Lately, however, the bitter winters had given his joints new reasons to hate being here, and today was a prime example. As he walked from the coffee shop next to the parking lot where he'd parked, it was two degrees below zero and his cup of coffee was rapidly going cold. A snort of amusement and cold escaped him as he thought back to accepting this post and the imagining of being told he'd have a female assistant. The fantasies of some nubile adolescent wet dream were quickly dashed by the reality of the middle-aged battleaxe that walked next to him. Even decent conversation was beyond her. Fritz was certain he could still count on both hands the number of words they'd exchanged.

Despite the counting of how bad his life was, the prickly sense most lawmen and, oddly enough,

the wanna-bes that emulated them developed began to drone for his attention. Something was wrong. He looked up from his miserable commute and began to take in his surroundings with earnest. A dull brown Crown Victoria was parked in front of the Boxing Club building, wrong way on the one way street. A nondescript black van took the corner of Mason street where it crossed Main, just beyond. There were nondescript men in the nondescript vehicles wearing nondescript suits, all watching him.

Fritz had nearly made up his mind to turn and, not flee, mind you, but return with expediency to his car, when the doors on all the cars opened and the men in black began to spill out. The van's side door opened to reveal a black clad tactical team in full assault gear, right down to the government issue 10mm HK MP5's. They didn't exit the van, but it wouldn't take them long if they choose to. A fortyish man with a comb over of what had once been rich chestnut hair stopped before him, holding a blue envelope and a decidedly unpleasant grin on his face.

It was the grin of a man who's spent years getting as much bread as he can on the shit sandwiches he's had to eat, and has just learned he's the head chef now. "Fritz Haustin?" he asked, already knowing the answer. "Gertrude Anders?"

"Who wants to know?" demanded Fritz.

"Peter Renaud, Department of Paranormal Affairs," he replied without any diminishing of the smile.

"I'm Special Agent Fritz Haustin of the Mutant Commission Office," Fritz fired back. "What can I do for you?"

A larger man in an ill-fitting suit that bulged under both armpits opened his coat and relieved Fritz of the .40 caliber Sig Sauer from his shoulder holster. Peter held up a photocopy of a collection of MIDs, one of them was The Redhead that had taken up residence in Fritz's fantasy life of late. "As Agent in Charge of this office, did you authorize these MIDs to be marked Deadly Force pre-Authorized?" demanded Peter whose grin showed he already knew the answer.

"Those are dangerous mutants!" snapped Fritz. "That one, Tennyo, has antimatter for blood!"

"She's also a US citizen that you've denied due process of law. Not to mention the criminal conspiracy here to commit mass murder against a collection of children." Peter tisked between his teeth as he shook his head in disgust. "You're under arrest Mr. Haustin, and you too, Ms. Anders. Place your hands on the hood of the vehicle."

"You won't get away with this!" thundered Haustin as he was relieved of his coffee and roughly patted down.

"There is where you're wrong, Mr. Haustin," Peter replied with a smile. "You'll find things are changing around here."

As his wrists were locked into a pair of handcuffs and the cold metal found his exposed skin, Fritz looked up and locked eyes with a teenager in a white and gold body stocking on the roof of City Hall who was frantically talking into her cell phone while her matching cape fluttered dramatically in the wind.

* * *

January 31, 2007

Headmistress's Office, Schuster Hall, Whateley Academy

"The SWAT team is leading a number of people out of the building now, it looks like the entire MCO Office in Berlin is under arrest!"

Gloriana's voice drifted from the speakers on Liz Carson's desk as she leaned back in the leather chair that was her one indulgence in this office and contemplated how this would affect things. There would be repercussions, and how the school would be affected wasn't entirely clear; this was cause for much concern. That was something she tried to not think about just at the moment so she could savor the sweetness of a victory on this scale. An entire MCO office under arrest! Who knew, this might even be something much larger, nationwide even. She'd have to start looking into getting larger broadcasts and getting more information.

That would come later.

Just now, for a brief moment, Liz Carson was young again and exulted with her students on the airwaves. "Interesting news, isn't it?" asked Amelia Hartford as she dropped off the morning's reports and the weekly requests the headmistress had to sign for. Her assistant's smile was knowing.

"Is there something you want to tell me, Amelia?" Liz asked around an arched eyebrow.

"Merely observing how the wyrm can turn," her assistant replied.

"Without doubt," Liz agreed. "The question is what he's turning about and why?"

"You know how he protests he feels about these kids, Liz," Hartford said evenly. "How would you react if someone threatened to kill one of your kids, even as dispassionately as some kind of, oh, shall we say authorization on a card?"

"How would he find out about such a threat?" Carson wanted to know. "We know what kind of a

temper he has."

"How indeed?" Amelia asked as she withdrew from the office. There were plenty of things that went on around this school the headmistress didn't need to be bothered with. Some of it mundane, some of it unworthy of her attention, some of it things she was better off not being able to testify about later.

Eldritch's little DFA rant was definitely part of the latter.

* * *

September 6, 1976

Workshop Lab, W.A.R.S. Studio, base of Kane Hall Astronomy Tower

"Tell me again how you three talked me into this?" demanded Dr. Alexander as he and a small group of teachers were observing in an out-of-the-way corner while a clutch of students were excitedly checking out the equipment and making their final checks.

"You were persuaded by our friends, Grant, Benjamin and Jackson," Liz replied drolly as she presented the headmaster a check. "That's our ad revenue."

"For the month?"

"The week," she replied with a grin.

"If even one of these kids slips up and confuses a codename with a real name..." warned the Headmaster.

Gizmo grunted and shook his head. "They can't," he rumbled proudly. "Circe did her magic thing so the kids won't make that mistake, but it's that blue box there I'm most proud of."

Alexander permitted himself a scholarly chuckle. "And that is?"

"It's a geospatial mixer," the Devisor returned with a grin. "No matter where the signal is picked up, the receiver will get a different set of landmarks and local references. If one of the kids mentions Berlin or Dunwich, those names will change to local places, depending on who hears it. Unless they're already local."

"Why does it exempt locals?" demanded the Doctor.

"Has to," Gizmo returned. "The station has to provide a service to the community, that's FCC regulation. Besides, if somebody is close enough for the mixer to let them hear about Berlin or

Dunwich, they likely already know where we are. But every fifty miles or so out, the locations will change, so there's no way somebody will trace it back."

"Good morning Whateley Academy, you're tuned to the voice of the School of Schools, WARS is on the air!"

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